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Urban Evangelism Experiment
Effective in South America

By Charlie Warren

BUENOS AIRES (BP)--Doyle Bailey and his wife Barbara readily admit that they don't have all the answers concerning effective urban evangelism, but they're closer than they were two years ago.

Southern Baptist missionaries stationed in Buenos Aires, Argentina, a city of about nine million, the Baileys began about two years ago to concentrate their efforts on an experiment in urban evangelism and congregational formation.

They have focused attention on finding ways to reach people that traditional Baptist evangelistic methods have failed to reach. Two overlapping groups of the "unreached" emerged--the middle and upper classes and the "secular masses who would be uncomfortable with theological jargon and evangelical church traditions."

The Baileys began to study some of the strongest Baptist churches in Argentina, especially in metropolitan Buenos Aires, to find out what they were doing "outside the walls of the church" to reach people.

Most, they learned, hold home meetings--nothing more than church services transferred to the home.

"People who came were either already church-oriented or had no inhibitions or reservations about going," Bailey explained. "It led us to the conclusion that they were reaching people in these home meetings that they could probably have reached in their regular evangelistic services."

So it became one of the Baileys' basic premises that they would not just conduct worship services in the home but instead, they would incorporate some of the best elements of group dynamics and the small group movement.

They decided to try informal small group meetings in homes or in high rise housing complexes where Baptist families had invited their neighbors to home meetings, but where a pattern existed that was too similar to church and the friends were turned off.

The small groups have been the most effective method the Baileys have found to provide a soft-sell opportunity for people to find Christ. But even though the small group generally meets in homes, they don't see the method as similar to the "house church" concept.

"It's not a rigid congregation that will continue to function for a long time," Bailey explained. "The basic emphasis is to meet new people, cultivate them and then channel them according to their interest into more permanent, existing groups. I believe that ultimately you need a building. The small group needs to feel part of something big."

The Baileys are using small group dynamics in three distinct ways--in fellowship groups, in Bible study groups and in informal worship services.

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The fellowship group is a "secular" group in which the initial contact is made with a person. There is a constant influx of new people into these groups.

Bailey believes the "depersonalization of living in a big city" helps make the small group effective. He said people enjoy the intimate setting where they can hear their own names spoken--especially after a day of encountering people who don't know their names and receiving mail addressed to "Dear Sir."

The Bible study groups and the informal worship groups add another dimension--an encounter with Christ--not emphasized in the fellowship group.

"There's never prayer, singing or anything in the fellowship group," Bailey explained. "There's no effort to hide where we're coming from--our orientation comes out constantly. People know who we are and what our commitment is but there's never a point when that fellowship group is anything other than a place where people can meet, relax and enjoy a discussion."

The fellowship group never develops into a Bible study group, but as couples or individuals within the group progress to the point that they have a desire to investigate a deeper spiritual level, they are invited to join a Bible study group.

The Bible study group always studies one particular theme at a time, discovering what the Bible says about family life or about the "new man" or about revolution. This often provides the newcomer a point of reference from the fellowship group he's been a part of, where he may have discussed the same topics but without the reference of a biblical viewpoint.

"What we're doing is not a ministry to the community," Bailey said. "Community doesn't exist. But the Holy Spirit, through the message of Christ, wants to restore community. When people find the setting where they can let down the mask a little bit and relax and investigate what life is all about, then you're not ministering to the community, you're restoring community."

Providing a transition to the formal worship service is the role Bailey envisions for the informal worship service, using innovative methods of sharing, of praying, and of singing that won't be such a drastic change from what happens in the fellowship groups and Bible study groups.

"We've got to find some way to bridge that tremendous gap between the small group--where you are able to say, 'I'm not sure I believe this,' or 'I've got a problem at this point,' and the group ministers to you--and the spectator-type worship service where you have the performers--the official prayers and the preachers,' he said.

"If we can get a number of churches which will be willing not just to have services in the home that reproduce what they do in church but which will receive these people on the same basis that they've been reached and won, then this will be possible."

The Baileys are convinced there are many people in the churches who will be eager to help but they're moving slowly because many of the pastors see the new approach as a threat.

"We want to go slow and reassure pastors and denominational leaders that what we're doing is not some kind of charismatic movement and that we're not trying to undermine the denominational institutional setting. We're not trying to say this is the way of working, we're saying this is a way of working."

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BWA Sends 20,000 Bibles And Hymnals Into East Europe

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--More than 20,000 Bibles and Christian hymnals have been imported into eastern Europe through Baptist World Alliance (BWA) auspices in the past 12 months, according to a report by Gerhard Claas to a meeting of the BWA Relief and Development Committee here.

