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SBC president, agency heads
urge support of Cooperative Program By Jim Newton

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BWA

SEOUL, Korea (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention President Morris Chapman and the top executives of five SBC agencies issued a statement supporting the denomination's Cooperative Program unified budget system and opposing "any deviation from this proven practice of cooperation."

The SBC leaders warned that such deviation "will most assuredly create confusion among our Southern Baptist family, complicate the receipt and distribution of funds, and weaken our witness for our Lord Jesus Christ around the world."

Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church in Wichita Falls, Texas, and the agency heads are attending the Baptist World Alliance meeting in Seoul.

Signers included Harold C. Bennett, president of the SBC Executive Committee, Nashville; Keith Parks, president of the Foreign Mission Board; Larry Lewis, president of the Home Mission Board; James Smith, president of the Brotherhood Commission, and Dellanna O'Brien, executive director of Woman's Missionary Union, SBC; and Chapman.

Their statement came just one week before an informal group of "moderate" Southern Baptists were scheduled to meet in Atlanta to discuss alternate mechanisms for SBC churches to channel their missions giving cooperatively.

About 2,000 are expected to attend the Atlanta meeting at the Inforum, a convention center in downtown Atlanta, according to Ouita Bottorff, executive director for Baptists Committed to the Southern Baptist Convention, who is handling arrangements for the meeting.

The statement issued by Chapman and the SBC agency heads made no reference to the Atlanta meeting, but strongly urged increased support of the Cooperative Program. The statement reads:

"During these days of worship and fellowship with Baptists from nations around the world, we have been given cause again to reflect on the urgency to spread the gospel throughout every land.

"While we recognize the autonomy of the local church, we fully affirm the Cooperative Program as the principal means by which Southern Baptists successfully support missions, evangelism, Christian education and other ministries within our convention.

"Deviation from this proven practice of Cooperation will most assuredly create confusion among our Southern Baptist family, complicate the receipt and distribution of funds, and weaken our witness for our Lord Jesus Christ around the world.

"We ask all Southern Baptist churches to maintain their commitment to world missions through the Cooperative Program and when possible, to increase Cooperative Program giving."

East European Baptists join
world Baptists in South Korea

By Mike Creswell

N:CO
AWA

SEOUL, South Korea (BP)--Baptists in Eastern Europe, swapping repression for freedom, came to take their place with other Baptists from around the globe meeting in Seoul for the 16th Baptist World Congress Aug. 14-19.

Baptists from Bulgaria, Romania, Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia attended the congress. It was the first time in decades Baptists from some of the countries have been free to attend such a gathering.

More than 150 Soviets came to the congress, reportedly the largest Soviet Baptist group ever to attend a religious meeting outside the Soviet Union. They were welcomed warmly, even receiving a police escort from the airport. In press conferences and dialogue sessions with other congress delegates, Baptist leaders from Eastern Europe talked of their joy over new freedoms as well as frustration, in some cases, about lacking even simple gospel tracts to share with fellow countrymen interested in Christianity.

"We have lived through special times and big pressure on our churches. We have seen we have a mighty Lord who can help us in all circumstances," said Theodor Angelov of Sofia, Bulgaria. Baptists in Bulgaria number about 1,000, with 15 congregations, he said.

It was the first Baptist World Alliance meeting for Angelov, and the first time in 44 years Bulgarian Baptists have been allowed to attend. Now that they are free to tell people in public places about Christ, Bulgarian Baptists' biggest need is to evangelize their nation, Angelov said. Their second need is church buildings, some of which were seized or destroyed in earlier times.

Angelov was moved by being with so many fellow Baptists. "This is the first Baptist World Alliance Congress we Bulgarians could visit and see with our own eyes," he said.

"We have to tell our people about all we have seen -- about the spirit, the singing, the fellowship, about the prayer, about the Korean church, of course. About the Korean food, too!" he added with a broad smile.

Konstanty Wiazowski, president of the Polish Baptist Union, said, "Censorship has been removed and we can do social work outside the church, work among children. Before, we had to register and ask permission."

While they are free to print church materials, Polish Baptists still have problems doing so because paper is so expensive in the country's shaky economy, Wiazowski said.

Zelimir Srnec, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Yugoslavia, said he plans to tell Baptists back home about the unity he saw at the congress. Yugoslavia, he explained, has more than 30 different nationalities threatening to split into separate countries. Baptists are being tempted to do the same.

