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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Alvin C. Shackelford, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Marv Knox, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 511 N. Akard, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 720-0550
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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Thousands respond
at Budapest crusade

By Mike Creswell

N-FMB

BUDAPEST, Hungary (BP)--More than 25,000 people walked forward in response to evangelist Billy Graham's invitation to receive Christ as savior July 29 at People's Stadium in Budapest, Hungary.

Much of the playing field was covered by the throngs who responded, leaving crusade officials scrambling for evangelistic materials to give them. A crowd estimated at 90,000 filled the stadium's 72,000 seats and the infield. Graham announced the gathering was the largest such event ever held in the stadium. The service was broadcast throughout Hungary and other parts of Eastern and Western Europe.

The one-night crusade capped the European Baptist Federation Congress held at nearby Sports Hall July 26-30, which attracted more than 5,200 Baptists from 42 countries, including many from Eastern Europe.

The record number surpassed attendance at the last congress by 125 percent. The gathering was the first such major meeting held by European Baptists in an Eastern bloc country. The congress meets every five years.

For Hungary's 12,000 Baptists, playing host to the congress was a mammoth undertaking. They prepared for more than a year, coordinated by Hungarian Baptist pastor Emil Kiss. Sermons at the congress were translated into multiple languages, and music was provided by a 1,000-voice choir and full orchestra.

But, observers said, perhaps the most significant event of the congress was a speech by Matayas Szuros, president of Hungary's national assembly and one of the nation's key leaders. Szuros called attention to the winds of change now blowing through much of Eastern Europe.

"It has been proven now that the Stalinist authoritarian system is now bankrupt, and in some countries political, economical and even moral crises have arisen and spread. There is a need for a new model for society to be worked out and created," Szuros said.

Baptists are contributing to making the "structure of a new society," he added. He praised the "values of the democratically controlled model in the Baptist churches."

In a century marked by "pain and humiliation," Szuros continued, "let there be shouting that Baptists are the spokesmen for Christian love and forgiveness for the benefit of nations and for peace of people and nations and for the tolerance between people and countries, for righteousness and the defense of human rights."

"Our common purpose is that based upon the necessity of helping each other," he said, because "the nations have to build bridges among those people who are separated for political or religious reasons. The Baptists are going ahead in a good example of this, going from spirit to spirit, because the message of salvation is for the total man, for his physical and spiritual heritage."

Referring to the congress theme, "Come See What God Has Done," Szuros also urged participants to note the social and political changes taking place in Hungary that guarantee religious and spiritual freedoms.

A new bill being presented in the national assembly, he said, will ban discrimination because of religious beliefs or confessions.

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Even while the Baptist congress was going on, the Hungarian Communist Party announced July 29 that it will no longer require party members to be atheists and will cease interfering in church affairs.

Szuros' speech was praised as "historic" for Hungary by Janos Viczian, president of the Baptist Union of Hungary. "Our political situation has changed," Viczian said. "We have a real reform situation in Hungary."

Viczian himself is a national assembly member because of his post as president of the Council of Free Churches in Hungary, an organization representing eight church groups, including Baptists, Methodists and others. Reform, Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches and Jewish groups have their own assembly representatives.

Szuros has urged Communist Party members to accept Christian people and "to live together," Viczian said. Szuros and several other government leaders have shown kindness and a desire to work with religious people, Viczian added.

Hungary has been a leader in reform among the socialist countries, and now at least some of them are looking to Hungary for more leadership, he said.

In another evidence of the new political conditions in Eastern Europe, more than 600 East German Baptists, as well as representatives from most other Eastern European countries, were permitted to attend the Congress. Only small groups came from some countries, however, because of restrictive currency laws, visa difficulties and other problems.

And reminders came that not all is well yet. The congress program, giving details on Baptist groups in Europe, stated of Albania, "In Albania it is forbidden to practice any religion."

Still, the Budapest meeting was a concrete expression of the new post-Cold War era in Europe, said Knud Wumpelmann during a press conference. Wumpelmann is completing a nine-year term this year as European Baptist Federation general secretary.

During the congress, several Baptist leaders met with Trautmann Rezzo, deputy prime minister of Hungary's Presidium, the government's central committee. In welcoming the Baptists, Rezzo said: "As you know, there is such a transforming process in our country which will affect almost all of our political, social, economic and cultural institutions, as well as our relationships with each other.

