



BAPTIST PRESS

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82-82

**Nuclear Arms Reduction
Talks Lauded By Ethicist**

CO

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Peace talks by American and Soviet leaders could result in significant mutual reductions in nuclear arms and could diminish the threat of nuclear war between the two countries, a Southern Baptist ethicist says.

Ronald D. Sisk, director of program development for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, responded to President Reagan's announcement that the United States and the Soviet Union will begin Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) June 29. Reagan is expected to ask for a one-third reduction in nuclear warheads when he begins negotiations with Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev.

"The most important point is that both sides begin to talk about arms reduction and each be willing to make appropriate concessions to achieve equitable agreements. Obviously we don't want to make ourselves more vulnerable to Soviet attack and certainly the Soviets will not agree to any move which would make them more vulnerable to attack by the United States," Sisk said.

"But in order to find a point of mutual agreement," he said, "we must at least begin to talk."

Sisk said that while many prefer that a freeze on construction and deployment of nuclear weapons by both sides would precede negotiations for reductions, the talks themselves will almost certainly begin to reduce tension.

It is important not to lose the momentum which has been building toward significant mutual reductions, he said.

"Baptists everywhere should redouble their prayers for peace with justice and for meaningful arms reduction negotiations," Sisk said. "The Damocles' sword of nuclear war hangs directly over our heads threatening to cut short our lives and those of our children and grandchildren. Negotiations toward mutually acceptable agreements is the clearest way to keep that sword from dropping."

Sisk said that nuclear war threatens to devastate everything we value.

"If they negotiate seriously, Reagan and Brezhnev have it in their power to prevent that devastation," he said. "This is a golden moment. It must not be lost."

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Scottish Family's Crisis
Sparks Genuine Fellowship

RB

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—A Baptist family from Scotland experienced Christian fellowship in action when a freakish injury hospitalized their 3-year-old son in Richmond, Va.

Pastor Laurie Dennison of Motherwell (Scotland) Baptist Church, his wife, Gwen, and their two sons had been in the United States just a few days on a combination sabbatical-vacation when the unexpected happened.

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Their younger son, Peter, fell in a shallow stream of a Richmond park. What appeared to be a routine cut on his knee became considerably more serious. Two different waterborne bacteria had entered his system. Peter's temperature shot up and the infection threatened permanent damage to his knee.

Gwen, a nurse, stayed with her injured youngster--irrigation tubes protruding from his knee--around the clock at a Richmond hospital for 10 days. She and Dennison remain anxious about Peter's leg, which doctors say could still suffer permanent arthritis, limited growth, or both.

"I would hate to think what would have happened to us if we had been in a strange land without a Christian connection," said Gwen the day before she and the boys returned to Scotland.

The Foreign Mission Board, where Dennison met with staff members, provided housing during the family's extended stay; a staff member lent them a car; and staff wives and church groups provided meals and care for their other son, Stephen, 6.

Gwen said the family was encouraged, knowing friends in Scotland, Canada, New Jersey and the Richmond area were praying for them.

The hospital staff bent regulations to move Peter into a private room so she could stay with him, and relaxed visiting hour restrictions for Dennison and Stephen. Hospital employees offered to take Stephen on outings.

Scott B. Anthony, the orthopedist who treated Peter, made follow-up calls and took both sons swimming, carefully exercising the injured knee in the pool.

Now Dennison, his family back in Scotland, has continued his sabbatical--with stops at the Home Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention and foreign missions conference at Ridgecrest, N.C.--hoping the remainder of his trip will be less eventful.

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Book Thief Confesses;
Now Brother In Christ

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Not every retail store can claim that shoplifting its merchandise can bring good into the life of a thief, but a Baptist Book Store somewhere in the United States can now make such a claim.

Recently a letter of confession, accompanied by five dollars, arrived at the Arlington (Texas) Mail Order Center.

"Several months ago I was in your book store," the letter began. "I was drunk, at the end of my road, without a penny to my name. I stole a paperback book ("Tracks of a Fellow Struggler" by John Claypool).

"I am in the process of making right some wrongs in my life and need to send you this five dollars to make restitution for this sin. Please forgive me, even though you don't know me. Respectfully, a brother in Christ."

According to William S. Graham, director of the Sunday School Board's book store division, no one knows from which store the book was taken. "Learning of changed lives through events like this make all our efforts worthwhile," Graham said.

