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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #7E
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2311
Alvin C. Shackelford, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Mary Knox, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367
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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

April 16, 1990

President invited
to speak at SBC

By Greg Warner

N- (10)
(F12)

90-53

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--President George Bush has been invited to speak at the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans June 12-14.

Although the White House has not yet responded to the invitation, the offer likely will be accepted since Bush reportedly initiated the idea.

Dwight "Ike" Reighard, chairman of the SBC Committee on Order of Business, which plans the program for the annual convention, confirmed that his committee issued the invitation after a Bush aide notified the committee of the president's desire to speak to Southern Baptists.

"To tell you the truth, we're not assured of anything at this stage," Reighard, pastor of New Hope Church in Fayetteville, Ga., told the Florida Baptist Witness April 12. "We've not received back confirmation ... (but) they have expressed an interest in being there."

"We need to know something within next two weeks," Reighard added.

The White House does not comment on such invitations until they are accepted, but a spokesman for the president told the Witness April 11 that any plans for the June convention would have to be put in motion "within a couple of weeks."

Reighard said word of the president's desire to speak to Southern Baptists came from Doug Wead, the president's liaison for religious affairs. Both Reighard and SBC president Jerry Vines "were made aware there was a possibility," the Georgia pastor said.

Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla. is a member of the Committee on Order of Business by virtue of his office. The seven-member committee voted unanimously to issue the invitation, Reighard explained. Wead could not be reached for comment.

Bush probably would speak Thursday afternoon, during the closing session of the three-day meeting. The committee, which knew of the Bush possibility while drafting the program, scheduled no major speakers during that session. "It would be much better if it works out for Thursday," Reighard said.

The Bush appearance, Reighard said, "would keep a lot of messengers there" on Thursday, which traditionally has the lowest attendance of the three-day convention.

The last U.S. president to speak at the Southern Baptist Convention was Gerald Ford, who addressed messengers in Norfolk, Va. in 1976.

The last time the SBC met in New Orleans, in 1982, then-Vice President Bush addressed the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference, where he endorsed the Religious Right for "the constructive contributions it can make to strengthen the United States as one nation under God."

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If Bush accepts the invitation to speak this year, he will address Southern Baptists in the same arena -- the Louisiana Superdome -- in which he spoke in 1982. The president reportedly has been asked to speak on either abortion or the environment. But Reighard said that issue is unsettled. "There's been no discussion about topic," he said.

Reighard predicted, however, that Bush would not make any statements that would embroil himself in the denomination's theological/political controversy. "I cannot imagine him getting involved in that in any way or fashion," he said, "and I certainly hope not."

Southern Baptists can expect security to be at a peak for the president's visit, Reighard said. However, that shouldn't present a problem, he added, since White House officials are familiar with the Superdome where Bush was nominated by Republicans in 1988.

Reighard said a speech by the president would be "a tremendous opportunity" for Southern Baptists. "We are the largest Protestant denomination, and it would be exciting to have our president there to address us," he said.

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Donald Whitehouse,
SSB communicator, dies

N-SSB
Baptist Press
4/16/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--Donald S. Whitehouse, senior coordinator of communications projects and processes in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's office of communications, died April 14 in Nashville of complications following surgery.

Whitehouse, 56, moved to Nashville from Louisville, Ky., in 1969 to become an editor in the Sunday School Board's church training department. Later he was supervisor of the staff services section in church training and supervisor of communications services in the board's office of communications.

He was a retired colonel in the U.S. Air Force Reserves.

Whitehouse was an accredited member of the Public Relations Society of America, a past president of the Nashville chapter of PRSA and a delegate of PRSA's national assembly.

He also was a past president of the Nashville chapter of the Religious Public Relations Council and had served, on the national level of the organization, as secretary and a member of the board of governors. He was a member of Baptist Public Relations Association.

A native of Chaplin, Ky., Whitehouse graduated from the University of Kentucky in Lexington, Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

He is survived by his wife and four children.

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

Patterson to retire
at Georgetown

N-CO
(KY)
Baptist Press
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GEORGETOWN, Ky. (BP)--W. Morgan Patterson will retire as president of Georgetown (Ky.) College Jan 31, 1991. He will turn 65 this October.

Patterson, who became Georgetown's president April 1, 1984, said he would like to return to other forms of ministry, including teaching.

Prior to coming to Georgetown, Patterson was dean of academic affairs at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., from 1976 to 1984. He also was director of graduate studies in the School of Theology and the David T. Porter professor of church history at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. Previously, he was assistant professor of church history at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

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He was pastor of churches in Alabama and Mississippi. He also was interim pastor of churches in California, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana and Mississippi.

He is a graduate of Stetson University in DeLand, Fla., and New Orleans Seminary. In addition, he has done two years of post-doctoral study at Oxford University in England.

