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Politics Sometimes
Halts Mission Work

By Jim Newton

MEMPHIS (BP)--China...Vietnam...Laos...Mozambique...the Seychelles...Angola...
Iran....

Color them black on the map of the world. They are countries where Southern Baptist missionaries no longer serve, forced to leave by changes in government. Iran, where 50 Americans have been held hostage at the embassy in Tehran since Nov. 4, is the most recent victim.

J. D. Hughey, the Foreign Mission Board's secretary for Europe and the Middle East, said he still had hope, "but not much hope," that missionaries could return to Iran. "We haven't given up, and we may be able to go back into Iran, but it may be several years from now," he said.

Unlike some other nations where Southern Baptist missionaries have left behind growing "indigenous" (national) churches, Iran has no Baptist church to continue a presence among the people, since most of the 350 members were Americans and other foreigners.

There are no SBC missionaries now serving in Angola or Mozambique, two former Portuguese colonies who gained independence in 1975. However, the Foreign Mission Board still lists on its books mission work in Angola, with one missionary couple still assigned to the African nation, although living in another country.

Mr. and Mrs. Curtis Dixon are now temporarily in Lisbon, Portugal, producing materials for Angola's Theological Education by Extension and actively seeking permission to return to Angola.

Southern Baptist missionaries were assigned to Mozambique from 1973-77, although all had to leave in 1975.

At last report, there were seven Baptist churches in Mozambique with about 500 members. Only one Baptist missionary has been allowed to remain--Valnice Coelho, a missionary from the Brazilian Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

Southern Baptist missions work in the Republic of Seychelles is perhaps the shortest of any in the board's history--about 13 months--the length of time Mr. and Mrs. William Steegers taught at the government high school at the invitation of the minister of education.

Only three Baptist churches out of 18 that were operating in 1975 are allowed to meet in Vietnam, according to recent reports received by former missionary Peyton Moore.

Moore, now assigned to Hong Kong, is one of 39 Southern Baptist missionaries who had to leave Vietnam in April of 1975 when the country fell to communism.

In 1975, the nine missionaries assigned had to leave Laos. Three house-church groups were meeting, and most of the Christians involved in them tried to escape. Fewer than a dozen are perhaps still there, although no authoritative information is available.

Though relationships between the United States and the People's Republic of China improved in 1979, the extent of Baptist ministries there still is uncertain. There were 191 Southern Baptist missionaries in China in 1948 when they began to evacuate as communists took over. The Foreign Mission Board reports that the last estimate was there were 392 churches and 123,000 members with which Southern Baptist missionaries had relationships, but it's not known how many of these churches still exist today.

Frequently, when a country is beset with political turmoil, SBC missionaries leave for short periods of time, hoping to return. In 1977, when war and unrest intensified following the depose of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1975, all of the 30 SBC missionaries assigned to Ethiopia left, leaving an Ethiopian layman to supervise the work in the Menz District under a management "trust" system.

One year later, two missionary couples--the Jerry Bedsoles and the Lynn Groces--were allowed to return to Addis Ababa, the capital. Their ministry, however, has been confined to the capital city, even though the strongest Baptist work had been in the Menz District rural areas.

Missionaries also have been forced to leave such countries as Nicaragua, Chile, and Uganda for short periods of time during revolution, but were able to return later.

When Idi Amin's kingdom in Uganda toppled in April of 1979, missionaries Webster Carroll and James Rice were invited back by the new government, and were instrumental in organizing relief efforts among Ugandans with medical and nutritional needs.

Missionaries in several countries have faced problems of getting visas, work permits or renewed entry permits.

The inability of missionaries in Malaysia to get residence permits in the states of Sarawak and Sabah has remained unchanged, and new developments in nearby Indonesia caused deep concern during 1979.

Missionaries in Indonesia who had been in the country more than five years were warned their annual visas would be renewed for only six months. Southeast Asia Secretary William Wakefield of the Foreign Mission Board expressed fear that if this "five year rule" continues, it would force almost 90 percent of the 102 missionaries assigned to Indonesia to leave the country within the next two years when their visas expired.