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Baptist Center Invites
Community's Troubles

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By Raymond Higgins II

Baptist Press
6/1/82

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The Knoxville (Tenn.) Baptist Center has gotten itself into a heap of trouble--on purpose--since director Tom Everett began the Neighborhood Disput Cent r.

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Everett, his staff and volunteers enter into confrontations between families, neighbors, landlords and tenants, and youth, and have learned what it means to bargain, mediate, compromise and negotiate. Everett calls it "reconciliation."

Ministries of the Baptist Center, supported by the Knox Association, the Home Mission Board's Christian social ministries department and Knoxville Southern Baptist churches, meet daily human needs. But, the dispute center is rare; it is only the second of its kind in the United States.

Everett, who grew up and was a pastor in the Center's heavily integrated, poor, inner-city community of 20,000, two miles northwest of the World's Fair, was "aware that violence is often viewed as an option in settling disagreements around here." The dispute center was formed to help people settle problems without "dragging them through the court or getting evicted or arrested."

Everett's strategy gets disputants together on neutral turf, so their disagreement can be openly and fully discussed. "We don't decide who is right--we only try to get you to agree on a solution," Everett says. Many times the agreement is written down and signed by both parties. He says most often the agreements are kept.

Hours of crisis resolution go unrecorded, but the results are not forgotten. Everett remembers an ex-prisoner who got a job, got married, lost his job, and then received an eviction notice because he could not pay his rent. With Everett's intervention, an agreement was worked out and eviction prevented.

Conflicts the dispute center will tackle include family problems, neighborhood problems such as noise, children and nuisances, landlord-tenant problems such as repairs, rent and damages, small claims over property and money and juvenile problems such as fights and vandalism.

"There are some troubles the center won't take on," Everett says. It does not handle problems with strangers, problems needing legal help such as lawsuits, criminal defenses, divorces and wills, disputes with bad checks, problems in which the disputants will not willingly agree to meet and problems that cannot be settled by compromise.

Everett says he and his volunteers will continue mediating disputes "during the day, evening or weekends." As long as they do, the Baptist Center, with its two-story building, playground and ball field adjacent to a housing project of 3,500, will support a rare ministry as well as its everyday concerns about food, health, utilities, Bible study for adults, Bible clubs for youth, athletics, education classes and community involvement.

"This involvement has shown me that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount can have a powerful impact on us today," Everett says. So, he "preaches to adults about reconciliation and teaches youngsters about options to violence in daily living," and keeps the Baptist Center a place where peaceful solution can still be found to life's problems.

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Higgins is special project coordinator with the Home Mission Board and Christian Life Commission.

Prayer, Action Crack
Barriers In Rio's Barra

LB

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6/1/82

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil (BP)—State law changed and evangelism took a big step forward in Rio de Janeiro recently as Baptists fused plans, action and prayers.

In a week the mission church in Rio's Barra da Tijuca community found a meeting place for its growing Sunday School, got state Baptist support for an evangelism program in the area and saw zoning laws changed to allow construction of a desperately needed church building.

Led by Southern Baptist missionary pastor Jerry S. Key of Texas, leaders of First Baptist Church of Barra da Tijuca huddled last fall to outline needs in the Barra, a glistening cluster of beaches, new high-rise condominiums, old money, slums and half a million people on the Atlantic coast.

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The group s tited on three needs: A permanent church building (the state Baptist convention owned prime property in a residential area of the Barra, but building plans were turned down because of zoning regulations); a meeting place for the mission Sunday School begun in a responsive section of the community; and a comprehensive plan for evangelism in the Barra, including area-wide visitation, beach ministries and preaching campaigns.

The group quickly realized the challenge far outstripped their resources and abilities. They dropped to their knees, turning bold plans into pleading prayers.

That was Saturday. On Sunday a meeting place for the Sunday School was offered to the church, rent free.

On Tuesday the evangelism committee of the state convention voted to promote "operation Trans-Barra," a plan for saturating the Barra with the gospel message, incorporating most of the ideas offered by the church and pledging seminary workers, music groups and other volunteers.

On Friday, thanks in part to the lobbying efforts of a Baptist deacon, the stat legislatur adopted an amendment to the zoning regulations, granting conditional permission for churches, schools, clubs and service facilities to be built in areas zoned residential.

The petition from the Barra church was the first to be approved by the zoning commission under the new regulations. The mayor of Rio personally signed the permit, expressing his desire to meet the people who "cared enough about building churches where families are, that they undertook to change the zoning law."

