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Diplomat from Russia Speaks At Baptist Dialogue Meeting

WASHINGTON (BP)--A Russian diplomat told a Baptist congregation here that Americans and Russians "must do everything possible to understand each other better and find ways to develop better relations between their two countries."

Alexander P. Eustafiev, press counsellor for the Soviet Embassy here in Washington, spoke at an international fellowship luncheon at the Calvary Baptist Church here.

The luncheon was the first in a series of conversations with diplomats designed to bring about "understanding and friendship" between members of the church and people from other parts of the world, according to the Calvary pastor, George W. Hill.

Eustafiev, speaking English with complete ease and a great deal of poise and humor, praised the church for its efforts in such a program. He was accompanied to the church by his wife, who is a sculptress and art teacher in Russia, and Mr. and Mrs. Grigori Rapota, also from the Embassy staff.

Elias Golanka, a staff member of the Southern Baptist Convention Home Mission Board, helped arrange the meeting with the Russian diplomat. Golanka, present for the historic occasion, described the meeting as a part of a project to create a number of Christian-Marxist dialogues in the United States.

The Russian diplomat showed special respect for the religious interests of the Baptist congregation. During his speech he referred to the long list of religious groups in Russia, where the Russian Orthodox Church and Islamic religion have the most members. Later, when asked how many Baptists are in Russia, Eustafiev replied with a laugh that "you would know more about that than I do."

In the USSR, Eustafiev explained, it is prohibited by law to ask if a person is religious. However, he estimated that between 10 and 15 per cent of the population attends religious services.

The Soviet diplomat said that in his own family there are several "believers," especially among some older aunts who are members of the Russian Orthodox Church. He identified one of his grandparents as a "Christian Baptist." Among the younger generation in his family, however, "there are no believers," he said.

The press officer, a journalist in the Soviet Union before his present assignment at the embassy here, said that under Soviet law "it is illegal to prohibit freedom of conscience and religion."

In discussing the relationship between atheism and religion in Russia, Eustafiev said that the Communist party upholds a high moral code and ideals for its adherents. Among those he listed are: "loyalty to the Communist party...love for the motherland...devotion to work...concern for the public welfare...mutual responsibility for all...honesty and truthfulness...friendship and brotherhood...and solidarity with the working people of all nations.

"Many of these sound like Christian commandments," Eustafiev declared.

Later in discussion, a time marked by openness, respect and humor between church members and the speaker, the Russian diplomat said that he felt many Americans know very little about the USSR and the Russian people.

Among the little known facts that he mentioned in response to a question is that only 15 million Russians out of a population of 245 million, are members of the Communist party.

Eustafiev blamed what he called "many myths of a slanderous nature" with the misconceptions many Americans have of Russia. He said the truth about the USSR "is hidden by capitalist power people here."

In describing Russian progress in the last 50 years, Eustafiev referred to the free education that is now available at all levels of schooling.

Before the Russian Revolution about 50 years ago, 75 per cent of the population were illiterate, he said, while in some areas this percentage reached 95 per cent.

Now there are 80 million students. Forty-nine million of these are children. There are 10 million college students. The rest are adults in night schools.

About 2.5 million people visit Russia annually, Eustafiev said. Of this number about 50,000 are Americans. Few Russians visit the United States, he explained, "mainly because of a lack of money."

Hill, the pastor of Calvary, and his wife have traveled extensively in Russia. A few years ago, he said, he and his family traveled by car over 9,000 miles and camped in many areas of the USSR.

At the end of the international fellowship luncheon and dialogue, Hill praised the Russian diplomat for helping "to build a bridge of understanding" between members at Calvary and the people of Russia.

About 200 persons attended the dialogue. Hill expressed the hope that the meeting would open the way for many diplomats to be entertained in homes of Calvary members.

"The idea of the whole thing is for understanding and friendship," Hill said.

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Chapman Given Fund Raising
Promotion by SBC Stewardship

2/13/73

NASHVILLE (BP)--Fred M. Chapman has been promoted from assistant to associate director of endowment and capital giving service for the Southern Baptist Convention's Stewardship Commission here.

Chapman, the senior member of the commission's fund raising service staff, joined the commission two years ago after having served as pastor of churches in Alaska, Texas and Tennessee.

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