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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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February 12, 1990

90-20

N-FMB

New school to boost
Iranian evangelism

By Mike Creswell

LONDON (BP)--A school opening in London in February with partial financing from Southern Baptists will train Iranian Christians to evangelize Iranians all over the world.

The Iranian Bible Training Center received \$25,000 from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. Further help is under consideration, said Dale Thorne, director of Southern Baptist work in the Middle East and North Africa.

Eight Iranian students -- six from Iran and two from England -- have been accepted into the first class. Four other students, including two from Turkey and one living in Denmark, are awaiting visas to enter England.

A two-year study program will give them a Bible-based education with special evangelism skills tailored to the needs and culture of Iranians. For every two months in class, students will spend a month ministering among Iranians outside Iran, said Samuel Yeghnazar, school director.

Plans call for the students to spend some out-of-class time in places such as Turkey or Pakistan, Yeghnazar said. After completing their studies, they will work in Iran or areas where Iranian refugees live, he said.

Teachers will include some Southern Baptist missionaries, seminary and Bible school professors from the United States, Europe and elsewhere, and other evangelicals experienced in Iranian or Middle Eastern culture. Some teachers will come from Iran. Most will teach three-week sessions at their own expense, living in school apartments alongside the students.

Classes will be held at the Iranian Christian Fellowship building in Chiswick, West London. The congregation meeting there, led by Yeghnazar, was organized in July 1986 and now includes about 100 mostly Iranian members, with many Muslim converts. About one-third of the members are British.

Yeghnazar, 45, a native of Iran, has an Armenian Christian background. His father was an evangelist in Iran. He recalled the night of Dec. 9, 1955, when his father woke him, three sisters, two brothers and their mother with a question, "If Jesus comes now are you ready to meet him?"

Admitting he was not ready, Yeghnazar "had a tremendous time of repenting before the Lord" and accepted Christ as his savior. Ten years later, he entered full-time Christian ministry. For 18 years he worked with United Bible Societies in England, Iran, the Philippines and Beirut, Lebanon, where he often cooperated with Southern Baptist missionaries.

He left the Bible society work three years ago to minister to Iranians after sensing that "we're living in a tremendously important time for Iran."

An estimated 3 million of Iran's 50 million citizens have fled that country since 1979, when the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his followers took over and established an Islamic state. Now those Iranians are scattered about the globe, Yeghnazar said, "and I've never seen Iranians so open to the gospel in all my life."

Evangelizing Muslims must be done carefully, he said, "but with Iranians you just share the gospel. They'll listen to you. Opportunities are so abounding."

In addition to his pastoral duties and starting the new school, Yeghnazar spends hours communicating by telephone and correspondence with Iranian Christians around the world. He often sends Bibles or Christian literature in Persian--or Farsi--, the principal language of Iran.

"Last month I received letters from Iranians in Korea, Bangladesh, Greece, the Dominican Republic and other countries," he said. "These are new believers. I never thought an Iranian would come to the Lord in Moscow, but I have sent Persian-language literature there. I also hear periodically from Iranian believers in Germany, Belgium, Holland, Austria, Spain, France, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Cyprus, Turkey, Pakistan, India, the prisons of Thailand and the Philippines, plus quite a few places in the United States, Canada, Australia and Latin America."

Yeghnazar estimated 300,000 Iranians live in Europe, many of whom have become Christians. The biggest concentration of Iranians outside Iran is in Turkey, numbering between 500,000 and 1.5 million.

Reaching these Iranians for Christ now is vital, Yeghnazar said, while they are open to the gospel and cut off from their native Iran. If conditions change in Iran, many will go back. He said he wants to see them go back as Christian believers ready to spread the gospel.

Despite the image of intolerance Iran has, "Iranian Christians (still have) much more liberty in Iran than in all Arab countries I know, both from the side of government and from the side of families," he said. "It may seem funny, but Iranians are very tolerant people. Islam has brought them intolerance."

After the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979, Christians from different backgrounds became closer, he said. "There's more working together and there's lots of warmth and brotherhood. They need each other. They have become more evangelistic. Evangelical churches are full and growing."

The biggest need is for trained Christian ministers, he said, noting a ratio of less than one minister for each 1 million Iranians.

Yeghnazar also plans to publish Christian literature in Persian and prepare radio programs in the seven major regional languages of Iran. Much less Christian literature is available in Persian than in Arabic, he said. "Today if 1,000 Iranians came to us and said, 'We believe in the Lord Jesus,' we would be in a dilemma on how to disciple them," he said.

Iran had "quite a place" in the Bible, Yeghnazar reminded Christians. Some Old Testament kings, such as Cyrus and Darius, were from Iran, and prophets such as Ezra, Daniel and Nehemiah served in the courts of Iranian kings.

Some words in the Bible, such as angel, paradise and Satan, have Persian origins, he said. Iranians, then called Parthians, also were present on the day of Pentecost described in Acts 2.