A veteran of World War II, Patterson is married to the former Ernestine North of Longwood, Fla. They have two sons, W. Morgan II and Jay North. Both live in California.

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Romanian church keeps going
after destruction by police

By Michael Creswell

F- FMB

Baptist Press
4/16/90

COMANESTI, Romania (BP)--A flimsy plywood Baptist church sits forlornly on an otherwise vacant lot in the mining town of Comanesti, Romania -- a visible reminder of the rule of deposed communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.

Flurries of snow mix with ice and rain on a cold Thursday night. But more than 100 members pack the temporary structure, lit by two naked bulbs hanging from the ceiling. Members greet visitors warmly but warily with the standard greeting: "Pace!" Peace.

None owns a car. All have walked to get to the Bible study and prayer meeting. Men sit on the left of the sanctuary, women on the right. A layman leads in study.

Last spring the 120-member congregation worshiped several times, not in the plywood structure, but in a new building that had taken nine years to complete. Members proudly show visitors well-thumbed snapshots of the building -- the real church building -- on which they worked so hard. It stood near the point where the temporary sanctuary now stands.

But more than 100 uniformed policemen descended on the new building last May 31 with several bulldozers and other heavy equipment and demolished it. They arrested eight of the church's leaders, including Pastor Ionel Chivoiu.

Some were detained for a few hours until the church was demolished. Some, including the pastor, were detained three days. Several were beaten, according to Gheorghe Iacobuta, a lay leader and one of those arrested. Four men were sentenced to one year to three years at hard labor on government farms. The church had to provide for their families.

Young people of the church, thinking they could stop the destruction, went to the site that May morning as word spread. They also were jailed briefly, said member Cornel Fedor, 22, who took a camera to document the destruction. When police approached, he threw it into some bushes as he ran. Fedor, who was arrested and held for several hours, did not retrieve the camera for several days, afraid police would spot him.

A police agent told Mihai Fedor, Cornel's father, who also was arrested briefly, that Ceausescu's government "had decided to exterminate the Baptists." Authorities said they bulldozed the building because members had used illegal building materials.

Chivoiu vowed the church did nothing wrong, even by Ceausescu's "warped standards," and bought all building materials legally, some from the state and some from "private sources."

Church members bought about \$125 worth of gravel from truck drivers, he said. The drivers obtained the gravel legally from a riverbed. But church leaders received no official documents approving the purchase. That gave authorities a "hook" to use against them, Chivoiu claimed.

"The secret police were just looking for something," he said. Chivoiu holds down multiple pastorates, as do many Romanian Baptist pastors. He leads two churches in Bacau, the largest city in the region, the church in Comanesti and two mission congregations. The secret police considered him the "most dangerous man in the district," he said.

He was accused of having sophisticated radio transmitters and was said to be spying for America. "It was just because I had visited the United States," Chivoiu said with a laugh.

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Christians in the United States did send him money for materials to construct the church at Comanesti, he admitted, although church members did all of the work themselves.

When word came late last December that a revolution had begun in Romania to overthrow Ceausescu, Chivoiu announced the news from the balcony of his apartment building in Bacau and led a group of Baptist young people in prayers of thanksgiving.

Today, a small police checkpoint building stands abandoned along the main road leading into the town, its windows smashed gleefully by vengeful residents during the December revolution.

The nightmare for the Comanesti congregation is over -- almost. The church still does not have its permanent building. When Chivoiu looks at the unpainted little meetinghouse, he still is moved and angered. He glances at the building, then at the vacant lot and looks away quickly.

Local, post-revolution authorities have given approval to rebuild the church building and may even lend the church money for construction. But Chivoiu estimated replacement will cost \$70,000. Even by Romanian standards, the Comanesti members are poor; \$70,000 might as well be millions.

But for now he is more concerned about the needs of congregation -- a congregation still faithful enough to walk through rain and snow to fill a plywood meetinghouse on a cold Thursday night.

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Single woman's life changed by
sponsoring Romanian refugees

By Susan Todd

F - (O)
(WMM)

Baptist Press
4/16/90

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP)--Alberta Gilpin never expected to have a family to call her own. But today the single woman has a live-in family of two children and two grandchildren.

Since spring 1986, Gilpin has sponsored Tudor and Maria Rafa, a refugee couple from Resita, Romania. The Rafas' 10-year-old son, Calin, and 9-year-old daughter, Ramona, joined them in July 1987.

"They have given to me a family I never thought about having," Gilpin said. "It had never bothered me that I was single and didn't have a family. It just never came up. But it has made a difference that when I came home, someone noticed. It has been good."

Gilpin's story was featured in an NBC television special titled "Easter 1990" on Easter Sunday.

