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August 27, 1990

90-113

NOTE TO EDITORS: This is an updated and final version of the story filed Friday, Aug. 24.

Moderates approve  
alternate funding

By Mark Wingfield

ATLANTA (BP)--A new mechanism for funding Baptist missions work was overwhelmingly approved by nearly 3,000 "moderate" Southern Baptists attending a Consultation of Concerned Baptists in Atlanta Aug. 24.

The funding alternative has been chartered as Baptist Cooperative Missions Program Inc., and will become active Oct. 1.

Moments after the vote, Benjamin Owen of Madison Avenue Baptist Church in Covington, Ky., presented a \$75 check as the first contribution to the fund. The money was given to missions by children in Vacation Bible School at the Kentucky church.

Consultation organizers claimed the new funding mechanism does not create a new denomination, although several consultation participants said they believe it could be the first step toward a new convention. (See related story.)

Those attending the meeting claim they have been cut off by the "conservative resurgence" that has changed the makeup of the denomination's boards and agencies over the past 12 years.

David Sapp, pastor of First Baptist Church in Chamblee, Ga., called the dilemma of moderates "taxation without representation.

"This is the first time in Baptist history that any group of folks has been systematically excluded," he said.

John Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church in Asheville, N.C., said the new funding alternative gives moderates "the gift of solidarity" and will allow churches to give a "profound, public dissenting witness" to current SBC leadership.

Details of how the new plan will operate are sketchy. For now, the Baptist Cooperative Missions Program will receive only designated funds from individuals, churches and state conventions. Funds may be designated to existing SBC agencies and institutions, as well as to non-SBC entities.

A 60-member steering committee was elected Aug. 25 to develop a more detailed plan and distribution formula, which is to be presented to a spring convocation of moderate Baptists.

"All we're doing between now and next spring is creating a bucket. The details of a plan are not here and will not be until next spring," said Sapp, who was coordinator of 40 workgroups discussing alternative funding.

Sapp presented a four-point proposal to the assembly, which was approved by a show of hands. Across the main auditorium and an overflow hall, less than a dozen hands were raised in opposition.

The proposal was drafted by Sapp and 40 group leaders and recorders who had taken input from the larger body.

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The motion calls for (1) "establishing an alternative funding plan for national causes Baptists believe in"; (2) long-term procedures to be developed by the steering committee; (3) the plan to "take into account input of this meeting"; (4) implementation of a plan identified as "Baptist Cooperative Missions Program" as a "makeshift" plan until a more detailed plan can be drafted.

Some participants suggested the plan be named Bold Mission Trust, a word play on Southern Baptists' Bold Mission Thrust emphasis to present the gospel to every person on earth by the year 2000.

According to documents distributed at the meeting, the Baptist Cooperative Missions Program was chartered as a non-profit corporation in the state of Georgia Aug. 1. Duke K. McCall, former president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is listed as the incorporator.

The corporation has a board of directors that is separate from the steering committee elected by the fellowship.

Additional directors listed in the document are: Darold H. Morgan, former president of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board; Lavonn Brown, pastor of First Baptist Church in Norman, Okla.; John Baugh, president of Sysco Corp. in Houston and member of Second Baptist Church; Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, former executive director of Woman's Missionary Union; Grady Cothen, former president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board; Harold Cole, former executive director of the South Carolina Baptist Convention; Randall Lolley, former president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and current pastor of First Baptist Church of Greensboro, N.C.; John McCall, an attorney from Louisville, Ky.; Drew Gunnells, pastor of Spring Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala.; Raymond Boswell, an insurance executive and member of First Baptist Church in Shreveport, La.; Bill Poe, an attorney from Charlotte, N.C.; Gene Triggs, president of Mississippi Chemical Corp., Yazoo City, Miss.

In discussion, participants said they approved of that group but wanted to expand it to include women, ethnics and younger people.

Immediately prior to the vote, Cothen announced that the board of directors had met and agreed to add seven additional directors for that purpose. Three of those seven names were announced: Frances Prince, associate commissioner of education for the state of Tennessee; Esther McCall, a layperson from Birchwood Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo.; and Brooke Wicker, a banking executive from Hendricks Avenue Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla.

Cothen said the expansion also will include another woman, one male layperson and two ethnics, all to be named later.

Cothen explained that this board of directors does not intend to be permanent, but will serve to get the organization established. According to Georgia law, initial directors must serve at least one year, he said.