"It will naturally affect on the one hand the relationship between you and the state, on the other hand the relationship among the churches, and according to my opinion, this effect will be favorable in both directions."

Present for the meeting were Australian G. Noel Vose, president, and American Denton Lotz, general secretary, of the Baptist World Alliance; Peter Barber of Scotland, new European Baptist Federation president; and West German pastor Karl-Heinz Walter, newly elected general secretary of the federation.

Delegates touring Budapest, a city of 2.1 million people situated on the Danube River, found no bread lines. Instead, shops and department stores were filled with throngs of Hungarian and tourist shoppers taking advantage of Hungary's low prices. Record stores and designer clothing shops were doing brisk business. A McDonald's hamburger restaurant was filled with customers.

The congress ended July 30 with participants visiting Baptist churches throughout the city.

European Baptists plan
missions, evangelism

N-FMB

BUDAPEST, Hungary (BP)--A resolution calling for development of a strategy for missions and evangelism in Europe was approved by the European Baptist Federation meeting in Budapest, Hungary, July 26-30.

In adopting the resolution, the federation cited the theme adopted by the Baptist World Alliance: "Vision 2000: Jesus Christ for All People." The new initiative calls for resource sharing, cooperative missions between Baptist unions and training of fresh generations of leadership.

The federation also adopted a resolution supporting the abolition of the death penalty and called on federation unions and churches to support the movement to stop all executions.

A resolution on the future of Europe encouraged churches "to do all they can that barriers between the nations and peoples be removed, that peoples and nations may determine their own futures, that minorities may be respected, that strangers may be welcomed and that peace may be pursued."

The resolution acknowledged that injustice, hatred and divisions still are present in Europe, but welcomed the many social, political and economic attempts to create a "House of Europe" and contribute to a more just and peaceful world.

The federation also adopted resolutions calling for support of religious liberty and the rights of children. Delegates also called on churches and unions "to give opportunities for women to serve in leadership positions within the churches."

The federation's council approved a similar resolution two years ago. "Where would we be without the women in our Baptist work?" asked federation President Peter Barber, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Scotland.

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Hungarian Baptists
get TV coverage

N-FMB

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BUDAPEST, Hungary (BP)--Hungarian Baptists were on MTV -- Magyar (Hungarian) Television, that is.

Such high-profile coverage was new to the 12,000-member Hungarian Baptist union, but it came along with playing host to the European Baptist Federation Congress, held July 26-30 in Budapest.

Church musicians from all over Hungary brought their vocal and instrumental talents to Budapest. The event's congregational singing and choir were accompanied by an orchestra of 40 musicians. For six months, 720 Hungarian Baptists practiced the convention's music so they could be the core of the 1,000-voice choir for the meetings.

Participants were treated to brass band music at the beginning of each day and at intervals throughout the week. Strains of "When We All Get to Heaven" and "Power in the Blood" floated across the Budapest downtown area from open-air concerts held outside the sports hall where the congress met.

The new winds of change blowing through Hungarian life touched people at the meetings, particularly those coming from other socialist countries.

"People feel something is very new," said one Hungarian layman of the congress. The president of the Hungarian national assembly addressed the opening session and said complimentary things about Baptists. "This is unusual for the ears of (Eastern Europeans)," the layman observed.

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Southern Baptists too similar
to Pharisees, Lewis says

By Joe Westbury

N-HMB

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists are not reaching unchurched people because Southern Baptists are too similar to the Pharisees of Christ's day, the president of the denomination's Home Mission Board said.

Larry Lewis spoke to about 500 pastors and lay people during the board's annual national mass evangelism conference at Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville.

The denomination stands in judgment before God for its lack of true evangelistic zeal and concern for a dying world, Lewis said: "The Pharisees were our kind of people. They were big on stewardship, espoused high moral standards, believed the Scriptures and were faithful in worship. Isn't it strange that Jesus released his most biting rebuke on people who were so similar to ourselves?"

Just as Christ condemned the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, he also is calling Southern Baptists to repentance today, Lewis said: "Why are we not reaching America for Christ? It is because we are whited sepulchers on the outside but full of decaying bones on the inside. We will never know the souls that have been shut out of heaven due to inconsistent living."

