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Pastor Turns Olympic  
Ticket Into New Church

By David Wilkinson

LAKE PLACID, N.Y. (BP)--David Book has a ticket to the Olympics, but he's decided to make it a one-way trip.

Book is pastor of the Baptist Chapel, a recently constituted Southern Baptist congregation which meets in a rambling, two-story, gray house on the main thoroughfare of Lake Placid, New York, site of the 1980 winter Olympics.

Along with two Southern Baptist Home Mission Board area missionaries, a US-2 couple from the panhandle of Oklahoma and a team of student volunteers, Book is working feverishly to see that a Christian presence is part of the celebrated, international festivities next winter.

But more importantly, the unique team is working to establish an effective Southern Baptist ministry that will be a part of the Lake Placid community long after the Olympics have left town.

"We're excited, of course, about the tremendous possibilities for ministry during the Olympics," says Book, "but our No. 1 priority all along has been to establish a church in Lake Placid."

Book has been an integral part of the Southern Baptist Olympic ministry since last summer when he took a 10-week sabbatical from his job as associate director of student work for the Kentucky Baptist Convention to work with Home Mission Board area missionaries Ken and Marilyn Prickett in Lake Placid.

With a small staff of student workers, he coordinated a summer program jammed with Bible studies, Vacation Bible Schools, backyard Bible clubs, puppet shows, concerts, and perhaps most importantly, a comprehensive religious survey of the community's 3,000 residents which was sanctioned by the area clergy association.

At the end of the summer, Book was asked to return.

"I could think of 40 good reasons not to be here during the Olympics," Book recalls, "but we (he and his wife Marianne) eventually decided that this was a tremendous challenge, an opportunity that we just couldn't pass up."

Book resigned his job in Kentucky, and moved his family to Lake Placid Dec. 1.

Although the pace since then has been hectic, the overall approach has been low-key, in keeping with the long-term strategy for Lake Placid mapped out in the fall of 1977 by the Pricketts and a special taskforce of representatives from the Home Mission Board, the Adirondack Baptist Association and the New York Baptist State Convention. Recognizing that a lasting acceptance by Lake Placid residents would not be achieved by an all-out Baptist blitz during the Olympics, the taskforce emphasized establishing contacts and cultivating relationships.

As Norman Bell, director of the Adirondack association for the past 18 years, explains, "You just don't come into a community cold turkey and announce that you're going to start a Baptist church."

Indeed, progress has been slow.

The Baptist Chapel began meeting last summer in a room in the Ramada Inn provided by the motel manager. On the first Sunday, eight persons showed up. Five were members of the Southern Baptist ministry team, two were Campus Crusade for Christ workers and one was a Lake Placid resident--a Southern Baptist--who promptly announced, "I thought you'd never get here."

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Attendance hasn't increased dramatically since then, but there are signs the low-key strategy is paying off.

Although Southern Baptists are newcomers to the community, Book serves with other local clergymen on the Olympic religious affairs committee. The committee, a first in the history of the Olympics, is officially sanctioned by the International Olympic Committee.

Dan McCormick, coordinator of religious affairs for the Olympics, says the Southern Baptist team will be "an integral part" of the committee's efforts to meet the challenge of the first statute in the International Olympic Committee regulations which states that "host cities shall watch over the spiritual as well as the temporal well being of the athletes and visitors."

McCormick credits the Southern Baptist workers for "making it obvious from the very beginning that they are here to help meet the needs of the community."

One of the most pressing needs, Book feels, is something to counteract the tourist town boredom that draws low paid employees to the 56 bars in Lake Placid.

"Lake Placid is a great place to take a vacation," he explains, "but it can be a terribly boring place to live. The unemployment rate is very high during the off season, and even when people do have jobs, it's hard for many of them to cope with the fact that they don't have money to throw around like the tourists who have a good time on \$200 a day."

Book hopes to use the house on Main Street as a place for Bible studies, Christian entertainment in a coffee house setting and lodging for Baptist mission groups who come to help. The building also houses the team of student volunteers who pay for their room and board by getting jobs in the community.

As for the Olympics, there is plenty to do. In addition to a limited ministry to the athletes, Book sees countless opportunities to meet the spiritual needs of the 50-60,000 spectators who will crowd into the resort area next winter.

"A lot of what we'll be doing is simply trying to hold people together spiritually and morally during all of this activity," he says candidly. "We won't be able to really get down to the brass tacks of ministry to the community until after the Olympics."

"I look for a long, hard haul. But I think it will be worth it."

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'At Home With the Bible'  
Introduced in Northwest

By Bracey Campbell

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SPOKANE, Wash. (BP)--It was a strange setting for the delegation from the usually warm climates of Tennessee, Mississippi and South Carolina.

The foot-and-a-half of snow was a first for many members of the group who had come to introduce "At Home with the Bible" to Baptists in the northwest. Such a deluge of the white stuff would have closed their home towns for days.

So it was with delight and surprise that the group was greeted by about 800 persons at the magnificent Spokane Opry House on a frigid week night and by about 200 persons the following night at a rally at the Victory Baptist Church in Des Moines, a Seattle suburb.

The rallies were planned by the Northwest Baptist Convention to introduce the new radio and television series--cosponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board and the Radio and Television Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention--to the people of that area.