If not for that requirement, "all of us in the good ol' boy network wanted to resign this morning," he said.

The day before, Bill Sherman, pastor of Woodmont Baptist Church in Nashville, responded to questions about expanding the board. He said the initial directors are individuals who would have immediate name-recognition with members of his congregation.

While he would want the board to reflect a broader diversity, having the "good ol' boys" as initial directors is almost essential to get churches to buy into the plan, Sherman said.

Several participants asked what would be accomplished by sending money to existing SBC agencies whose boards are controlled by conservative appointees. However, no provision was made to demand proportionate representation on those boards.

Speaking again before the vote, Sherman said, "A lot of our people are slow learners. This is a first step, but in the minds of many of our people it is a seismic step. We can go no further than the people who give the money allow us to go."

Throughout the three-day meeting, the event's organizers disclaimed any intent to form a new denomination in a split from the SBC. However, those individuals spoke cautiously, and would not rule out the possibility that this funding mechanism could be the first step toward a new convention.

The alternative funding mechanism would allow Baptist people to "express their conscience" and "give us some time to see what God might do," said Daniel Vestal, twice-defeated candidate for SBC president and chairman of the new fellowship's steering committee.

In a press conference after the vote on alternative funding, the meeting's organizers said they do not know how much money will be channeled into the new organization.

"Every congregation will handle this at their own speed," said Jimmy Allen, chairman of Baptists Committed and former president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission.

The goal is to re-establish trust, Allen and others said.

Despite looking for "new and innovative" forms of missions support, the group continually expressed concern not to leave current missionaries dangling.

"I have talked to no Baptist who wants this conduit to take money away from missionaries in the field, home or foreign," Sherman said. "They're not responsible for this mess."

The day before, Vestal had said, "Our intent is not to hurt the missions cause. We're not going to abandon the missionaries."

When asked if the new group would send their own missionaries, Allen answered: "We'll have to see. If they (conservative-controlled agencies) keep turning down gospel-loving, God-called people, somebody will have to send them."

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(Bill Bangham also contributed to this story)

Southern Baptist moderates  
organize new 'fellowship'

By Jim Newton

Baptist Press  
8/27/90

ATLANTA (BP)--Moderate Southern Baptists organized a new fellowship Aug. 25 but stopped short of forming a new convention.

During the closing session of a three-day Consultation of Concerned Baptists, more than 3,000 participants elected a 60-member interim steering committee to propose future meetings, plans, programs and budgets for the unnamed fellowship.

The interim steering committee was authorized to receive and distribute funds through the Baptist Cooperative Missions Program Inc. The non-profit corporation will provide an alternative funding mechanism through which moderate SBC churches can give to causes they support. (See related story.)

The interim steering committee, chaired by Daniel Vestal of Atlanta, was given seven assignments, including developing plans for a convocation this spring "for further planning and action of this body."

Date and place of the spring convocation will be determined by the interim steering committee.

Participants rejected a motion by David Hopper of Norman, Okla., urging the steering committee to consider holding the spring meeting in Augusta, Ga., where the Southern Baptist Convention was organized in 1845.

Rudy Zachery of Maui, Hawaii, opposed the motion, urging the fellowship to forget about political symbolism and meet in a central location that would be more economical.

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Organizers of the three-day consultation denied they were taking the first steps to organize a new convention that might split away from the SBC.

Instead they used terms like "fellowship," "renewal movement," and "body" to describe the new organization.

Vestal, pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta and an unsuccessful candidate for SBC president in 1989 and 1990, urged participants at both the beginning and end of the consultation to focus on renewal, not on creating new organizations or institutions.

Vestal acknowledged that other renewal movements, such as the Protestant Reformation and Wesleyan renewal movement, created new denominations.

"But let's go back from this meeting and talk not so much about new institutions, but about renewal, ... about the gospel," Vestal said.

In an opening news conference, Vestal declared, "Our purpose is not to birth a new denomination or new organization, but to bring about renewal."

Baptists Committed Chairman Jimmy Allen, who chaired the meeting, said the fellowship does not have an official name, and that the convocation's planners have avoided adopting a name that implies organization of a new convention.

During the final session, Page Fulgham of Lawrenceville, Ga., suggested the name "Cooperative Baptist Fellowship" but withdrew his motion after Allen urged participants to simply refer to it as "the fellowship."

Even though this is not a convention, the fellowship eventually could send out its own missionaries, Allen said.

