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87-82

India Mission To Stop
Seeking Visas For Now

By Marty Croll

BANGALORE, India (BP)--Following the most recent "no" in a series of visa denials, Southern Baptist missionaries in India have decided to stop seeking entry for new co-workers, for now.

Missionaries learned in late April the Indian government had denied a visa for Cindy Howard, a pediatrician appointed by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board last October. They had considered Howard their final test case in requesting visas. A request for visa extensions by college teacher David Travis and his wife has been pending for more than a year.

The modern Christian missionary movement began in what is now West Bengal, India, with the work of William Carey 195 years ago. But attempts by India's leaders to purify the nation of foreign influence could end missionary activity there, said Jerry Rankin, administrator for Southern Baptist work in India.

For the past six years India has denied entry to new Southern Baptist missionaries, including some who possessed highly sought-after technical skills. Before Howard's visa was denied, a 33-year-old Southern Baptist woman with a doctorate in plant pathology was denied the opportunity to teach at an Indian university. Medical personnel with very specialized training also have been denied entry.

"We're using this (Howard's visa denial) as a signal that it's pointless for us to continue to try to secure visas until there is some change in the political climate," said Rankin, who on June 1 becomes the Foreign Mission Board's area director for India and other nations in south Asia and the Pacific Ocean region.

"All over India among missionaries, more and more are being asked to leave, and visa extensions are not being granted," said Rebekah Naylor, administrator at Bangalore Baptist Hospital, where Howard was to work. "This is evidently the continuing policy of the government."

Until about four years ago most Southern Baptist mission work with Indian believers was centered around the hospital, near the southern tip of India. But in 1982 the Foreign Mission Board began helping an entity named National Indian Ministries.

National Indian Ministries pooled the efforts of Southern Baptists and other Baptist groups working in the country. One of its primary goals was to help train Indian Baptists to start churches in areas where no Christian witness exists.

If Southern Baptist missionaries were asked to leave India, Baptist ranks still should continue to grow, Rankin said. "By training nationals and equipping them to evangelize India, we're at a point that our church development and evangelism work would not be affected one way or another," he said.

Meanwhile, Naylor and the Baptist Hospital staff are working feverishly to prepare the hospital to stand on its own, training nationals to take over jobs that have been filled by missionaries. While Rankin believes the presence of Southern Baptist missionaries in India enhances the Christian ministry there, he also does not fear what appears to be happening.

"I believe that India is so open and so responsive that the Lord will do it (evangelize India) in a way that brings complete glory to him rather than to any human institution," he said. "I can certainly foresee what happened in China readily happening in India," he added, referring to the growth of the Christian church in China during the years most foreigners were barred from the country.

Religious extremists who have persecuted Christians and accused foreign missionaries of being troublemakers will be stunned as their countrymen continue to turn to Jesus Christ, even without foreign missionary influence, Rankin said.

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Baptist Students Respond
To Mission Opportunity

By Frank Wm. White

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NASHVILLE (BP)—Southern Baptist college students have responded to an international missions project in greater numbers than anticipated by student ministries leaders.

A total of 143 students representing 25 Baptist state conventions have been approved for a two-week missions encounter in Brazil in January 1988. Fourteen students will remain in Brazil as semester missionaries.

The project is the flagship for future involvement of students in volunteer foreign missions, said Harlan Spurgeon, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board vice president for human resources. It is a cooperative effort of the Foreign Mission Board, the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's national student ministries department and the Brazilian Baptist Home Mission Board.

State student ministry leaders in December 1986 endorsed a plan to send as many as 100 student volunteers on the project.

"Students historically will more than do their part when provided an opportunity," said Brad Gray, national student ministries consultant for missions and coordinator of the Brazil project.

Gray said the project, which will include two days of orientation in Miami before departure for Brazil Dec. 28, is a significant move to involve students on the foreign mission field.

"With this type of experience students will become more involved in short-term and long-term missions and later will be more likely to consider career missions because of their experience. This will broaden the scope of world citizenship as students return to their churches and Baptist Student Unions, Gray said.

Teams of five Southern Baptist students will join five-member teams of Brazilian Baptist college students for mission projects throughout the country.

While the project is designed to expose Southern Baptist students to foreign missions work, it also will help Brazilian Baptists see what can be done through student work and volunteer student mission projects, said Mattie Lou Bible, a Southern Baptist missionary to Brazil who works with the Brazilian Baptist National Youth Board in student work.

Brazilian Baptists also have selected 150 student volunteers to participate in the project.

Southern Baptist students approved for the project represent 25 state conventions including students from Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico.

