



Baptists can offer help  
to Soviet Christians

By Kathy Palen

F-BK

WASHINGTON (BP)--Although no Baptist religious prisoners remain incarcerated in the Soviet Union, needs still exist among Baptists there, said a Southern Baptist who works on Soviet issues.

Baptists in the United States can help Soviet Baptists in several ways, said John Finnerty, a staff member of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, or Helsinki Commission.

Many Soviet Baptists want to stay in that country, Finnerty said. The biggest need among those Baptists is literature, including Bible commentaries and children's literature, as well as Bibles, he said.

Finnerty recalled a conversation he had with a pastor in the Soviet Union last November.

"The pastor told me that the greatest problem for Soviet Christians is no longer the KGB," Finnerty said. "He said the problem is that he and others are hesitant about their ability to teach others. They have lots of faith, but not much to study."

Finnerty also suggested visiting the Soviet Union and Baptists there as often as possible.

In addition, Christians in the United States should keep members of Congress aware of their interests in these issues, Finnerty said. "Doing so not only lets Christians in the Soviet Union know we care about them as brothers and sisters in Christ, but it also lets the Soviet government know we have an eye on this situation," he explained.

Other Soviet Baptists desire to emigrate, Finnerty said, adding that Baptists in the United States can take action on their behalf also. Baptists here first should learn about the law and its application and then should write their elected representatives, fighting the appropriate sections of the law, he said.

A third category of Soviet Baptists is comprised of people who already have left the Soviet Union. More than 3,400 Baptists and Pentecostals emigrated from the Soviet Union during 1988.

The sudden increase in Soviet immigrants has resulted in the placement of many of them in refugee camps in Vienna, Austria, and Rome, Italy, said G. Keith Parker, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board area director for Europe.

The FMB is considering ways to assist the refugees, Parker said. A major need is helping Soviet immigrants adjust to the shock of being in the Western world and develop realistic expectations about life there, he noted.

"Their needs are not just physiological, but psychological and spiritual," Parker said. "They need help learning about what to expect in the West, such as that along with freedom they will have the responsibility for their own needs."

FMB personnel in Europe are expected to consider plans for assisting Baptist refugees from the Soviet Union during the next year, Parker said.

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Miami churches minister  
to Nicaraguan refugees

By Mark Wingfield

F-HMB

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MIAMI (BP)--Southern Baptists in Miami have begun assisting hundreds of Nicaraguan refugees while bracing for thousands more expected to arrive in south Florida soon.

Currently, Nicaraguan refugees are arriving in Miami at a rate of 200 to 300 per week. Many arrive aboard buses which come in with full passenger loads and empty baggage compartments.

Federal officials estimate as many as 100,000 could arrive in the South Florida city this year. Up to 3,000 refugees are entering the U.S. through Texas each month, fleeing intense political and economic oppression in their homeland.

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Many of the Nicaraguan refugees choose Miami because of the large community of Latin American refugees already there. Nicaraguans seeking refuge in Miami join thousands of others still fleeing Cuba, Haiti and other Latin American countries each year.

The addition of thousands of Nicaraguan refugees into Miami's already volatile racial mix worries city officials who say Miami might not be able to accomodate more refugees.

As government agencies become overwhelmed with the chaotic situation, more refugees are turning to local churches for assistance, said Reinaldo Medina, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Estrella Belen in Hialeah, a predominantly Hispanic section of Miami.

"The situation is desperate, and it's going to get worse," he said.

Currently, about 25 Hispanic churches in Miami Baptist Association are dealing with refugees on a regular basis. The assistance they offer varies depending on available resources and lay involvement.

Mike Daily, associational director of church and community ministries, has begun coordinating the latest relief efforts among the churches. The association is preparing to open a refugee ministry center at one church if the situation worsens as expected.

In early February Medina and five other pastors were the first to benefit from special hunger relief funds channeled through Miami Baptist Association from the Florida Baptist Convention and Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Daily took the group shopping at a wholesale grocery store so they could provide essentials for refugees coming to their churches for help.

The pastors and some of their laymen pushed five-foot-long metal carts down the wide aisles of a warehouse market. They loaded the carts with 100-lb. bags of rice, cases of Corn Flakes cereal, 25 lb. boxes of Quaker Oats and other food staples.