"If the mission boards keep turning down people for missionary appointment, then the fellowship may have to decide that," Allen said. "We'll just have to wait and see."

He observed that both home and foreign mission boards have rejected appointment of "a lot of people who have been called" but who may be divorced or who are not acceptable theologically to conservative trustees.

The new Baptist Cooperative Missions Program gives Baptists an alternative way to express their conscience, Vestal said. "It will only be a matter of time until the character of SBC institutions will change so drastically that many Baptists will no longer be able to support them in good conscience."

Vestal said this movement is to foster and recreate trust among Baptists who have come to distrust the denomination.

"The Cooperative Program is built on trust," Vestal said. "We are trying to promote more cooperative giving, not less. It just may not be through the same channels as in the past."

In addition to disbursing money received through the Cooperative Missions Program, the interim steering committee was asked:

- To develop a mission statement and operating documents for consideration in the spring;
- To take any further interim actions necessary to function;
- To promote understanding, harmony and community among Baptists who want to become part of the fellowship;
- And to develop future strategies based on input from workshops and interest groups which met during the session.

The initial 60-member steering committee was authorized to fill vacancies in its membership and to add up to 10 additional members, keeping in mind the criteria developed by a 27-member nominating committee chaired by Dick Maples of Bryan, Texas. The interim steering committee will recommend a permanent steering committee for election next spring.

Elected to the interim steering committee were representatives from 23 states, plus seven at-large members who had been involved in organizing and planning the fellowship. The committee includes 34 ordained people (including four ordained women), 26 laypeople, 39 men and 21 women. The committee includes three blacks, one Chinese and one Hispanic.

The interim steering committee includes members who have been active in the Southern Baptist Alliance, Baptists Committed to the Southern Baptist Convention and Women in Ministry.

Vestal said each of these organizations will meet in the future to decide their relationships with the fellowship.

"I think there is a broad base of Baptist people who want to cooperate for the cause of Christ," Vestal said. "That cooperation cuts across a lot of different lines, across a lot of labels."

Vestal pointed out that the interim steering committee is a completely different group than the board of directors of the Baptist Cooperative Missions Program. Duke McCall, retired president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., was listed as incorporator of the BCMP board of directors, which was constituted with 17 directors.

Throughout the three-day meeting, several speakers called for an emphasis on Baptist ideals such as priesthood of all believers, the autonomy of local churches, separation of church and state, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and quality theological education.

In the final session, participants voted against adopting any resolutions, including one which would have urged a formal name for the fellowship and utilization of "SBC Today" as the official publication of the fellowship.

In the closing session, Bill Sherman of Nashville introduced a motion asking participants to commend Al Shackelford and Dan Martin, director and news editor of Baptist Press who were fired July 17. Sherman, pastor of Woodmont Baptist Church, praised the two for their commitment to justice, truth, openness, honesty and integrity.

A special interest group on alternative information systems adopted a resolution expressing support for Associated Baptist Press, a proposed alternative news service to be established by an independent board of directors in Nashville.

A group discussing theological education expressed a desire to protect faculty members at SBC seminaries but urged developing alternatives immediately.

"If we think there is not going to be a wholesale bloodbath at Southern (Baptist Theological) Seminary, we've got our heads in the sand," one participant warned. "It's time for this group to take action."

Glenn Hinson, a professor at Southern Seminary, told the group he was warned not to say anything at the meeting because of possible retaliation from trustees. "This is one of those times for us to think big and take a big step," Hinson said.

Commenting on a proposal to move the seminary faculty to the vacant campus of Tift University in Forsyth, Ga., Hinson observed that "a few years ago this would have been an insane idea. But now is the time to think the unthinkable."

In a workshop on legal issues, several attorneys pointed out there is little chance of a successful lawsuit by moderates who might seek control of the \$3.3 billion in assets of the SBC.

The group was divided between those who foresee a split within the SBC resulting in a new convention and those who want to remain within the existing SBC.

Participants in a group on church literature discussed the possibility of developing their own Bible study materials as conservatives tighten control of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

"We're a couple of years from seeing the full force of the fundamentalist movement," one woman said.

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Mark Wingfield, Sarah Zimmermann and Bill Bangham also contributed to this story. (BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press

Moderate Fellowship elects  
60 to steering committee

Baptist Press  
8/27/90

ATLANTA (BP)--Moderate Southern Baptists attending a national consultation elected 60 members to an interim steering committee assigned to plan a national convocation next spring when a permanent steering committee would be elected.