Gray said 26 of the students are from North Carolina, 25 from Mississippi, 11 from Texas and 10 from Missouri. In Mississippi, 31 students applied for the 10 positions originally available to the state.

Students are responsible for raising the estimated \$1,650 cost of participating in the project. However, some state conventions are assisting in funding for some students, Gray said.

"This represents a significant commitment on the part of students and state student ministry directors," he said. "The attitude about the project is good. Based on the response of students, they are excited about it. That's going to make the project a success."

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A list of the number of students from each state is being mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the BSSB bureau of Baptist Press.

Romanian Baptists' Funerals
Are Witness Opportunities

By Art Toalston

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Funerals provide a prime witnessing opportunity for Romanian Christians, a Baptist pastor from the Eastern European country reports.

Constantine Dupu, pastor of three churches in northern Romania, says funerals are a key means of witness for Romanian Baptists because funerals are the only church services the government permits in homes and outdoors. All other services must be held in church buildings.

Dupu, who visited the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board May 19-20 and spoke during the trustees' meeting, is pastor of a 120-member Baptist church in Piatra Neamt, a city of about 200,000 people, and pastor of two other congregations outside the city. One of these has 150 members, the other 75.

When someone dies in Romania, the body is kept at home and typical funeral services span four days, Dupu explains. In Baptist funerals, one or more pastors and a church choir come to the home for services the first three nights. On the fourth day, a final home service is held, along with one at the cemetery. And there's a processional from the home to the cemetery.

The church members invite relatives, friends, co-workers and acquaintances. Hundreds often attend; sometimes, thousands, Dupu says. Once, he preached before about 2,000 people in a service for a deacon who had been an official at the local cement factory.

Each service may entail several sermons, each with an evangelistic emphasis, Dupu says.

"This is a big challenge for the pastor," as he often must prepare five new sermons. But it's "a big opportunity for the church ... to show who we are."

The Baptist Union of Romania encompasses about 1,000 churches with 200,000 members. There are only 200 ordained pastors and 200 deacons who handle some ministerial responsibilities. Dupu says 100 or more pastors could be put to work immediately.

Baptists in Romania are expanding by about 10 percent a year, 20 percent a year in some churches, "a phenomenon from above," Dupu says. He says many converts are 18 to 40 years of age whose spiritual needs have not been met by Romania's predominant Eastern Orthodox Church. Many are seeking meaning in life in the face of economic troubles the nation is experiencing.

On several fronts, Dupu says, Romanian Baptists face restrictions. The government allows the Baptist Union to publish one periodical. No others can be printed even by local churches.

The Baptist seminary at Bucharest is limited to 15 students. The government allowed an enrollment of 40 several years ago, but only 10 when Dupu graduated in 1974. And evangelicals are barred from attending some universities.

To renovate a building or build a new one, Dupu says "you need a lot of patience and waiting" at various levels of bureaucracy, each manned by officials not inclined to favor the church. Some pastors and congregations have moved ahead without permission, only to see their construction or renovation destroyed by the government. "Some of them, afterwards, got permission, and it was just twice the work," Dupu says, adding that their defiance also "takes a lot of money." Dupu led one of his churches in building a 200-seat auditorium in 1982.

And there is "psychological pressure" of various sorts. His wife, Violet, for example, is a university graduate in economics who has worked at a local factory for agricultural machinery for 10 years. But she is not the head of the business office and never will be "because she's a believer."

Pastors dissatisfied with life in Romania can easily get a way out of the country, and become heroes wherever they go, by preaching a few anti-government sermons, Dupu says.

But in 14 years of ministry and three years of teaching at the Bucharest seminary, Dupu says no one has ever told him "what kind of sermon I should have, (or) what subject to preach (on)."

Church Training Programs
Enhance Baptisms, Giving

By Terri Lackey

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (BP)—Southern Baptist pastors interested in increasing Sunday school enrollment, giving and baptisms in their churches may see results by trying an age-old solution — starting a church training program.

Recent research shows that churches with church training programs have a higher percentage of Sunday school membership, a greater baptism rate and give more dollars to convention causes than churches without church training, said Steve Williams, a growth consultant in the church training department at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Speaking to a group of state church training directors attending mid-year meetings in Williamsburg, Va., Williams said a church with a membership of 300 to 499 and a church training program enrolls about 71 percent of its members in Sunday school.

"A church of the same size without church training has only 57.5 percent enrolled in Sunday school," Williams said. This represents 23.5 percent more of their resident members enrolled.

Williams said he discovered the trend after requesting a routine statistical profile on churches that do not have church training. The information came from the 1986 Southern Baptist Uniform Church Letter statistics and was compiled by the Sunday School Board's research services department.