By the time the pastors reached the checkout lane, perspiration dripped through their clothing as they pushed the carts stacked four feet high with food. Daily stood at the cashier's window for 10 minutes cashing \$2,500 in traveler's checks sent from the state convention.

Volunteers at the churches later divided the bulk foods into smaller portions for distribution to families in need.

At Medina's church, about 40 people showed up the following night to receive packages of food prepared especially for them. Large bags and boxes stuffed with food sat in metal folding chairs in a Sunday school room when the refugees arrived. Each bag was marked with a family's name and the number of people in the family.

Medina spoke to the assembled group before distributing the goods. He prayed and sang with them, handed out Spanish New Testaments and tracts, and attempted to assess the individual needs of each family.

"We have opened our arms and our hearts and are very glad to help you for free," he explained. "Regardless of what material needs you have, we want to help you."

Medina, a refugee himself, came to the U.S. in 1979 from Cuba. He was a Cuban pastor who had been held as a political prisoner for 13 years.

"I know what it is like to be starving to death, to not be able to see loved ones. I understand what it means to be away from the country you love," he explained in an interview. "That's why I feel led to help these people. I think Christians should try to minister to those in need."

Besides food, Medina's church offers clothing, furniture and assistance in finding jobs and housing. Layman Marko Rodriguez, who came to the U.S. from Cuba in 1964 in a row boat, directs the church's refugee assistance ministry. His assistant is Jose Gonzales, who arrived with his family in Miami last December from Nicaragua.

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Gonzales sa is story is similar to that of most of the new refugees. Gonzales, his wife and three children walked and hitchhiked from Nicaragua to the Texas border, traveling through Guatemala and Mexico. They arrived with only the tattered clothes on their backs, knowing no one and having no money.

Along the way, the 15-month-old Gonzales daughter almost drowned as the family crossed a muddy river. The parents lost sight of the girl for seven to eight minutes, he said.

Medina said U.S. doctors were amazed that the girl survived because she was so anemic from the trauma. With assistance from Medina's church the girl received medical attention and is now healthy.

The Gonzales family, like the thousands of other Nicaraguan refugees who have come to Miami since December, rode a commercial bus from Harlingen, Texas, to Miami. The latest influx of refugees to Miami began in earnest when a judge in Texas declared the refugees were free to leave Harlingen, where they waited for government processing.

A few Southern Baptist churches in the Harlingen area are assisting Nicaraguan refugees, according to Rosendo Lopez, associate director of missions for Rio Grande Baptist Association. Refugees pass through south Texas quickly, stopping only to register with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, he said.

Now the refugees are gathering in Miami. Despite their desperate plight in Miami, most refugees find life there an improvement over what they left behind, Gonzales said. He said Miami is "paradise" compared to Nicaragua.

Medina and Rodriguez helped Gonzales find a job at a meat processing plant and provided initial rent assistance. Although the family barely survives, they are able to support themselves and help other refugees through the church.

Unlike most refugees, the Gonzaleses were Christians before arriving in the U.S. The ministry of Miami's Southern Baptist churches has resulted in hundreds of professions of faith in Christ among those who had not heard the gospel in their native land, Daily said.

No exact number of conversions is available because of the diverse ministries and transient population. However, Medina's church alone has recorded 40 conversions since December. Other churches ministering to refugees report similar results.

"We not only feed them with material things, but with spiritual things as well," Rodriguez explained.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press

Ethnic presence increasing  
in Southern Baptist literature

By Frank Wm. White

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NASHVILLE--(BP) Use of art and photographs depicting ethnic people in Southern Baptist Sunday School Board periodicals has almost doubled in the past three years, but more progress needs to be made, according to the director of the board's black church and language work.

"Ethnics are not being addressed as well by any other denomination," said Bill Banks, director of the Sunday School Board's special ministries department. "Southern Baptists have a chance to be more inclusive and make an impact with the increasing ethnic population."

Ethnic groups make up more than 40 percent of the United States population and represent about 10 percent of Southern Baptist membership, Banks said.

"We are perceived to be at the forefront of mainline denominations when it comes to reaching out to language and ethnic groups," Banks told Sunday School Board program leaders.