Although no official word has been received indicating a change in the rules or enforcement of the proposed ruling, Foreign Mission Board officials said in September that three Indonesia missionaries recently received visa extensions without the notation, "not to be extended again." Indonesia missionaries hope this is a sign the rule will not be enforced.

R. Keith Parks, the newly installed executive director of the Foreign Mission Board, said one of his major tasks for the future will be mapping a strategy for continuing missions work in countries when the career missionaries have to leave suddenly, a strategy that is currently undefined.

Italian Returns 'Home' To Stir Evangelism Fires

ROME, Italy (BP)--After an absence of more than 33 years, Amelio Giannetta, an Italian-born Southern Baptist missionary, has returned to help stir the fires of evangelism in his native land.

Giannetta, a 20-year veteran of missionary work in Brazil, is nearing the half-way point of a year's special evangelistic assignment in Italy.

Both he and his wife Lidia are encouraged by the response they've found among Italian Baptists.

In Mottola, a town of 17,000 in southern Italy, a two-day clinic turned into a 13-day meeting with 22 people asking to be baptized--more than the Baptist church had baptized in the last five years. The church of 135 members now has set a goal of baptizing 30 more in 1980.

"The experience was beautiful," Giannetta said. "For two weeks the Baptist family in Mottola praised God, loved one another, prayed and cried together and experienced the wonderful joy that accompanies every God-sent revival."

The Giannettas' journey back to Italy has been a sentimental one. Amelio's mother died when he was six, and he grew up in the Baptist Children's Home in Rome. He first met Lidia when his choir sang in her church.

He left Italy at 21, disillusioned with Italian politics of that period and vowing never to return. But he never forgot Lidia, and with the help of his father and sister, who had preceded him to the United States, he brought her to America. They were married in 1949 and later became U.S. citizens.

After training at New Orleans, Southern and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminaries, they worked for eight years with Italian-speaking people in the San Francisco Bay area of California under sponsorship of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

But a growing awareness of needs overseas led to their appointment in 1960 as missionaries to Brazil, where he has served in key evangelistic posts. For 12 years he was executive secretary of the National Board of Evangelism.

His experience in Brazil, now in the midst of a major drive to increase Baptist membership to one million by 1982, convinced Giannetta that certain evangelistic principles can be applied almost anywhere.

The key to winning people to Christ, he feels, is in talking to a person about the reality of Christ in your life--not about theology or doctrine. It's the experience that counts, he explains.

Giannetta was invited to Italy by Saverio Guarna, director of Italian Baptists' Department of Evangelism. Guarna met the Giannettas in 1978 when he went to Brazil as part of an evangelistic emphasis.

The spiritual awakening taking place among Italian Baptists excites both Giannetta and Guarna. And Giannetta, the orphan boy of Rome who today has become a man of three countries, has a quiet confidence that God brought him back to Italy at just the right time.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

WMU Chooses Acteen Panelists

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Six Baptist teen-age girls have been selected as members of the 1980 National Advisory Panel for Acteens, the missions organization for girls in grades seven through 12 sponsored by Woman's Missionary Union.

The young panelists will write articles and offer suggestions to help WMU's national Acteens staff understand the interests and needs of teen-agers.

They are Linda Gayle Crisp, Dallas, Texas; Catherine Elizabeth Kadingo, Laurens, S.C.; Lori Keeling, Houston, Texas; Glenda Myers, Miami, Okla.; Tina Wiese, Nashville, Ill.; and Mary Ann Williams, Strongsville, Ohio.

Chosen by WMU from 107 applicants from 19 states, they will serve as pages at the WMU annual meeting, June 8-9 in St. Louis, Mo; write for "Accent," the WMU monthly magazine for Acteens; and may be asked to attend state and associational meetings related to WMU.

Pam Brown, editor of "Accent," said three previous Acteens panels have reported that Southern Baptist teen-agers are interested in "peer ministries, teaching teens to relate to teens in different situations." Problems such as world hunger and energy supply concern many teen-agers, according to the Acteens panelists.

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