Southern Baptists are guilty of false evangelism -- "at times so anxious to get 'joiners' that we do not spend time to be sure the conversion experience is valid", he continued: "When we draw people to the Lord, we need to be sure we are calling them to commitment and sacrifice rather than to membership in the church on the corner."

In addition, the denomination has grown indifferent to people in need outside the doors of the church, Lewis added, explaining that eloquent prayers and sermons never will replace ministry and evangelism.

The president of the Atlanta-based missions agency said it is "a tragedy how Southern Baptists, in many instances, have forfeited their greatest opportunity for ministry by turning over community ministry to government hirelings."

"If we reach our cities and towns for Christ we'll do it one way -- through ministry. Food distribution, job training programs, alcohol rehabilitation programs -- the church that is truly the living body of Christ will never run out of prospects if it is committed to ministry in its community," he said.

Such programs should not be ends in themselves but should be redemptive, resulting in conversion and discipleship, Lewis said: "If we ever do any eternal good, we must bring people to Christ. Because even as great as the physical needs may be, greater still is the spiritual need. There's nothing more important than getting people saved, and getting saved people getting other people saved."

Bob Hamblin of Tupelo, Miss., retired vice president of the board's evangelism section, told conference participants that leading people to faith in Christ is not an option for Christians: "Either you're a personal soul winner or you're out of fellowship with God. It's just that simple."

Hamblin joined Lewis in cautioning against churches being too anxious to boost their membership rolls through evangelistic gimmicks.

"You can grow a church by not winning people to Christ. In too many instances, we are compromising our convictions in order to get new members," he said.

"I've been in churches that do not require baptism or a walk down the aisle to accept Christ -- all you have to do is fill out a response card in the back of the pew and leave it in the offering plate.

"A harvest awaits, but we'll never reap it by questionable tactics."

In addition to a program of speakers from across the nation, the conference offered 10 eight-hour workshops in areas such as witnessing women, area crusade preparation, guiding older children to Christ, prayer and evangelism, and prospect discovery and cultivation.

Baptist wants AIDS debate
to include moral agenda

By Ken Camp

N-Texas

DALLAS (BP)--As the only ordained minister serving with the National Commission on AIDS, Scott Allen wants to make sure public policy debate on the pandemic includes a moral agenda.

"There is both a communal and individual dimension of moral responsibility," said Allen, research consultant with the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission in Dallas.

"Society should respond compassionately to persons infected and affected by the HIV virus. Individuals should live constructive, healthy lives and not place others at risk."

Allen was named to the National Commission on AIDS by former Speaker of the House Jim Wright. The 15-member commission is authorized to study and make recommendations concerning health-care finance, discrimination against HIV-positive people, intergovernmental and international AIDS activities, and AIDS prevention and education.

The commission will meet Aug. 3 in Washington.

"I believe the commission has the potential to be a useful tool in advising the president and Congress as to how we as a nation can respond in an effective manner to AIDS," Allen said.

"I hope we can examine and highlight the tremendous complexities of this pandemic and offer sound strategies to help alleviate the tragedy."

Specifically, Allen said he hopes to explore how the private sector -- particularly churches and other religious institutions -- can respond to the AIDS epidemic by providing scientifically sound health information and by offering direct care to people with AIDS.

"There is a need for religious communities to respond compassionately to the plight of persons that are HIV-infected or are participating in high risk behavior," he said.

"We need to work together as communities -- religious and non-religious -- to alleviate suffering through ministry to persons living with AIDS and to the families and friends of HIV-positive persons. We need to see this not as a disease that just affects others but as a disease among us that must be reckoned with.

"Churches need to educate folks as to how the disease is transmitted and how it is not transmitted. We need to teach a personal ethic of caring about oneself and others."

Allen was first director of the AIDS Interfaith Network in Dallas; a member of the Special Texas Legislative Task Force on AIDS; a member of the Dallas County Task Force on AIDS; and board member for AIDS ARMS, a program that deals with meeting the special human needs of people with AIDS.

Since joining the Texas CLC, Allen's specialized assignment has been research into the spiritual, ethical and psychological dimensions of AIDS. His work with the AIDS Interfaith Network has included organization and administration of support for HIV-positive groups, special groups for women with AIDS and family support groups.