Yeghnazar's organization is called Elam Ministries. "Elam" is a biblical word for a province and a city in Iran, and comes from Jeremiah's prophecy that the fortunes of Elam, or Iran, will be restored. Yeghnazar is determined to be part of God's plan for restoring Iran.

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'Missionary kid' recovers,
amazes medical specialists

By Donald D. Martin

F-FMB

Baptist Press
2/12/90

PALMS, Mich. (BP)--Sarah Hessling's tennis shoes now squeak in the elementary school's waxed hallway as she hurries to her second-grade class.

Less than three months ago the only sound Sarah, 7-year-old daughter of Southern Baptist missionaries Warren and Sharon Hessling, made in the school hallway was an occasional metallic click as her wheelchair rounded a corner.

Her legs -- then limp and unable to feel the difference between a pinprick and a finger's touch -- were rendered useless by nerve damage in her spinal cord. For a time, even sitting up for 30 minutes took most of her strength.

But now, to the amazement of medical specialists, she has almost fully recovered from the nerve disorder. Doctors at Mott Childrens Hospital in Ann Arbor, Mich., gave her a clean bill of health after a day of testing Feb. 5. That clears the way -- pending final approval from doctors at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board -- for the Hesslings, of Deckerville, Mich., to return to work in the west African nation of Sierra Leone.

Sarah is recovering from schistosomiasis, an ailment caused by a parasitic flatworm that lodged against her spinal cord. She picked up the parasite last July in Sierra Leone, where the Hesslings had lived for more than two years. Her father works as an agricultural mission specialist.

The parasite, commonly called a blood fluke, lives in the blood vessels of humans and other mammals. The female parasite releases eggs into the blood stream. The eggs make their way into the intestine or bladder and are emitted from the body. In most cases when the parasite enters a human body, it causes a mild fever, some swelling and perhaps liver tenderness or inflammation. Early diagnosis and treatment are almost always successful.

In Sarah's case, however, the parasite did not pass through the body but made its way to the spinal column and lodged there. Pressure on the spinal nerves grew rapidly as her body attacked the parasite and began building a protective coating around the intruder. Like a malignant tumor, the growth inside her spinal column soon cut off feeling to the lower part of her body.

Even after surgeons removed the growth, Sarah's paralysis continued. Doctors working on her case said that because of extensive nerve damage, they were not sure how much feeling -- if any -- she would recover in her legs.

Doctors at both Mott Childrens Hospital and the Foreign Mission Board now say Sarah's recovery is next to miraculous.

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"There was a good deal of damage by this tumor pressing on the cord," said Joanna Goatcher, medical consultant to the Foreign Mission Board's missionary health department. "Usually nerves don't regenerate, or if they do, it takes a year or more. In this case it has been under a year. ... There was obviously not as much nerve damage as first believed, but the miraculous part to me is that it regenerated at all, and in less time than one would expect."

Although Sarah's recovery has been swift, it hasn't been easy. Sarah had to learn how to walk again. During weeks of physical therapy in the hospital and later at home, she relearned each muscle movement in her legs. If she learned the wrong way, she could have developed a severe limp for the rest of her life, Mrs. Hessling said.

All along the way, small hurdles loomed before Sarah. Some challenges made a simple day at school seem like boot camp as she progressed, one painful step at a time.

"She would sometimes cry at night, 'I can't do that tomorrow, Mamma,'" explained Mrs. Hessling. "But as she made each step and saw she could do it, she made progress. It was hard for both of us. It was hard for me because I would have to push her. I knew she was physically ready, but I didn't want to push her too hard. I knew it was an emotional step."

A major step came when Sarah stopped using a wheelchair at school.

"One morning I said, 'Let's not take the wheelchair down the hall today; let's take the walker.' That was real traumatic. It took a few days to talk her into taking the walker. The wheelchair had become something of a security blanket for her. But she was encouraged by her teacher and the principal, and she gave up the wheelchair."

Sarah adjusted to the walker quickly. The strength and control in her legs grew as she put more demands on them. She still used the wheelchair at recess, but even that was soon replaced by the walker.

However, convincing Sarah to give up the walker took a mother's touch and a small dose of vanity. Mrs. Hessling saw what Sarah could do at home and knew the child no longer needed the walker at school.

"What happened next was interesting," she said. "Sarah couldn't ride the school bus because her walker wouldn't safely fit anywhere on the bus, so we rented a walker that would fold up. But the folding walker wasn't as 'cute' as the one she had. Sarah complained that it was ugly. I told her: 'We already traded in the other one. I guess you'll just have to go without it.' And she did."

That step came in October, and although minor ups and downs have followed, Sarah continues to make steady -- and according to doctors -- remarkable progress.

Foreign Mission Board doctors and administrators said they plan to approve the family's return to Sierra Leone if written reports from Mott Hospital are as good as oral reports they already have received. The family of four, including the Hesslings' son, Michael, 9, could be on back in Sierra Leone by the end of March.

