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October 17, 1990

90-142

SBC controversy debated
at Samford University

By Karen Estes Lowry

N-co (Samford)

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Southern Baptists have been debating issues informally for years but at Samford University last week the debate was planned, organized, moderated, and even timed.

Samford University's Student Government Association sponsored the debate "The Southern Baptist Convention: Hope for Reconciliation" with Randall Fields of San Antonio, Texas and David Montoya formerly Gravette, Ark., and now of Fort Worth, Texas, representing moderates and Paul Pressler of Houston and Wayne Dorsett of Birmingham, Ala., speaking for conservatives.

Samford law student Maryanne Matthews-Walser, a former Birmingham radio and television journalist, moderated the debate, cutting off responses and discussions in mid-sentence when necessary to keep the program on schedule.

While the panelists did find areas of common ground, they also illustrated the distance between the two camps of Southern Baptists.

In his opening statement, Montoya, a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, recounted his own involvement with the conservative movement in Arkansas. He called that movement as a brilliant and powerful, organized political machine which worked informally through friendship networks to place conservatives in certain leadership roles and even in influential pastorates.

Montoya said he participated in the movement because he felt he was defending the Bible and left the movement when he realized he was part of a machine with an organized effort to gain control.

In Pressler's opening remarks the appeals court judge read a portion of 2 Timothy 3, focusing attention on his insistence that the controversy is theological rather than political. He said the SBC would not be having the problems of today if 11 years ago Baptist leaders had acknowledged the sincerity of conservatives concerned over liberalism in Southern Baptist schools, admitted that there was a problem, and been willing to work together for solutions.

He countered Montoya's concerns about the political nature of conservatives by presenting documents indicating that moderates had an organized effort too. Montoya said moderates had made a mistake in attempting to run a national campaign to counter a movement which was operated like a local campaign.

Randall Fields, an attorney and president of Baylor University's alumni association, used his allotted time for questioning Pressler to seek common ground. He asked such basic questions as; how does one become a Christian? and what does priesthood of the believer mean? On those points he said he could find no disagreement with Pressler. Differences began to surface, however, when Pressler was asked to define "liberal."

Pressler said that in matters of biblical interpretation "I don't know anyone I agree with 100 percent," yet he maintained there should be parameters of belief that qualify or disqualify for teaching in Baptist colleges and seminaries.

Montoya said that the 1987 Peace Committee report is being used as a creed for Southern Baptists and suggested that there is still a penalty for those who refuse to comply.

Pressler said that although conservatives have spoken of "enlarging the tent" he said they could not bring in "those who are still throwing hand grenades."

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Mention of "destructive acts" brought up recent firings of Baptist Press employees. Pressler said, "If the media had not tried to discredit me" more progress would have been made toward reconciliation. He said, "I'm tired of extending my hand in fellowship and having it come back a bloody nose."

While the four panelists agreed that the Samford debate had been helpful and worthwhile, they differed on their assessment of what it will take to bring reconciliation to the Southern Baptist Convention.

Montoya expressed little optimism, saying that reconciliation could come about only if policies and bylaws could be changed to provide for more regional participation, possible church member votes on certain SBC issues, and inclusion of more Baptists in decision making. "Something has to be done to eliminated the political prize that's there," he said.

Pressler again asserted that if someone had listened to conservatives long ago, there would not be a problem today. He said they had just worked within and used a political system that was already in place to accomplish their desired results.

Fields and Dorsett, who were both students in Baptist colleges until the late 1970s, expressed more optimism, however. Fields said he was willing to be an instrument of reconciliation. Dorsett, pastor of Central Park Baptist Church in Birmingham, said his entire ministry had been conducted thus far under the shadow of SBC controversy and he and a whole generation of young Baptists are tired of controversy and are ready to talk about ways to end it.

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Lowry is editorial assistant for The Alabama Baptist, newsjournal of the Alabama Baptist State Convention.

Furman trustees
amend charter

N-10 (Furman)

Baptist Press
10/17/90

GREENVILLE, S.C. (BP)--The Furman University board of trustees voted Oct. 15 to amend the University's charter and give the board the sole power to elect Furman's trustees.