Daniel Vestal, pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta, was elected chairman of the interim steering committee. Vestal had sought the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention for the two previous years, but had been defeated.

The steering committee of the organization, which has no official name other than "the fellowship," will be comprised of up to 70 members when elected next spring. The interim committee will have authority to fill vacancies and enlist 10 additional members, using criteria developed by a nominating committee.

Seven "at-large" members were selected to serve on the interim committee because of their involvement in planning the consultation in Atlanta Aug. 23-25. They are:

Winfred Moore of Amarillo, Texas, now a visiting professor at Baylor University, Waco, Texas; Jimmy Allen of Fort Worth, Texas, chairman of Baptists Committed and former president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, Fort Worth; Stan Hastey, executive director of the Southern Baptist Alliance, Washington; Carolyn Cole Bucy, of Waco, Texas, president of Women in Ministry; Cecil Sherman, pastor of Broadway Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas; Richard Groves, pastor of Wake Forest Baptist Church, Wake Forest, N.C.; and Vestal.

Fifty-three members were elected to represent 23 states. They are:

ARKANSAS: John McClanahan and Billie Sharp; ALABAMA: Dotson Nelson and Steve Tondera; CALIFORNIA: Cherry Chang and E.W. McCall; DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA: Joe Hairston, Jeanette Holt, and Diane Williams; FLORIDA: James Graves and Dan Yeary;

GEORGIA: Nancy Ammerman, Wink Hicks, and Walter Shurdan; HAWAII: Rudy Zachery; ILLINOIS: Bill Trautman; KENTUCKY: Ken Chafin, Reba Cobb, and Gabe Payne; LOUISIANA: Relma Hargus and Jon Stubblefield; MARYLAND/DELAWARE: Frank Heintz and John Roberts;

MICHIGAN: Dot Sample; MISSISSIPPI: Mary Jane Nethery, Tom Sims and Joe Tuten; MISSOURI: John Hughes and Joy Steincross; NEW MEXICO: Charles Price; NEW YORK: Jamie Munro and Virginia Neely;

NORTH CAROLINA: Peggy Haymes, John Hewett, and Anne Neil; OKLAHOMA: Stephen Earle and Bill Owen; PENNSYLVANIA/SOUTH JERSEY: Dwight Moody; SOUTH CAROLINA: John Cothran, David Hull and Barbara McClain; TENNESSEE: Calvin Metcalf, Anne Nolan and Bill Sherman;

TEXAS: Patsy Ayres, Jim Lacy, George May, Margarita Trevino, and Charles Wade; and VIRGINIA: Ray Allen, Paula Clayton Dempsey, Ray Spence and Jean Woodward.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: This replaces the story sent Friday titled: Broken Baptists seek healing in Atlanta meeting

Broken Baptists find  
renewal in Atlanta meeting

By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptists who described themselves as broken and banished said they found renewal during the Consultation of Concerned Baptists in Atlanta.

More than 3,000 Baptists, at least half of them laypeople, attended the Aug. 23-25 meeting organized by Baptists Committed to the Southern Baptist Convention. The meeting was called at the request of Daniel Vestal, pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta and twice-defeated candidate for president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"After New Orleans (site of the June SBC meeting), the word I would use to describe many of us is, 'broken.' We were not only defeated in an election, we were crushed in spirit," Vestal said during the opening session.

"I have heard that the key to revival is brokenness. Well, if there ever was a group of people who have experienced brokenness, it is us.

"We're here seeking renewal for ourselves, for Southern Baptist people and for the body of Christ. "We're here to help, not hurt; to heal, not wound; to unify, not divide; to focus on the future, not the past."

In the meeting's closing session, Vestal said, "I believe God is granting us that renewal; in love, in faith, in fellowship, in hope and in mission ministry. If we are serious about that, the Spirit of God himself will guide us in whatever steps we take together."

Other speakers echoed Vestal's sentiments of brokenness.

Jo Ellen Witt, student at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., said that after this year's SBC annual meeting, "I experienced a period of depression and hopelessness. I felt banished from my family."

Lavonn Brown, pastor of First Baptist Church of Norman, Okla., said, "I've been happily identified with the Southern Baptist Convention for 25 years -- 25 years out of 35 isn't all that bad."