Sarah still will have special exercises for her legs each day. She also will have annual X-rays of her spine until she is grown.

"We're definitely excited to be going back to our home in Africa," Mrs. Hessling said. "There are a lot of people we need to thank for their prayers. We could not have gone through this without people praying for us."

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The Hesslings already are planning what to pack and arranging flights. They have a lot of work to do now that the waiting is almost over, she said.

But it will get done -- one step at a time.

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

Czech church reclaims
confiscated movie

N-FMB

Baptist Press
2/12/90

PRAGUE, Czechoslovakia (BP)--Vysoke Myto Baptist Church has gotten its Billy Graham-produced film back -- after 21 years.

The Prague, Czechoslovakia, church was showing a Czech-language version of "The Restless Ones" one night in 1969 after Warsaw Pact tanks had rolled into the city to crush the nation's 1968 "Prague Spring" reforms.

Communist authorities suddenly entered the church, confiscated the film and threatened to revoke the preaching license of the pastor, Richard Novak, now president of the Baptist Union of Czechoslovakia.

On Jan. 8 of this year, Jan Pospisil, general secretary of the Baptist union, decided to exercise "our new freedoms," he told European Baptist Press Service. "I called the (government) Ministry of Culture and told them we wanted the film returned." Authorities promised they would search for it.

Nine days later, a worker at the Ministry of Culture called Pospisil to report workers had found the film, produced by the movie-making arm of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

"Hurry up and get it," the worker advised. "We don't know what might happen to it now." Pospisil went to the ministry's office, where a clerk handed him the movie and said: "Please excuse us. I am glad to return your film."

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Lolley resigns Raleigh
to take Greensboro post

N-CO

Baptist Press
2/12/90

RALEIGH, N.C. (BP)--W. Randall Lolley has resigned the pastorate of First Baptist Church of Raleigh, N.C., to become pastor of First Baptist Church of Greensboro, N.C.

Lolley was president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., near Raleigh for 14 years.

He announced his resignation from Southeastern in the fall of 1987, shortly after the seminary trustees' new conservative majority changed the way the school picked professors. He said at the time that he could not continue as president under the new procedures.

Lolley's resignation at Southeastern was effective March 31, 1988, and he presided over spring commencement exercises at the seminary two months later. He became pastor of the Raleigh church the following July.

Lolley read a letter of resignation to First Baptist of Raleigh during the Sunday morning worship service Feb. 11. He will assume the Greensboro pastorate later this spring, perhaps as early as Easter, April 15, the Raleigh News and Observer reported.

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In announcing his resignation, Lolley told the Raleigh congregation that he is moving because he and his wife need more distance from Southeastern Seminary and because of their ties to First Baptist of Greensboro.

He cited a lingering "total sense of pain" over the seminary. That pain has been intensified and lengthened because of the close proximity of the seminary's Wake Forest campus and his Raleigh church, he noted.

"Lou (his wife) and I have learned a tough lesson about the connection between proximity and pain," he said in his resignation letter. "Raleigh, with all its beauty and excitement, is still very near the people and the places of our common weeping. We choose to put this passage behind us, and it is our conviction that distance will help."

Lolley was associate pastor of First Baptist of Greensboro in the late 1950s, immediately after completing two degrees at Southeastern Seminary. Afterward, he continued his education at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, where he was associate pastor of Broadway Baptist Church. He was pastor of First Baptist Church of Winston-Salem, N.C., from 1962 until he became president of the seminary in 1974.

In Greensboro, he will succeed Alton H. McEachern, who took a leave of absence in September 1987 and resigned in March 1988.

The Greensboro church has 3,400 members; the Raleigh congregation has 1,375.

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Contributing to this story was R.G. Puckett, editor of the Biblical Recorder, the North Carolina Baptist weekly newsjournal.

CORRECTIONS: Please change the last sentence of the second paragraph of the 2/8/90 Baptist Press story titled "Nine of 10 areas gain in 1989 SBC statistics" to read:

The Southern Baptist church year runs from Oct. 1 through the following Sept. 30.

Also, the 2/9/90 Baptist Press story titled "Conservative candidate now Chapman, not Wolfe" should include a credit line at the end that reads:

Also contributing to this story was Greg Warner, associate editor of the Florida Baptist Witness.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

Gift launches renovation
of Arkansas Baptist camp

N-10

Baptist Press
2/12/90

SILOAM SPRINGS, Ark. (BP)--A gift from the Harvey and Bernice Jones Foundation of Springdale, Ark., has launched a drive to improve facilities at Arkansas Baptist Assembly in Siloam Springs.

The Jones Foundation's \$1,125,000 gift is half the renovation campaign's \$2.25 million goal, said assembly Director Freddie Pike.

Plans for the 70-year-old camp in northwestern Arkansas include a new worship center, renovation of 54 dormitories and 42 family units, expansion of the business office and bookstore, new staff housing, a new classroom building and improvement of the retreat center.

The new 1,100-seat worship center is to be named in honor of the Joneses, Pike said.