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## Directors Answer Questions About Mission Service Corps

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Mission Service Corps--the Southern Baptist Convention's plan to recruit and send 5,000 volunteers to mission fields at home and abroad by 1982--is rapidly taking shape after six months of life. But questions still abound about the functions, organization and operation of MSC. Dan Martin, news director of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, interviewed the three men given responsibility for developing and operating MSC: Ralph L. West, SBC process coordinator for applications and inquiries about MSC; David Bunch, Home Mission Board director of MSC coordination; and Lewis I. Myers Jr., coordinator of MSC for the Foreign Mission Board.

Here are the questions and answers about MSC:

**WHAT IS MISSION SERVICE CORPS?** It is a plan for enlisting and using Southern Baptists to give full time for one or two years in mission work under direction of the Foreign Mission Board, Home Mission Board, state mission boards and district associations.

**HOW DID MSC ORIGINATE?** It grew out of a luncheon meeting between President Jimmy Carter and heads of SBC agencies. After the luncheon, the SBC leaders asked President Carter to make a videotape to be presented at the SBC annual meeting in Kansas City. Following the presentation, messengers to the 1977 meeting approved a recommendation that the convention, by 1982, enlist 5,000 persons, groups of churches or churches who would agree to provide and fund 5,000 mission volunteers to serve for one or two years at home or abroad in an effort to reach the world for Christ.

**HOW WILL MSC VOLUNTEERS BE SUPPORTED?** The volunteers may support themselves financially, or may be sponsored by individuals, groups of individuals, churches, groups of churches and others. Support should be made as designated gifts and be above and beyond giving to the Cooperative Program and the special missions offerings.

**WHO CAN PARTICIPATE AS AN MSC VOLUNTEER?** Anyone who is a member of a Southern Baptist church with good health and the expertise to do the needed work. "We are looking for persons active in their local Southern Baptist church...who have made a contribution where they are and want to make a similar contribution in mission work at home or overseas," Myers said.

**HOW CAN SOUTHERN BAPTISTS VOLUNTEER FOR MSC?** Application forms and other information are available by writing West at P. O. Box 7203, Atlanta, Ga., 30309. Persons specifically interested in home or foreign service may contact Bunch or Myers directly.

**HOW CAN SOUTHERN BAPTISTS SPONSOR VOLUNTEERS?** By contributing designated funds, through channels to the mission agency. Information also may be obtained by writing West at the post office box above.

**WHAT SORT OF WORK WILL VOLUNTEERS DO?** "Almost anything that is supportive and religiously oriented," Bunch said. "We need administrators, teachers, carpenters, secretaries, pastors, visitors. The whole gamut."

Myers added: "We have filed requests for a variety of things, like agriculturalists, secretaries, people to work in evangelism, teachers, bookkeepers, interim pastors for English language churches, dorm parents..."

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West says, however, that not everyone who volunteers will be a missionary evangelist, or even be doing religious work primarily. "Those who volunteer will have an opportunity to fulfill their own religious commitment, even if they work in other duties. They will have an opportunity to share their faith in many ways."

HOW WILL THE VOLUNTEERS BE TRAINED? Those going abroad will receive a more intensive orientation than will those who serve in the United States.

"We have set up a flexible orientation because some volunteers may have more specific experience than others," says Myers. "We plan about a week of training in the States, to be followed by specific orientation on the field. We will deal with personal spiritual growth, because volunteers will be detached from the organizational mechanism that has fed them spiritually. We also will deal with FMB procedures that relate to their work, the country and area in which they will serve, cross cultural communications, major world religions and their specific responsibilities."

Bunch said: "Orientation for HMB volunteers primarily will be done in the field. However, if numbers and job assignment warrant, we will establish a central orientation program."

WILL LANGUAGE COURSES BE TAUGHT TO VOLUNTEERS WHO GO TO COUNTRIES WHERE ENGLISH IS NOT THE PRIMARY LANGUAGE? No. All of the job assignments to foreign fields will be English language assignments. "Some basic training in marketplace communication will be offered on the field so that volunteers will be able to converse on a day-to-day basis," Myers said.

Myers added, however, that volunteers who are bi-lingual may be used in such a way to take advantage of the linguistic ability.