Gilpin, executive director of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union in Missouri, had two good experiences sponsoring refugees before the Rafas. The employees of the Missouri Baptist Convention had sponsored a Vietnamese family 10 years ago. Then, almost eight years ago, Gilpin's church sponsored another Vietnamese individual.

"Both of those were pleasant experiences," she said. "They made me feel really good about helping refugees resettle."

When Gilpin built a second home, she built it a little bit larger than the first.

Then she began to wonder what she had that would be useful in helping others. "It was like God asking Moses, 'What's that in your hand?' I realized I had my house," she said.

Although Gilpin travels quite a bit training women in Southern Baptist churches to be involved in mission study, action and support projects, she knew that if someone lived with her in her own house, she would have to take the time to get involved.

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Gilpin contacted the immigration and refugee service of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta, in January 1986. Within a month, she had read case studies and had chosen to sponsor the Rafas.

"I chose them because in their case study it said they had left behind a 6-year-old boy and a 5-year-old girl," she explained. "I couldn't imagine what kind of sacrifice it would take to leave children. I wanted to do what I could to help them get the children here."

One April Monday morning, Gilpin received the call that the Rafas would arrive on Friday night. "It finally registered with me on that Monday that I didn't speak Romanian and they didn't speak English. I panicked," she recalled.

Gilpin said she should have known she had no reason to worry, noting, "God was going to take care of it."

"I remember thinking they looked so young," Gilpin said as she described her first thoughts after meeting the Rafas. "They kept looking at me with great anxiety and yet with gratefulness. I could tell they were very eager to communicate with me."

The first days were a struggle. They soon learned that trying to communicate through language barriers is very tiring. And other struggles abounded.

"Responsibility was the overwhelming feeling I had," Gilpin said. "I became keenly aware that everything I did would be a testimony (of Christian faith) -- positive or negative."

One of the first outings the three took together was to the local grocery store. The Rafas were amazed that there was so much food, and that there would be just as much the next day, too, she said.

"We provided a lot of entertainment in the grocery store in those early days," she said. Since many of the cuts of meat didn't look familiar to the Rafas, Gilpin had to resort to pointing to packages of meats and imitating the noises made by that animal. "I was relieved animals talked the same way in Romania as here," she said with a laugh.

But the frustrations don't overshadow the joys for Gilpin or for the Rafas.

"None of it has been all that frustrating," she said. "Each thing, although it had an element of frustration, had a challenge to it. You draw on all the resources you have."

Most frustrating of all was the slow process of getting the children out of Romania and into the United States. The two countries had a trade agreement at the time that stipulated a condition for trade -- the United States agreed to trade as long as Romania agreed to cooperate in efforts to reunite families.

After 14 months, the two children were reunited with their parents, and they met the woman who had helped bring that about.

The commitment to help a refugee family has cost Gilpin time, energy and resources.

"It has been more of a financial commitment than I ever dreamed," she said. Each time Gilpin got back on her feet financially, someone else was arriving -- first the children, then Mrs. Rafa's brother came and lived with them a few months, then Rafa's cousin came for a while, and finally, Mrs. Rafa's uncle arrived.

But Gilpin has no complaints.

"I'm always looking to know them better," she said. "I look at them and try to get to know them better because I think they are fine people. They've been through a lot, and they've been short-changed. They've come up on the short end of the stick, and I want to help change that if possible."

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Change has been possible because of Gilpin. The two families lived together in the beginning because Gilpin had a large house and wanted to share it with someone who needed the help. Today, each family could afford to live on its own, but each is choosing to live together a little longer.

"We're still together because we've made a commitment to recover financially and buy land," she said.

Each Sunday afternoon the five of them check the local newspapers for ads of land for sale. Then they all pile into a car and check it out. They still are looking for just the right plot for their two houses, which will be built next door to each other.

No longer are the Rafas dependent upon Gilpin for their day-to-day needs. They both have good-paying jobs and are fluent in English. But they have become family to each other.

"I've moved from caretaker to more of friend," Gilpin said. "I'm baby-sitter. I'm grandmother to the children. I'm mother to Maria and Tudor. I'm teacher. I'm confidante.

"We don't have many secrets from each other."

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Itinerant music evangelist
sees lifestyle as a calling

By Charles Willis

7 JDS

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4/16/90

SPARTANBURG, S.C. (BP)--"Our family is just like yours," Alan Celoria insists. "The only difference is that we move every week."

A full-time music evangelist and recently published composer, Celoria travels all year with his wife, Jan, and five children in a ministry he describes as "a family calling."

While two travel trailers parked side-by-side on church parking lots have constituted home on wheels for several years, Celoria did not set out to be a roving evangelistic singer. In fact, his education and early career days were traditional.