The action to amend the charter, which required a simple majority vote by the trustees in attendance, according to the 1900 state Legislature approved general law governing all non-profit corporations, was taken during a special meeting of the board. Since the university was founded in 1826, Furman's trustees have been elected by the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

"The Furman University board of trustees believes it is in the best interests of the University to take the board out of disputes that might develop within the Southern Baptist denomination," said Minor Mickel, chairman of Furman's board. "This action will enable the state Baptist convention and Furman to pursue their mutual interests with minimum controversy," he continued.

When asked how the charter amendment would change the trustee selection process, the board responded, "The Furman Board will be responsible for naming the university's trustees instead of leaving the election process to an outside agency, which has been the South Carolina Baptist Convention. The board will have the power to elect its members in any fashion it deems advisable.

The board also approved, by a two-thirds vote, a motion to conform the university's bylaws to the amended charter.

"This amendment to the charter clears up any doubt about who governs the University," Furman president John E. Johns said. "It gives us the stability we need to plan Furman's future affectively.

"But I also want to underscore the fact that our relationship with South Carolina Baptists has not changed. I want to assure everyone that this action will not affect Furman's day-to-day operation in any way. Our social regulations and our admissions policies remain the same."

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In response to the Furman University trustees action, Ray P. Rust, executive secretary-treasurer of the General Board of South Carolina Baptist Convention, explains: "It is difficult from two perspectives to understand the reasons for such action. First, there appears to be no imminent threat to any South Carolina Baptist Convention institution from any group attempting to 'take over.' Though we do not all agree on all matters, South Carolina Baptists have been able to find solutions peacefully to most of the matters of cooperation we have discussed in recent years.

"Second," Rust continued, "we believe this unilateral action taken is without legal basis. The charter of Furman University, as amended on May 21, 1956, provides that the 'charter shall not be amended, altered or added to without the approval of the State Baptist Convention.' This charter contains the provision of trustee election by the Baptist denomination in South Carolina.

"Furman University, its administration, faculty, staff and students are a part of the South Carolina Baptist Convention family. All of us are concerned for the integrity of our South Carolina Baptist institutions. These are our friends and co-workers. Our hope is that this matter can be resolved in a proper, legal and Christian manner that will serve to strengthen our witness to this state," Rust said in closing.

Furman was incorporated and issued its charter by the South Carolina General Assembly in 1850. The University has a current undergraduate enrollment of 2,500 students from 40 states and 12 foreign countries.

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Seminary trustees urge
Cooperative Program support

N-CO (SPTS)

Baptist Press
10/17/90

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--As many Baptist state conventions prepare for annual meetings in October and November, trustee officers of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have "an urgent message" for those gatherings: Please don't cut funding for the national Cooperative Program unified budget.

Three of the seminary trustees' four officers met briefly following a late September called board meeting and trustee retreat on the Louisville, Ky., campus to voice "profound concern" about the future of Cooperative Program funding for Southern and the denomination's other five seminaries.

Trustees have "grieved" over meager salary increases granted to faculty and staff over the past five years which have lagged far behind cost of living increases, said Wayne Allen, first vice chairman and spokesman for the group.

"We have made a major priority to seek creative ways for additional funding," Allen said, "but success in this area could easily be offset by decreases in Cooperative Program funding."

Gifts from Southern Baptist churches through the Cooperative Program unified budget account for about 40 percent of the seminary's \$15.7 million budget.

"In particular," Allen said, "we urge state conventions to take no action that would result in decreased funding" for the seminary. "Ironically, many people who would possibly initiate this kind of action will only be hurting those faculty members and others they have a deep commitment to.

"Our concern is that if Cooperative Program funding decreases for any reason, with the budget cutting we have already done in recent years, the only areas we have left to cut is faculty and staff salaries."

Allen and fellow officers Larry Adams of Oklahoma City, and John Hicks of Louisville, bemoaned "financial boycotting" by some churches which have chosen to bypass the convention's Executive Committee which disperses national Cooperative Program contributions and to designate gifts to selected convention causes.