WILL SOME APPLICANTS BE REJECTED? Each applicant must have the endorsement of his or her home church, as well as references which will be checked.

"Persons who do not have a compatible theology with Southern Baptists, who are moral deviants, who are little messiahs or who want to reform the whole mission structure likely would be liabilities. However, I do not see this type of person coming out in large numbers," Bunch said.

Those who lack qualifications for the job assignment, have poor health, or would need a missionary to "baby-sit" them on the field would also be rejected.

WHO WILL SUPERVISE THE WORK OF THE VOLUNTEERS? "Before a service opportunity is approved, a supervisor will have to be named," Bunch said.

"We are preparing material telling the supervisor what is expected. He also will be required to periodically make reports on the work the volunteer is doing," Bunch said.

West added: "On the foreign field, an orientation committee will be named by the mission. The committee will help and guide the volunteer. This is the same process used for new missionaries."

HOW WILL FUNDS TO SUPPORT THE VOLUNTEERS BE HANDLED? Bunch explained: "Sponsorship funds may flow in several directions. If the volunteer supports himself, we would not be involved at all. If persons or churches wish to contribute, we encourage them to do so through regular channels, designating the offering to MSC."

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST TO SUPPORT A VOLUNTEER? The Mission Service Corps Steering Committee has established minimum levels of support: At home, \$6,000 a year for a single person and \$9,000 for a couple; abroad, \$7,500 for a single person and \$12,500 for a couple.

WILL FUNDS BE SOLICITED FROM INDIVIDUALS, CHURCHES AND ASSOCIATIONS? "No," says Bunch. "My job description does not call for me to solicit funds. We will distribute the information, and let those who wish to contribute do so. We are not involved in a money race, nor are we competing with the Cooperative Program or the special missions offerings."

WILL VOLUNTEERS BE EXPECTED TO RAISE THEIR OWN FUNDS? No. The program will not require volunteers to drum up their own support.

West said: "We are not establishing an independent missionary system. We see it as an additional opportunity for those who wish to give over and above what they already are giving through the Cooperative Program. We think it will be compatible both with the Cooperative Program and the special missions offerings."

SHOULD VOLUNTEERS APPLY FOR MSC EVEN THOUGH THEY DON'T HAVE SUPPORT? Yes, says Myers. "We tell people who inquire to fill out the application even if they cannot support themselves or have no sponsors. We believe funding will come when the program gets under way."

HOW WILL VOLUNTEERS BE ASSIGNED? West said some missionaries expressed fears MSC will be "sending volunteers to them" rather than responding to requests from the field. That is not the case, he said.

Bunch added: "We are not just sending out people ad hoc. We plan to respond to requests from the field, fitting the talents and abilities of the volunteers to the needs."

WHEN WILL VOLUNTEERS BE ASSIGNED? Bunch anticipates letting a potential volunteer know within a week after receiving the application whether the volunteer is acceptable. Within a month, he plans to make assignment of the accepted volunteers when funds are available.

Myers said the process may take a bit longer, because of the overseas requirement, but anticipates quick processing and assignment.

HOW IS MSC DIFFERENT FROM THE MANY OTHER VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS THAT OPERATE IN THE SBC? "The basic difference," Bunch said, "is that MSC people are going out full time for a year or two. In other volunteer programs, the person may or may not be full time, may be bi-vocational, or may be spending a vacation on the mission field. The definite time frame and the fact they will be full time, financially supported volunteers, makes it different."

WILL MSC SIPHON OFF EFFECTIVENESS AND STRENGTH OF OTHER VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS? The leaders say no. "I anticipate the other volunteer programs will continue, with people devoting varying lengths of time to mission service through those organizations," West said.

HOW ARE SOUTHERN BAPTISTS RESPONDING TO MSC? Slowly, say the three men. So far, only three FMB and four HMB volunteers have been assigned. Sponsorship response also is slow. West, however, is doing a lively business answering inquiries. He estimates writing 2,000 letters in the past two months about MSC.

"We are seeing the beginning of a grassroots response to the vision of a few people," says Myers. "Southern Baptists are responding to the dream of a few persons who have the winning of the world in our time on their hearts and are in a position to share their dream."