Harold Branch, pastor of St. Stephens Baptist Church in San Antonio, Texas, said as a black Southern Baptist he typically feels like a "speck in a sea of white" at Southern Baptist meetings even though there are 1,500 black churches in the SBC.

"This is the first time I've felt at home," Branch said. "All of us are outside looking in."

Yet participants questioned their motives for being at the meeting. "Is our motive to punish, is it vindictive?" several asked during a dialogue session.

In a press conference, Vestal said the meeting was not called to "fight the fundamentalists with our budget. It is to get on with the kingdom in a positive way."

Carolyn Cole Bucy, president of Women in Ministry and youth minister at Lakeshore Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, said her dream is that there "will come a day when acceptance of diversity will be the hallmark of Baptists."

She said any group that is formed as a result of the Atlanta meeting should be balanced with members' age, gender, race, vocation and diversity of opinion.

Dan Yeary, pastor of University Baptist Church in Coral Gables, Fla., urged participants to "take some redemptive action regarding our dysfunctional family" and to renew the spirit of Christ's compassion.

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Yeary said he is weary of moderates saying they have been banned from the SBC. "Let's bury the rhetoric of exile and give ourselves to a greater purpose."

Herbert Reynolds, president of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, challenged the group to "move forward on all fronts but keep a strong rear-guard action to protect our state conventions." He lamented that the amount of time Southern Baptists have "wasted in battle with inerrancy" is the same time that Paul spent evangelizing the known world of his day.

Reynolds further said the group needs to "rid ourselves of motives of personal gain and power, which are the motives that have destroyed the Southern Baptist Convention in order to meet the unhealthy personality needs of a group of Baptist bishops."

Randall Lolley, former president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., noted that Jesus' life was marked by controversy and confrontation. Lolley said Jesus handled confrontation by listening to his "hardliner" adversaries, countering them with a fresh vision of the kingdom of God and calling them exactly as he saw them.

Lolley, now pastor of First Baptist Church of Greensboro, N.C., said, "The New Testament does not give us permission to be angry at the hardheartedness of religious hardliners; it gives us a mandate to do so."

George Mason, pastor of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, likened the Southern Baptist Convention to his attempts to turn an energetic Labrador retriever into a house pet.

"Any time the church domesticates the Spirit of God in ministerial authority or in creedalism or in liturgy -- high church or low -- or even in denominationalism, that church will decline and give birth to new and creative movements it tried to suppress.

"We find ourselves this night breathing deeply and freshly of the Spirit. The Spirit, we think, is being unleashed after 12 years of captivity," Mason said. "But unless we allow the contours of Pentecost to shape us, to move us out in mission, we will quickly seek security in old, confining ways.

"The primal challenge is whether or not we in the local church will cooperate with that wild and restless Spirit of God within us."

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Baptist couple, other Americans  
said to be well in Kuwait embassy

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
8/27/90

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The U.S. Embassy in Kuwait has water and "sufficient supplies" to care for an undisclosed number of Americans who have taken refuge there, according to the State Department.

Southern Baptist workers Maurice and Laurie Graham and their 13- and 10-year-old sons remain among other U.S. citizens who took refuge in the embassy after Iraq invaded Kuwait Aug. 2.

The State Department spokesman confirmed news reports that Iraqi forces cut off water and electricity to the embassy, and have blocked entry and exit at the compound, after the United States refused to obey an Iraqi order to close the embassy Aug. 24. Other countries' embassies still open in Kuwait in defiance of the Iraqi order also have lost their utility service, according to news reports.

"We're in communication with our embassy," the spokesman said Aug. 27. A skeletal staff of about 10 embassy officials is "functioning, their morale is good and they're trying to serve the American community," the spokesman said. According to news reports, the embassy has an emergency system for electricity.

Otherwise the State Department spokesman would not discuss supplies of water and food available to Americans at the compound.

Mrs. Graham's mother, Margaret Nuzum in Hutchinson, Kan., said she is working to keep a positive outlook about the plight of her daughter, who grew up in Hutchinson; her son-in-law, a native of Shelbyville, Tenn.; and two grandsons trapped in Kuwait.

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"If going to pieces would help, I'd go into a million pieces," she said. "But it wouldn't help a bit."

At the helm of the embassy in Kuwait is Ambassador W. Nathaniel Howell, who as a youth was a member of Court Street Baptist Church in Portsmouth, Va., and later was active in the Baptist Student Union during his studies at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.