A native Floridian, he earned the bachelor of church music degree at Stetson University in DeLand, Fla., followed by studies at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg.

After a courtship in Hattiesburg, the Celorias were married and spent eight years in which he worked as a minister of music for Temple Baptist Church in Hattiesburg; First Baptist Church of Roswell, N.M.; and First Baptist Church of Winter Park, Fla.

But in August 1979, he resigned his church job to enter music evangelism. He moved his family to Jackson, Miss., to be near Mrs. Celoria's mother and an airport.

"I had nothing on my calendar. Zero," he recalled on a recent Sunday afternoon in his living room on the parking lot of First Baptist Church of Spartanburg, S.C. "But that fall I had enough meetings to provide for our needs, and thereafter my ministry continued to grow and grow."

By 1984, leaving his family at home while he sang for revivals and state evangelism conferences became more difficult. He and his wife had talked of the family traveling together "some day," but family needs helped set a specific date.

"I came home one day and found our oldest son, Jon, crying in the yard," Mrs. Celoria recalled. "He said, 'When will Daddy be home?' I told him, 'In about a week.' And Jon said, 'But I need him now!'"

Believing "ministry is not a priority above family," Celoria said the family pared down their possessions, left their home in 1985, and began living on the road year-round as "The Celoria Family Singers."

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Today, Jon, 16; Matt and Mark, 14; Beth, 10; and Kathy, 8, sing with their parents in a different church almost every week, Sunday through Wednesday or Thursday. Friday is the day they travel to the next church, and Saturday is a day off. On Sunday afternoons and during the days, Monday through Thursday, the children follow videotaped home schooling programs for their respective grade levels.

Celoria believes the quality of their singing has improved in the five years since their first appearance in a church.

"It was so bad," he laughed. "But to see a family together in a time of broken homes is a ministry before we even open our mouths.

"Preachers used to ask, 'Why are you bringing your family?' Now they say, 'Don't come unless you bring your family.'"

Celoria writes much of the music he and his family sing, and in May the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's Genevox Music Group will release a choir book, "Classic Gospel," by Celoria.

David Danner, who arranged and produced the music for Genevox, described Celoria's works as "singable, melodic songs that speak to the hearts of people." The words, he said, are "timely for evangelistic services."

Fes Robertson, manager of Genevox Music Group agreed: "Alan communicates quickly with simple, straightforward songs. His music builds on our long-standing commitment to music that can be used effectively in reaching souls for the Lord."

Celoria said his song writing is inspirational to the point that "sometimes I feel I'm writing the words directly from God."

Songs from the revival collection will be sung by a 700-voice choir in New Orleans during the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists, of which Celoria is music director.

"My whole approach to music is to use quality and gospel," Celoria said. "That's why I call it classic gospel."

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BP photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SSB bureau of Baptist Press

Vocational ministers told:
'seek bread that satisfied'

By Brenda J. Sanders

N- CO
(MWBTS) Baptist Press
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KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Vocational ministers must "seek the bread that satisfied every spiritual hunger and thirst," Doyle Smith advised students at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary during a chapel service.

Referring to the text from the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John, Smith said ministers often interpret the passage -- in which Jesus describes the "bread of life" -- as an evangelistic message.

Smith, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Great Bend, Kan., and chairman of Midwestern trustees' instruction committee, said he believes the passage also describes a need in the life of the vocational Christian minister.

"There is always a temptation to spend your life searching for a bread that does not satisfy," he pointed out.

"How does a pastor or staff worker do that? By looking in terms of your ministry at the things that the world thinks ought to satisfy, but never really do."

Sometimes, vocational ministers strive for financial security or worldly success, thinking those things will bring fulfillment to their lives, Smith noted.

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"Many of us spend our lives searching for 'physical food' that makes us look good in the eyes of other people but does not satisfy the call of God in our souls," he said. "God has given each of us a call and gifts that can only be satisfied when we are in the place where God wants us. To lose sight of that is to live your whole life in vocational ministry full, but hungry."

In addition, ministers may believe that time spent in sermon preparation, visitation and evangelism efforts will satisfy their spiritual hunger. But, Smith said: "There are those who work religiously as hard as they can and still find themselves empty."

"It's not the works you do that bring fullness of life, but one thing the Father wants from you, and that is a relationship of trust and dependence upon the Son."

God gives each minister specific gifts, Smith pointed out. Some are gifted in starting new churches; others are gifted in bivocational ministry.

The world may not term such efforts "successful," but he noted: "If you live your whole life being a success in the eyes of everyone but you and God, you will live your ministry in emptiness and end your ministry in frustration."

"There is a bread for the vocational Christian worker that fills and satisfies and completes. It is the finding of God's call in the ministry to which he's given us that fulfills the gifts and desires he's planted within us."