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"Within the context of many hundreds of man-hours devoted to seeking reconciliation within the board and between the board and faculty and students, it deeply grieves us that financial boycotting by some individuals and churches could accomplish what theological conflict could not accomplish," said Allen.

Trustee chairman Sam H. McMahon Jr., of Charlotte, N.C., was unable to attend the impromptu meeting and later could not be reached for comment.

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Cate resigns as dean
Golden Gate Seminary

N-10
(66675)

Baptist Press
10/17/90

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--Robert L. Cate, dean of academic affairs at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary since 1984, has resigned to become chair of the religion faculty at Oklahoma State University, effective Jan. 31, 1991.

In a letter to Seminary President William O. Crews, Cate said, "I believe my call is to make the Bible live for people. The opportunity of doing this and of bearing witness to the Lordship of Christ at a major university is exciting beyond belief."

Cate said it will be difficult to leave Golden Gate because it has been gratifying to work with students who have helped and will continue to shape much of the Christian mission "from the Rockies to the Orient." He also expressed his appreciation to the faculty and staff for their support and encouragement over the years.

Cate joined the seminary faculty in 1975 as associate professor of Old Testament, following a 10-year pastorate of First Baptist Church in Aiken, S.C. He is an author and has been a trustee of Furman University, Tift College and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

"The loss of Dr. Cate's wisdom, counsel and leadership will be missed by the entire Seminary family," Crews commented. "This is a great loss to the seminary and to me personally."

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Ralph W. Beeson, 'Samford's
greatest donor', dies at 89

N-10
(Samford)

Baptist Press
10/17/90

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Philanthropist Ralph Waldo Beeson who donated millions of dollars to Samford University and educational institutions in two other states died Oct. 15. The former Liberty National Life Insurance Company executive was 89.

Beeson was born in Meridian, Miss., in 1900, but moved to Birmingham in 1927. He lived in Birmingham for the remainder of his life.

Beeson's father, John Wesley Beeson, and his father's three brothers all were college presidents, and Beeson developed an interest in higher education at an early age.

"I just want to do the Lord's work," Beeson said in explanation of his gifts to Samford University in Birmingham, Maryville College in Tennessee and Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky, all denominationally-related institutions, and to Independent Presbyterian Church.

Samford President Thomas E. Corts described Beeson as "the university's greatest donor," adding, "All that Mr. Beeson did, he did with a profound sense of Christian stewardship."

"As weak as he was, he called me a week ago Saturday, rejoicing in the recognition Samford was afforded by U.S. News and World Report magazine," said Corts. "He is a titanic figure in the history of Samford University."

Beeson began supporting Samford's scholarship and building programs during the 1960s. During the 1970s his gifts made possible two buildings. A new university center was named in his honor in 1973. The Orlean Bullard Beeson School of Education and its buildings are named for his late wife, a former teacher, and a summer improvement program for K-12 school teachers operates at Samford with support provided by the Beesons.

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While continuing to support scholarship programs for students, Beeson gave money during the mid-1980s for a new residential village known as Beeson Woods. Comprised of 12 apartment-type units, Beeson Woods houses 500 students.

Two years ago, Beeson donated \$4.2 million as a beginning nucleus to start an interdenominational divinity school at Samford. Begun during the fall of 1988, the school was the first interdenominational divinity school in the nation on the campus of a Southern Baptist college or university. The Samford board of trustees subsequently voted to name the school in honor of Beeson and his late father.

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Montana Southern Baptist Fellowship
defeats relocation recommendation

N-CO
(MO.)

Baptist Press
10/17/90

GREAT FALLS, Mont. (BP)--A recommendation by the executive board of the Montana Southern Baptist Fellowship that the fellowship office be relocated in Helena, Mont., was defeated by messengers at the Oct. 10-11 fellowship meeting.

Following the defeat, a planning document for 1991-1996 was adopted.

Earl Fitzwater, a layman from Easthaven Baptist Church in Kalispell, was elected president. He succeeds another layman, Grant Jackson. Forsyth pastor Garvon Golden was elected vice-president.