Bibles are in very short supply in most of the Communist-dominated countries of eastern Europe, said Claas, BWA associate secretary for Europe. Hymnals are even more scarce. Baptists have work in all of the "Socialist" Republics, as they call themselves, except Albania. The Baptist World Alliance is in regular contact with the Baptist union or convention in each such country, and the BWA relief program offers Bibles, and on occasion, hymnals whenever permission is received from the authorities.

The Alliance's program of interchurch aid for eastern Europe runs to about \$166,000 a year, in addition to its special program of fostering theological education, according to Carl W. Tiller, associate secretary for relief and development in the BWA's Washington office.

In addition to the Bibles and hymnals, Tiller said, BWA assistance takes such forms as:

--Financial grants for the building, rebuilding, and repair of churches. (Often government restrictions require that such costs be funded in part, sometimes up to half, in western currency, which is unobtainable by the Baptists of the eastern countries except through grants.)

--The importation of blank paper--newsprint and book paper--for religious printing. (In some of the countries, paper is in short supply, and must be imported.)

--Food, clothing, medicines, and cash grants to pastors, pastors' widows, and other leaders in special need in certain countries. Permission has been obtained to provide aid of this type as a special concession for Christmas in three countries. The pay of pastors in many of the countries is at or below a subsistence level.

In other action, the BWA Relief and Development Committee ratified plans for accelerating theological education in eastern Europe, principally using gifts received by the BWA in earlier years.

Besides a projected plan to establish a Bible college or seminary in Moscow, approved plans call for placing a mini-library of theological books in the Baptist offices in each Communist country, setting up short courses in Switzerland and funding the enrollment of selected leaders from the eastern part of the continent, increasing the use of correspondence courses in pastoral work, and for conducting capstone reviews and examinations, from several days to a week in length, for those who complete the other training. Many of the Baptist pastors in eastern Europe have comparatively little formal educational preparation for their work.

**BWA Commends Middle
East Peace Efforts**

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Executive Committee, meeting here in annual session, commended "all national leaders who are striving for a just and peaceful solution to problems in the Middle East and other troubled areas of the world" and pledged Baptists of the world "to pray and to work with all others who cherish the achievement of this goal."

Baptist leaders from eight nations attended the committee meetings on the campus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary conducted by the BWA, a fellowship of 109 Baptist conventions and unions, with 29 million members in about 100 countries.

The resolution noted actions by the BWA world congresses in Tokyo in 1970 and Stockholm in 1975, which it said, "reaffirmed the deep commitment of Baptists to peace and reconciliation for all humanity under God" and "called upon world leaders to intensify their efforts and to take initiatives for peaceful solutions of international disputes and differences."

The peace resolution was drafted by Hugh W. Smith of Valley Forge, Pa., an official of American Baptist Churches in the USA, after an informal report of peace talks between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli leaders in Jerusalem. Warren R. Magnuson of Evanston, Ill., general secretary of the Baptist General Conference, moved its adoption and Alexei Bichkov of Moscow, general secretary of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the USSR, seconded it.

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**Kentucky Pastor Called
To Plains Baptist Church**

**Baptist Press
11/30/77**

PLAINS, Ga. (BP)--Donald Wilson, pastor of the Vine Run Baptist Church, Folsom, Ky., for three years, has been called as pastor of Plains Baptist Church here, the hometown church of President Jimmy Carter.

A 1977 graduate of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., Wilson was to preach his first sermon at the church December 4.

He said he is looking forward to being pastor of the church frequented by the President, now a member of First Baptist Church, Washington, D. C., when he returns home, although he added, "I won't prepare a sermon especially with him in mind."

Wilson is filling the position vacated earlier this year by Bruce Edwards, who left the church after it was factionalized over a vote to permit black members and is now a pastor in Hawaii.

"I think the church is trying to work through this thing and settle back down," Wilson said of the division, which caused a number of members of the church to leave and form a separate congregation, Maranatha Baptist Church.

"Plains recently adopted a constitution and bylaws which said that anyone can present themselves for membership, and I agree with that," he added.

Wilson replied he'd "rather not say," when asked if he voted for Jimmy Carter in last year's presidential elections, but he acknowledged that he felt Carter "has been doing a pretty good job," since moving into the White House. "I respect him very highly," he said.

The 38-year-old former veteran reportedly was recommended to the church by an Air Force colleague, who is now director of admissions at the Plains Baptist Church.

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