Meanwhile, Williams said, a church of 300-499 members which does have church training had an annual average of 2.7 baptisms per 100 resident members annually, while a church of the same size without church training had 2.1 baptisms per 100 members.

In other words, Williams said, churches of that size with church training programs have a 29 percent higher annual baptism rate per 100 than those without.

Likewise, a church of 300 to 499 members without church training gives 8.9 percent of its undesignated receipts to the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget. Those with church training give 10.1 percent of their dollars to Southern Baptist causes, which is a 13.5 percent higher rate than those without.

The research project studied eight size categories of churches ranging from under 100 members to more than 2,000, and in each category churches with church training came out ahead in Sunday school enrollment, baptisms and Cooperative Program giving.

Church training Director Roy Edgemon said he is pleased but not surprised "that churches with church training are moving ahead of those without church training. They have made discipleship a priority in planning," he said. "They are absolutely building stronger churches in every sense of the word."

Edgemon said when a church has a strong church training program, other programs grow and flourish. Through church training, people are trained in discipleship, Baptist heritage and polity and church leadership roles.

"Church training is foundational support for all other programs. You must build a church on knowledge; you can't build on shallow understanding," he said.

A church training program makes a unique contribution in addition to increasing Sunday school enrollment, baptisms and Cooperative Program giving, he added. He sees a strong discipleship program leading to the attainment of the Southern Baptist Bold Mission Thrust goal of sharing the gospel with every person in the world by the year 2000.

"Bold Mission Thrust will become a total impossibility unless people who are being saved and those who are already members in our churches are equipped in their faith. Evangelism is based on knowledge and understanding of the nature of God, and without a solid base, we are not going to share the wealth of faith," he said.

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Meanwhile, encouraging churches to start church training programs and training new members in basic Baptist beliefs remain as priorities of the church training department.

Williams said about 14,000 churches out of about 37,000 in the Southern Baptist Convention did not report church training in 1986.

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Seminary Administrator
Involved In Prison Ministry

By Breena Kent

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)—Clay Corvin is a seminary administrator who is not confined to the campus where he works. He also brings the gospel inside prison walls to minister to the heart of "Sin City."

He is vice president for business affairs at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and feels that in itself is a ministry. "God gave me the gift of finances and management," he said.

But God also has given him a gift of sharing Christ with prisoners one-on-one, as a volunteer who leads Bible studies in a parish prison in New Orleans one night a week.

"At times, it's very frustrating; at times rewarding," he said. "The problem is you have a lot of people that will get converted every week. ... But you never know how many are sincere."

In more than six years of prison ministry, Corvin has dealt with several different types of prisoners. One boy, jailed for cannibalism, attended a Bible study he was leading in the forensic unit of the Community Correctional Center.

"The boy was off on Pluto somewhere," said Corvin, "He asked, 'What about the passage that talks about drinking the blood of Christ?' What do you say to someone who's in for cannibalism and asks a question like that?"

Corvin said his partner shared the gospel with the prisoner, who continued attending the Bible studies, and by the fourth week accepted Christ. "It was obvious the boy was changed," said Corvin.

"I've had a lot of experiences where a guy will accept Christ and talk about how all of a sudden he has a peace in his life he has never felt before," he said. "The sad thing is we don't have contact with them but once a week. ... We talk with them, and maybe in one or two years they're sent to Angola (the state penitentiary) and we don't hear from them."

There are exceptions, however. One man, convicted for rape, was sent to Angola from the Correctional Center but still corresponds with Corvin.

Corvin said of his Bible studies, "I try primarily to talk about salvation and God's love, forgiveness, care and concern for mankind." He reads from evangelistic passages in the Bible, and his messages are "low-profile." After the Bible study, he and the people ministering with him will talk with the prisoners one-on-one.

Corvin is part of the Colson Prison Fellowship, a local care committee.

"We don't have as many things going on as other prison ministries," he said, mainly because there are not enough workers. "If we did more, we would need local churches to do it -- volunteers. The problem is, ministry is getting too professional." So many people want "to be paid for ministering, but ministry is service to one's fellow man, and it's really difficult to put a price on."

"There's a place for all of our students to be preaching and teaching. It's a shame that anyone should come to New Orleans seminary and not do preaching and teaching. We could find places for 30 to 40 more people to do Bible studies. There's tremendous opportunity."

Corvin, who has been ministering to prisoners in New Orleans for several years, said more important than how well someone preaches or teaches in any ministry is "the consistency of it. When you've done it for years, that's when you begin to make a difference. What you do impacts a person. It's a point of reference -- this is what Christians are.

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