Meanwhile, 12 Southern Baptist personnel and 10 of their children from Yemen are scheduled to arrive in Cyprus Aug. 28, said Dale Thorne, who directs Southern Baptist work in the Middle East and North Africa.

One worker, Judy Knight of Reidsville, N.C., originally was scheduled to arrive there Aug. 24 or 25 with her three sons, ages 11, 9 and 3. She and her husband, Fletcher, a maintenance worker from Madison, N.C., and their sons are among the group of personnel that left Yemen Aug. 27 with an overnight stop in Egypt en route to Cyprus. Another worker is traveling to the United States, having begun furlough earlier than planned.

The number of Southern Baptist personnel who have left Jordan now stands at 10, including nine who have evacuated to Cyprus and one who also started furlough early in the United States.

U.S. embassies in each country have advised non-essential personnel to evacuate in the face of protests and escalated resentment aimed at the United States over its military buildup in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Middle East.

Nine Southern Baptist workers are hoping to remain in Yemen to continue the operation of a hospital Baptists began in 1968 in the town of Jibla.

Nine other Southern Baptist workers also are hoping to remain in Jordan and have been exploring possible avenues of ministry to some of the thousands of refugees who have fled to Jordan from Iraq and Kuwait.

One Baptist worker who evacuated Jordan, Gary DeBerry of Gadsden, Ala., said he did so only after co-workers continuously advised him to leave the country. DeBerry had been supervising the operation of two Baptist bookstores in Amman -- one of them in a Palestinian refugee camp -- and one in the city of Zarqa.

DeBerry said his presence as an American in the bookstores "got to the point that I not only might be in danger myself but that I was probably endangering the bookstores."

He recounted, for example, an incident of a Jordanian man who came into one of the bookstores and "was very upset toward America, and he voiced that ... in some language that wasn't too kind." DeBerry left Jordan Aug. 21 with his wife SuEllen, also of Gadsden, and their 11-year-old daughter.

A strong majority of Jordanians agree with Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, DeBerry said. Palestinians, who comprise a majority of Jordan's 4 million people, see Saddam Hussein as "a possible liberator" who could help them regain their homeland, Palestine, which now is part of the state of Israel.

Many native Jordanians see the Iraqi action as a chance for all Arabs to share in the oil riches of Kuwait, DeBerry said. Meanwhile, he said, Jordanians at large are viewing America as an enemy because of its military buildup in their part of the world.

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Former Baptist student at helm  
of embattled embassy in Kuwait

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
8/27/90

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--A former Baptist Student Union member is at the forefront of U.S. diplomatic efforts in Iraqi-occupied Kuwait.

W. Nathaniel Howell, U.S. ambassador to Kuwait, was a member of the Baptist Student Union during undergraduate studies at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville 30 years ago. In recent years, Howell and his wife, Margie, have been involved in Baptist Student Union alumni activities at the university.

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Howell leads the embassy, where two Southern Baptist workers, Maurice and Laurie Graham, have taken refuge with a number of other Americans. The Grahams sent a cable Aug. 23 to relatives in the United States reporting: "We are still at the embassy with many others in good hands."

The ambassador's tour of duty in Kuwait had been scheduled to end this month, but now his diplomatic skills face the severest of tests. Iraq has ordered the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait to close, but the United States has refused to comply, even in the face of Iraqi troops blocking entry and exit at the compound.

Howell is a veteran of tense moments in foreign service. He was a diplomatic official in Cairo, Egypt, when Israel battled its Arab neighbors in the Six-Day War of 1967 and in Beirut, Lebanon, when that country's bloody civil war broke out in 1975.

He is a 25-year career diplomat, fluent in Arabic, an imposing presence in stature, a man who lives out his faith more with actions than words, according to one of his two sons, Chip, and several contemporaries from his student days at the University of Virginia.

Meanwhile, Southern Baptist workers besides the Grahams have been affected in the Middle East. In Cyprus, three single Southern Baptist workers have arrived from Jordan, bringing to nine the number of personnel who have left Jordan in the midst of rising anti-American sentiment. Fourteen Southern Baptist workers also were scheduled to leave Yemen beginning Aug. 24.

Baptist representative Gerry Milligan reported by telephone Aug. 24 on the status of Southern Baptist workers in Jordan: "There are nine adults who have said the only time we're leaving is when President Bush or (Jordanian) King Hussein says, 'You must.'"

Southern Baptist personnel and their Jordanian co-workers are exploring ways they might shelter and aid some of the tens of thousands of refugees arriving in Jordan from Iraq and Kuwait, said Milligan of Tulsa, Okla.