"There is a great spiritual hunger" in the Soviet Union, said Soviet Baptist leader Gregori Komandant. "People take up any tract, any spiritual brochure," but Soviet Baptists do not have enough printed literature or enough Baptists trained in theology or as pastors, he said.

Bulgarian Baptists face the same situation, said Angelov. "We need to go out on the street and evangelize, but we haven't enough Bibles and books to give out. Trained people, too -- that's a big need."

The Eastern European delegates also reported some positive developments in their countries: Srnec said Yugoslavian Baptists have made progress with their two printing houses, producing Bibles and other Christian literature not available from any other publisher in the country.

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Polish Baptists are building a new seminary and office complex outside Warsaw, said Wiazowski. Romanian Baptists have had a successful training program called "School of the Prophets," which has led to more than 20 young men being ordained as pastors, reported Nicolae Gheorghita, senior minister of Second Baptist Church in the Romanian city of Oradea.

All the representatives said it is now possible for foreign missionaries to work in their countries, and all welcomed help from Baptists in other lands. Gheorghita said Romanian Baptists would like to talk with Korean Baptists about setting up a radio broadcast ministry in Romania. But he also warned against outside church groups bringing divisiveness that might polarize Romanian Baptists.

Requests for help with evangelistic efforts in Eastern Europe are coinciding with a new emphasis within the Baptist World Alliance, said Denton Lotz, BWA general secretary. The world's Baptists must stand by to continue aid for several Eastern European countries where shortages still exist, urged Karl-Heinz Walter, general secretary of the European Baptist Federation.

Southern Baptists, through the Foreign Mission Board, have made about \$3.25 million available to assist in Bible distribution, evangelism-related programs and literature, hunger relief and capital projects in Eastern Europe.

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Southern Baptist chaplains provide
ministry presence in Middle East

By Sarah Zimmerman

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N-NMB

ATLANTA (BP)--As the world focuses on the Middle East, Southern Baptist chaplains are working behind the scenes to provide a ministry in the Persian Gulf countries.

At least 15 Southern Baptists are apparently among chaplains sent to the Middle East after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, although that number cannot be officially confirmed.

Bob Vickers, chaplain at Georgia's Fort McPherson, said he knows of chaplains sent with crews on ships carrying weapons to the gulf. "What an opportunity for ministry," he said, as he considered the environment on board ship during the nearly two-week voyage.

Chaplains routinely are sent with troops on deployment missions. Lew Burnett, director of military chaplaincy for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, noted that chaplains were sent with troops into Panama, Grenada and Honduras.

Stateside, chaplains are helping soldiers fight internal battles.

A leader at Fort Bragg, N.C., who taught troops how to combat chemical warfare confessed his fears to Southern Baptist Chaplain Donald G. Wilson. As soldiers left for the Middle East, the man wondered if he had taught them well, if they would remember how to put on their gas masks correctly or when to wear the protective clothing.

Wilson assured him that if he had done his best, it was all he could do.

Another man remembered as he was getting on a plane bound for Saudi Arabia that his power of attorney needs to be renewed in September. Wilson wrote down the soldier's wife's name and phone number and promised to take care of it.

Other family matters are of primary concern for the soldiers, Wilson said. It will be the first separation for some couples. Spouses wonder how they will take care of the children alone.

Wilson said every unit at Fort Bragg has a family support group where soldiers' spouses can find consolation from each other.

Communication is another key concern. "Nothing takes priority over mail, not even food," Wilson said. He added that a system has been established for soldiers in the Middle East to send and receive mail.

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Once chaplains are established in the Middle East, Burnett said Southern Baptists can assist them by sending Christian literature to use with the troops. In the meantime, prayer is the greatest means of support for the chaplains and the military personnel they seek to help, he said.

Among soldiers waiting for orders, the big issue is morale, said Wilson, who has been a military chaplain for 21 years. "They're in holding patterns with time on their hands. They have a lot to deal with mentally."

Wilson understands their uncertainty. None of the soldiers in the Middle East knows how long their assignment will be. Soldiers here do not know which units will be sent next. Wilson said for all he knows, he may be assigned to the Middle East.

"The enemy may be something other than the publicized enemy," Vickers said, suggesting boredom and fear as potential foes. "Chaplains do behind-the-scenes ministries to boost their courage and hope."