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He cited a review of board periodicals that showed 9.6 percent of the pictures in the January-March 1989 quarter depicted ethnics. Of the 2,274 pictures in 158 periodicals, 216 included ethnics.

Photos included in the count are those with at least one person who obviously was Hispanic, Black, or Asian.

A similar analysis of the periodicals for the October-December 1986 quarter showed that only 141 of 2,599 illustrations included ethnics, for a 5.4 percent representation.

Banks said he would like to see a continuing gradual increase of ethnics in periodicals of about 2 percent per year for the next five years.

Not only is the percentage of pictures with ethnics increasing, but the quality is improving as well, he said.

According to criteria used to evaluate the pictures, none of those in the January-March 1989 quarter presented ethnics in a negative way, Banks said. In the October-December 1986 quarter, 19 pictures presented a negative image of ethnics, while 40 pictures were considered neutral rather than positive or negative.

A negative image would be a picture which presents ethnics in a potentially demeaning or belittling way such as poor, down-and-out and receiving services, rather than participating in a church activity, Banks explained.

Also, most of the pictures in the January-March 1989 quarter presented ethnics in church activities rather than in home or foreign missions settings. In the October-December 1986 quarter, only seven pictures were judged to be in that category, while the others were missions pictures, Banks said.

Ethnics now are being portrayed in pictures as leaders, caregivers and participants in church activities, Banks said.

He commended editors and artists at the board for working to find pictures involving ethnics in local church situations.

A special ministries design section was created in the church program services art department two years ago. Although the section's primary concern is the various language periodicals, it has an added benefit as a "source for helping other artists locate illustrations of ethnic persons," explained Doris Adams, section manager.

The section has developed a file of materials from Southern California, New Mexico, New York, Miami, Chicago and Atlanta depicting Blacks, Koreans, Hispanics, American Indians and Chinese in various church activities, Adams said.

Samples of the materials are routed to other publication artists to make them aware of what is available, she said.

Although illustrations with ethnic people were used in language periodicals beginning in the late 1970s, English language material use of illustrations depicting ethnic people was not emphasized until 1983, Banks said.

Still, periodicals occasionally may be "lily-white" for a quarter, but the overall situation has changed radically, Banks said.

"In five years, we should be right where we ought to be with inclusion of ethnics in materials," he said.

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

Exercise self-discipline  
prof tells seminarians

By Breena Kent Paine

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(NOBTS)

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"No athlete competes in the Olympics without submitting himself to rigorous training," Lucien E. Coleman Jr. told students at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. "And no disciple of Christ runs the race of life without self-discipline."

"To be a disciple is to submit oneself to discipline," said Coleman, a professor of adult education at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. "One who claims to be a disciple (of Jesus Christ) without accepting the necessity of discipline is like one who wants to be a Cajun who doesn't like pepper. ... Discipline is mandatory."

"The obscene spectacle of secret liaisons with prostitutes and church secretaries, of preachers inhabiting lavish penthouses, resort homes (with) gold-plated bathroom fixtures and other symbols of heathenistic buffoonery have little in common with a pauper from Nazareth who had no place to lay his head."

Coleman emphasized: "We cannot guarantee that those around us will live according to the Christian ethic. But we can, by the quality of our lives, make it certain that they know what the Christian ethic is."

The motivation for this disciplined life should come from within the Christian, he added. Otherwise, a Christian would "fall into the trap of legalism."

"The legalist obeys the rules because someone has written it down in a book; the Christian obeys the rules that are written on the tablet of his heart," he explained. The latter "finds joy in the very running of the race; for as he runs, he knows deep down in his soul that this is the life that is worth living."

A disciplined life is costly, however, for it involves self-denial, he said, noting that many people look at the hard demands of this kind of discipleship and decide they want to be "free."

"The truth is, only those who do submit themselves to this discipline are truly free. The athlete who lives loose and easy, doing what he wants to, and then collapses with exhaustion on the track is not a free man."

"Only the player who has paid the price on the practice field can play the game with freedom and abandon. And only the Christian who has paid the price in the prayer closet, in the arena of human relationships, and in the moral struggles within his own soul will stand free and unbound amidst the crises of life."