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Volunteers Keep Baptist
Center's World Spinning

By Walker L. Knight

AB

Baptist Press
6/1/82

DETROIT, Mich. (BP)—If volunteers make the world of missions go around, then the Baptist Center in Detroit is spinning.

During an awards banquet, Center Director Lowell Lawson honored 464 volunteers for the past year's work, including the wife of a Ford research physicist, Mary Sue Sickafus, and the neighborhood snow shoveler, John Dailey.

Mrs. Sickafus received the volunteer of the year award, and Dailey, who sees his mission in life as a snow shoveler, received the "Johnathan Award" as a friend of the center.

The unusual volunteer program was created by Lawson during the last six years despite a relatively low number of Southern Baptist churches in the area and the fear most suburbanites have of the inner city. This has been especially true of Detroit following its difficulties six years ago when youth gangs ran out of check and the National Guard was called to aid the city's beleaguered police force.

"We had to build slowly," Lawson said, to climb the mountains of fear and guilt with the volunteers. "In 1976, Baptists were cancelling meetings in the downtown area."

His approach was positive, encouraging volunteers to go shopping and eat lunch downtown, and making sure they had a good experience at the center.

Volunteers helped staff the center's multiple programs ranging from senior citizens' meals and recreation to a thrift store.

Lawson called his annual appreciation day "an orgy of thanksgiving," explaining: "We get the thanks that belong to you, and I'm taking these (thanks) and giving them back to you."

Everyone participating received certificates. Those with more than 100 hours of volunteer work were awarded Bachelor of Caring degrees. Those with more than 300 hours were awarded Master of Caring degrees.

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Lawson plans also to offer a doctorate for more than 500 hours, noting "we already have people who qualify."

Also recognized this year was Paul Walser, last year's volunteer of the year who was cited by the Kiwanis of Metropolitan Detroit as their volunteer of the year.

Walser, a truck driver, told of his early sense of calling to the ministry, but said his pastor helped him realize God wanted him to serve as a layman. "I determined to be the best layman I could."

Lawson himself was cited by the Christian social ministries department of the SBC Home Mission Board for exceptional achievement in creative enlistment and use of volunteers.

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Hays Sees Hope For Greater
Religious Freedom In China

By Erich Bridges

RB

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6/1/82

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—A veteran observer of Christian work in Asia sees hope that a new Chinese constitution to be ratified this fall may increase religious freedom in China.

"What we hope for is a statement that would include not only the right to believe or not believe in religion, but also the freedom to share one's religious experience and the freedom of assembly for religious purposes," said George Hays, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's director for East Asia and a former missionary to Japan.

Released in April for public debate before ratification, the new constitution would replace the one adopted in 1978, which allows Chinese citizens the right to believe or not believe in religion, but restricts public propagation of belief to atheism.

The section on freedom of religion in the new document declares that "no religious affairs may be dominated by any foreign country" and that "no one may use religion to carry out counter-revolutionary activities or activities that disrupt the social order, harm the health of citizens, or obstructs the educational system of the state."

The statement on foreign involvement in religion echoes previous statements made by the government and by Chinese religious leaders.

Government officials and representatives of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the officially recognized Catholic organization, have rejected recent Vatican efforts to influence Chinese Catholics and name local bishops. Most Chinese bishops declare their independence of any papal control.

Leaders of the Three Self Patriotic Movement, the Protestant counterpart of the Catholic association, have repeatedly stated their determination to build an independent, indigenous Chinese church, free of foreign meddling.

Southern Baptist missionaries first entered China in 1846 and began more than a century of evangelistic, medical and educational work in the country, the Foreign Mission Board's first mission field. Some 600 Southern Baptist missionaries worked in China before communists gained control of the mainland in 1949 and forced out foreign religious workers.

Since the government-sanctioned reopening of some Chinese churches in the last few years, however, Bishop Ding Guangkon, Three Self leader and president of the New Chinese Christian Council, has welcomed limited contacts with western Christian leaders. He has received visitors ranging from the Archbishop of Canterbury to representatives of the National Association of Evangelicals. Harold C. Bennett, executive secretary of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, accompanied the latter group to China in November and met with Ding.

A member of the constitutional revision committee, Ding had earlier requested that the reference to the right to propagate atheism in the 1978 constitution be deleted, leaving a simple statement of the right to believe or not believe in religion. He was joined in the request by several other groups, including Chinese Buddhists and Moslems.

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