Nine Southern Baptist workers at a 70-bed Baptist hospital in Yemen also are hoping to remain there despite anti-American protests.

In all, 19 Southern Baptist personnel worked in Jordan and 23 in Yemen at the time of Iraq's Aug. 2 invasion of Kuwait and the outset of the U.S. military buildup in and around Saudi Arabia.

Relatives of the Grahams had hoped the couple and their 13- and 10-year-old sons would be able to leave Kuwait as part of a 33-car convoy of non-essential U.S. personnel and officials' dependents that left for Iraq Aug. 23 with assurances they would be permitted to depart for the United States.

Graham reported in his cable, however, "Only those with diplomatic passports can safely travel out of Kuwait today."

Remaining at the embassy compound are Ambassador Howell, a skeletal staff of about 10 other diplomatic officers and a number of Americans. The State Department has refused to disclose the number of Americans sheltered at the embassy. The department has scaled down its estimate of Americans remaining in Kuwait to 2,500 instead of 3,000.

About 70 diplomatic officials and spouses and 30 children were on the 20-hour convoy to Iraq, according to news reports. However, Iraq was not permitting the group to leave for the United States in light of the U.S. refusal to close its Kuwaiti embassy, according to the State Department.

The Grahams, of Shelbyville, Tenn., and Hutchinson, Kan., took shelter at the U.S. Embassy compound in Kuwait City a few days after the Iraqi invasion. Via embassy communications, the Grahams have sent several brief cables to relatives reporting that they continue to be safe.

Ambassador Howell is a native of Portsmouth, Va., and was a member of Court Street Baptist Church there. His mother, Josephine, has been a member of the congregation for more than 60 years, said the pastor, Wilbur Kersey, adding, "He (Howell) was here every Sunday until he went away to college."

Howell's wife, Margie, who also was active in the Baptist Student Union at the University of Virginia, returned to the United States in late July. The couple's two sons, Chip, 28, and Edward, 26, were both in the United States when Iraq invaded Kuwait.

"I'm worried, as I guess you can understand," said Chip Howell, a Department of Defense worker who lives in Pasadena, Md.

But he said his father possesses a number of skills that should serve him well in the midst of crisis. "He's a very good communicator. I wish I were as adept at it," Chip Howell said. "He gets along well with a lot of people, a lot of kinds of people.

"He has a very good sense of humor, which may come in handy," the son added. "He has always enjoyed good satire, he likes a good joke, he tells jokes, in fact he can tell jokes in several languages."

Despite the difficult moments his family has weathered in foreign service, there were benefits to growing up overseas, Chip Howell said. "A lot of people grow up in the United States without ever having met a foreigner, for example. They don't really think of them as people a lot of times. But they are people like we are."

Howell is a 1961 graduate of the University of Virginia who majored in Russian and then earned a doctoral degree in government and foreign affairs from the university in 1965.

"I do remember that he had an interest in international students at the university," said Russell Davis, a fellow Baptist Student Union member during the early 1960s. Davis recalled a night when Howell brought several Asian students to the BSU for a time of dialogue. Davis, assistant professor of psychiatry in religion at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, was reached by telephone in Vienna, Austria, where he is doing research for a book on Sigmund Freud.

Howell "always seemed to stand out in a group and be thought of as a leader whether he was the elected leader or not," Davis said. "Apparently that's been borne out."

"He was a big bear of a young man, not particularly athletic and not particularly out of shape," recalled Fred Riggins, a classmate who is a senior vice president with Central Fidelity Bank in Poquoson, Va. "At the same time he wore glasses and looked scholarly" and made extremely good grades. Riggins thought Howell would have been more likely to become an Ivy League professor than a diplomat, he added.

Howell was comfortable with his style of faith, Riggins said. "Being at a quote-unquote liberal state university, Thomas Jefferson's university, you were almost an anomaly for going to BSU."

But Howell and other BSU friends also had a carefree side. "We would raid the Methodist group and the Episcopalians and Presbyterians," Riggins said with a laugh, "just to see if they had better lemonade than we had."

Another contemporary, Clint Hopkins, pastor of Churchland Baptist Church in Chesapeake, Va., said Howell as a layman has worked "through government channels ... with a kind of expectation to serve God in international relations as a way of expressing one's commitment to God's goodness."