"This (the series) is the greatest thing I have seen from the standpoint of having potential to open this part of the country to the work that is being done by Southern Baptists," said Don Sills, pastor of a Baptist church in Spokane.

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Sills organized the rallies, flying to Nashville, Tenn., and then to Jackson, Miss., to visit with Frank Pollard, host of the series and pastor of the city's First Baptist Church.

Sills, one of many bi-vocational pastors working in what he calls an "unparalleled opportunity" for evangelical work, said people in the northwest are not "church oriented."

The pastor said the first information he received on the series, which premiered in October and is now being broadcast via cable and commercial television and radio stations into more than 1,500 cities and towns, led him to believe that it offered the potential to awaken this part of the country.

"The opportunity for piping this program into homes via television or radio, following that up with the free literature that is available from the Sunday School Board and then connecting those people with the local churches has all of us in the Inland Empire Baptist Association excited," he said.

Sills said the series gives Southern Baptists opportunity to overcome their "greatest weakness in the Pacific Northwest--exposure."

The Washington residents who braved the elements to attend the rallies were shown one of the 30 minute segments and heard from Chester Russell of the Sunday School Board, explaining the origin and the possibilities for the series.

Pollard, a Texas native, told the Washington audiences that God has a purpose in every life. "And I am certain that he has a purpose for you out here in this beautiful country to expand his work."

Pollard said the series was the "boldest step" he has seen Southern Baptists undertake in their Bold Mission Thrust effort, designed to share the gospel with every person in the world by the year 2000.

"People out here--and people everywhere--hunger for something they can trust. Here is a new way...a great way... to expand the only message the world has ever known that has never failed to live up to its eternal promise of life and hope," said Pollard.

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(BP) photo mailed separately to Baptist state newspapers by Sunday School Board Bureau of Baptist Press.

Situation Erratic in Iran;  
Journeyman Decides To Leave

By Ruth Fowler

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TEHRAN, Iran (BP)--In the face of an "erratic and uncontrolled situation" in Tehran, Southern Baptist missionary journeyman Michael Joe Sowder has decided to leave Iran.

Southern Baptist missionary Henry E. Turlington told the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board Jan. 31 that although the situation was precarious he felt that if any board personnel were hurt it would be simply "happenstance." The Turlingtons plan to stay, at least for the next week, in Tehran.

Plans for Sowder's evacuation were indefinite at the time of the phone conversation with Turlington, but he hopes to fly out of Iran as soon as arrangements are made. Tentative plans are for Sowder to transfer to Aberdeen, Scotland, to work in a youth ministry.

While Turlington admitted there had been growing anti-American sentiment in the past week, he had not yet decided to leave. "I don't want to minimize the situation," Turlington said. "We do feel less safe than a week ago."

"We are closer to leaving now than we have been," he said. "If things calm down we'll stay. If we leave it will probably be for just a couple of weeks."

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Turlington reported that he had been out every day and that there was shooting "from time to time" in his section of Tehran.

The congregation of Turlington's English-language church has dwindled in the past weeks from over 350 to about 40. But he feels no matter how much the situation deteriorates, a few church members will remain in the city.

"We held services on Friday, our regular worship day," Turlington said, "and had a church-wide dinner Sunday night."

Because of their decreased number, the congregation is meeting primarily in homes. Nigerian and Pakistani families also worship with the American business and military personnel. Most of the congregation are men now, Turlington said.

The Turlingtons live just 100 yards from a market and have enough food to last six weeks if they were confined to their home. As many Americans left Tehran, they brought the food they had in stock to the Turlingtons. "The pastor is eating well," Turlington said. He also reported that they had heat more regularly and that the Iranian cold season would soon be over.

Other Southern Baptist missionaries have already left Iran.

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Church Attendance Check  
Reveals Division by Thirds

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RUBY, La. (BP)--Checking attendance is a common practice in Baptist Sunday Schools. But what happens when a pastor takes roll call of the entire membership for a worship service?

D. L. Callender, pastor of Pine Grove Baptist Church, has done it a number of times. The most recent was a day in January.

"The members were excited. Some were anxious, wondering..." Callender said. "The idea was new here. The day we took roll was a nasty day, cold and raining. But when the roll was finished, we had 102 present and 197 absent."

He said about one-third of the membership was present, one-third lived in the church's vicinity, but was absent and one-third was "AWOL--whereabouts unknown," statistics he believes are representative of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"This thing of calling roll is very revealing," he said. "Many people sitting there had children, friends, relatives who had moved away years ago. When their names were called as members of our church you could hear the gasps of disbelief."

"The church suggested that absentees be sent a letter encouraging them to get into a church, into the Lord's service, whether it's in their own church here, or in another church where they can follow his commandments. It will not be a reprimand because that just wouldn't work."

Callender said the idea of a roll call came from the old song by James M. Black, "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder," and from Revelation 20:12 that refers to judgment based upon whether one's name is in the Lamb's Book of Life.

"The sad thing is that we don't seem to care or worry too much about (those missing ones)," Callender said. "Too many pastors and churches seem to slide into a 'dipped and done' attitude."

"I don't want my remarks to be derogatory toward my convention, but I want them to become disturbed over these people we are losing. We are losing the potential...the blessings. We need to contact these people and say, 'Hey, you are still a member; we still love you; come back.'"

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