Issues that surface repeatedly as Wilson listens to troops are death, fear of the unknown and family separation. In each conversation, Wilson looks for an opportunity to make God known to the soldiers. He said he's learned if he addresses the issue people bring up, in time he will be able to discuss spiritual needs they possibly have not considered.

From his experience as a chaplain during the Vietnam conflict, Wilson knows chaplains "can find good in the midst of horror." He recalled 12 people who committed their lives to the ministry in the one year he was in Vietnam, and noted that "sometimes a little bit of heaven comes along."

Military chaplains who are endorsed by their religious group are employed by the armed forces and can be transferred as needed. The Home Mission Board endorses about 1,100 military chaplains.

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Well-known church recreator
(sort of) begins retirement

By Terri Lackey

F-SSB

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NASHVILLE (BP)--Finding someone in Southern Baptist church recreation circles who has not heard the name Frank Hart "Pogo" Smith would be a task of long duration.

Unlike many legendary characters who travel to the top because of flashy outspokenness, Pogo has made it with charity and kindness.

"Frank Hart is so very, very person centered," said Bob Boyd, director of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church recreation department from 1962-71 and who first interviewed Smith for a job at the board in 1962. "The first word that comes to my mind when I think of Pogo is caregiver. He loves people; he shows it; and they respond.

Smith retired Aug. 1 as program design and marketing specialist for the church recreation department. He "reluctantly" joined the board as a leadership consultant in the department in July 1962 and has since held "pretty much" every available position in the department.

Twenty-eight years ago, Smith was working with college students and youth at Seventh and James Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, when he was discovered by the church recreation department. Until then, his life had been neatly laid out.

He was working on a doctorate in English at Baylor; he had a wife, Wini, and a two-and-a-half year old daughter. His wife's parents lived in Texas, and "my church really liked me," Smith said.

Smith was discovered when, upon the recommendation of a friend, he led a seminar for the church recreation department. Because he was so well liked, he was asked to return -- again and again. After a while, he was issued an invitation to join the church recreation staff.

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"Except for the fact that my wife and I thought it was the Lord's will, we couldn't think of a single reason to come," Smith said. "But we came down. Bob (Boyd, then assistant director) talked to us, and we prayed about it and talked about it. When we decided to accept, Bob told us not to tell anybody because apparently the position hadn't been approved."

Smith said he remained mum even though he was itching to tell many of the friends he ran into at the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in San Francisco that summer.

Then, one day at the convention, he walked up on Agnes (Granny) Pylant (then director of the department) talking to a group of people. "When she saw me she said, 'Hey everybody, here comes my newest grandson. He's coming to work with us.' Well, I just about died."

Smith, who has been editor of Church Recreation magazine and several department-produced books, said he has seen quite a few changes during three decades -- changes not only in church recreation products and events but in the general mindset of churches toward the field of recreation.

"When I came to the board, there was one magazine (Church Recreation) and one study course book. Now we have more than 100 products."

Smith said he also has witnessed the ministry of church recreation become more accepted as a support organization and outreach tool of the church.

"A lot of people used to think it was just for young people, but now it is viewed as being for everybody. It goes far beyond sports and socials. Church recreation offers drama and crafts and retreats and camping," Smith explained.

Because Smith believes so avidly in the ministry of church recreation, he said he plans to continue working two days a week in the department. His wife, a recently retired school teacher, also is working in the department three days a week.

Unlike most retired persons who look forward to sleeping late, Smith will not be afforded that luxury. Due to failed kidneys about six years ago, Smith is required to undergo dialysis three days a week.

"I chose early mornings on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to go through dialysis so I could have my afternoons free on those days, and then I will work on Tuesdays and Thursdays," Smith said.

Smith views his as a priority-setting tool. "I don't take anything for granted. Every experience is precious," Smith said in an earlier interview about dialysis.

"Twenty-five to thirty years ago, we didn't have dialysis machines. If this had happened to me then I wouldn't be here," he shrugged.

A member of Nashville's Woodmont Baptist Church, Smith plans to spend many weekends leading church retreats "for families, church staff, all kinds of people. That's what I really like to do."

During football season, Smith will spend more of his time serving the Vanderbilt University football team as chaplain. An avid devotee of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Smith was voted in as team "chaplain a couple of years ago because of his giving Christian spirit and love of athletes.

"It's not that he loves sports so much," Boyd said of Smith. "He just loves young people, and he loves athletes. He probably couldn't tell you which team won the Southeastern conference, for example, but he could name every man on a specific team, and probably give you their mothers' names."