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

Chaplains remain  
on military alert

By Connie Davis

FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. (BP)--Chaplain (Capt.) Dave Coram must be ready within two hours to leave for Saudi Arabia.

Coram is just one of several Southern Baptists stationed at Fort Campbell, Ky., whose lives are uncertain at this time because of tensions in the Middle East.

"This tends to put things into perspective," Coram said. He is facing military conflict for the first time. "It has brought me a little closer to my family." Of his three children, Coram is most concerned about his 13-year-old son, who remains aloof.

It is a tense time, he explained. "When you sit down to eat supper you don't know if it's the last supper you're going to have together."

"We tend to examine our calling. I don't have any regrets because I feel this is where God would have me to be -- so I'm at peace with it."

Coram hadn't lost his humor. He wondered about baptizing in a desert.

Of the six Southern Baptist chaplains at Fort Campbell, Chaplain (Maj.) Sonny Moore was deployed Aug. 17. Captains Eddie Sumbler, Tommy Preston, James Duke, and Coram will be deployed within the next five weeks. Charles Walker may be deployed. He is recovering from surgery.

About 40 chaplains serve the 15,000 troops and 2,000 support personnel of the 101st Airborne Division based at Fort Campbell. Deployment of the division began publicly Aug. 15 after the Aug. 2 military takeover of Kuwait by Iraq.

Moore's wife, Martha, faces a year of separation -- the first during their 25-year marriage. Moore was pastor for 16 years before joining the Army chaplaincy eight years ago. Church members from the Mississippi church they formerly served have supported her. The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's chaplaincy department also has offered its help, she said.

The days before his deployment were especially hectic because the Moore's oldest daughter, Pam, had to reschedule her wedding. Her husband left for Saudi Arabia four days after the Aug. 11 ceremony. It was an emotionally charged time, explained Moore.

Although being apart from her husband on their 25th wedding anniversary was difficult, Mrs. Moore said, the couple agrees his service as an Army chaplain is God's plan for their lives. But, the young soldiers need his humor and sensitivity more than I do now, she added.

Sgt. 1st Class John McGatha had to make a big decision when the 101st Airborne Division was deployed to Saudi Arabia. He already had filed his retirement papers, but he wanted to do his patriotic duty as he had done in Vietnam.

He also had to consider practical matters like the house his family just bought. Though a Christian only three years, McGatha sought God's will.

After prayer and conferences with Harvey Britton, minister of family life at First Baptist Church of Clarksville, Tenn., where the family is actively involved, McGatha found his ministry at home -- through his job and church.

As part of the rear detachment of his battalion, he will be the link between the soldiers and the families. And at First Baptist Church, he will be involved in ministries such as a military family support group.

However, if war is declared, he will be in the Army "for the duration plus six months," as the Army puts it, said McGatha.

"The soldiers are enthusiastic about going. They're scared in a way, but they're enthusiastic."

First Baptist Church of Clarksville has about 250 military-related members.

Dennis Newkirk, who has been pastor of the church about two years, admitted he never had been "in this situation before."

"There is no one in this town that won't be affected," said Newkirk.

The church staff has developed several programs to try to meet the needs and reach the community because of the crisis.

Deacons and selected families will adopt a military family. A letter-writing effort, Project: Barnabas, and outreach through cable TV, newspapers, and radio will be launched.

Teachers of youth and children will be trained to identify stress-related problems of students and will plan special activities for them. A committee also will develop a referral ministry.

"This is our preoccupation right now," said Newkirk, noting that soldiers are leaving.

Verlon Moore, pastor of Hilldale Baptist Church in Clarksville, not only believes the soldiers are prepared for the crisis in the Middle East, but the church also is ready.

"This is an opportunity for the church to be the church," said Moore, adding it is "thrilling" when he has contacted a military family and they report calls from Sunday school members and deacons.

"There's no rank here (at Hilldale Church). Everybody here is in the army of God."

Of the church's 2,000 resident members, about 18 families may be deployed, reported Moore. Those families have been assigned to deacons who will call them once a week.

Moore, who has been in the Army, added, "The Army is as compassionate as they can be." It assists the soldiers with legal matters like wills and provides good financial and spiritual support to families, he noted.

"We need to remember what our revivals were about," he said, referring to the "Here's Hope. Jesus Love You" simultaneous revivals held across the Southern Baptist Convention this spring. "Here's Hope, Jesus, not Saddam Hussein, but Jesus Christ," said Moore.

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