A 1991 budget of \$782,333 was adopted. The amount designated for world missions through the Cooperative Program unified budget remains at 20 percent.

Joel Gregory, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, spoke three times and four Montana pastors led Bible studies on the theme "Sharing the Abundant Life." Special guests from Florida, the Montana Fellowship partnership state, were Glen Owen, assistant to the executive director, and six associational directors of missions.

The 1991 annual meeting will be Oct. 9-10 in Four Corners Baptist Church in Bozeman.

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Overseas human needs spending
could reach former high level

By Marty Croll

F-FMB

Baptist Press
10/17/90

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Southern Baptists this year could appropriate one of the highest amounts ever to help people overseas meet bodily needs even while the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board increases its focus on evangelism and starting churches.

Last year overseas human needs appropriations sank to \$5.2 million, the lowest total since 1981. The number of FMB human needs projects slipped to 191, from 245 in 1988.

But through September of this year the mission board already had released \$5.4 million, and planners project a total as high as \$10.2 million by year's end. Southern Baptists' largest expenditure for overseas human needs in one year was \$10.9 million in 1988.

"Contrary to the perception some people might have, the board is not cutting back on its human needs efforts, but is making a more effective use than ever of its funds," said John Cheyne, associate director of FMB research and planning. Cheyne has guided Southern Baptists' overseas human needs efforts for 13 years.

On several occasions Cheyne has presented detailed plans to board strategists on how missionaries can involve themselves in holistic ministry -- helping people grow not only spiritually but also in their physical, social, emotional and economic well-being.

Late last year board President R. Keith Parks, as a result of a boardwide study for streamlining staff, dissolved the human needs department and moved the administration of world hunger and general relief programs into the portfolio of strategy research and planning.

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But Cheyne believes the move confused some people, including missionaries. During the first part of this year requests from missionaries for human needs money only trickled in. In May Cheyne asked Parks to reiterate to field administrators the importance of designing human needs programs. After that, funding requests picked up markedly.

"The board is considering strategic use of these funds as never before," said Cheyne. "We're combining concern for the human condition with strategic objectives in church planting and evangelism. We're going to areas where the very act of meeting needs opens doors for personnel to go in and minister holistically," such as in Romania, where Baptists have gained new acceptance.

In comparison to funds spent for one-time disaster relief efforts, money sent overseas for projects that enable people to raise their overall standard of living shows a marked increase this year over years past, he said.

Some recent appropriations include:

-- In the Philippines, \$123,502 to help teach families effective home farming, nutrition and simple health techniques;

-- In Brazil, \$4,610 to teach backyard gardening, small animal production and trades such as sewing;

-- In Ecuador, \$24,252 to help people break out of the poverty cycle by teaching them how to farm fish in ponds;

-- In Senegal, \$45,000 to dig 10 wells to provide clean drinking water.

In Romania, Southern Baptists' readiness to help people get their farms producing again after a drought has raised the credibility of local Baptists in their communities, reported Cheyne. Last March, after Romania opened to the West, the Foreign Mission Board sent \$1 million in seeds, herbicides and insecticides. Government officials there estimated it would have cost them \$7.6 million to purchase the same supplies for themselves, Cheyne said.

With the help of field administrator Paul Thibodeaux, who worked with European Baptists to support the effort, Southern Baptists sent help to Romania within three weeks of an initial needs survey there.

"Government officials said they were incredulous that the total response came within the time they had designated to be able to plant crops in mid-April," Cheyne said. "Romanian Baptists have now received a new level of credibility with national officials and local people for an ongoing witness."

Cheyne visited Romania again in September. "Every door was open to us," he said. "Now we're getting invitations for personnel -- people in marketing and management, technicians, all kinds of people. This extends the scope of our potential witness to contacts in every sphere of life."

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NOTE TO EDITORS: The following two stories about response to need in Eastern Europe may be used as a series, companion pieces or separately.

Expanded Baptist mission force
bolstering E. European churches

By Art Toalston

F-FMB

Baptist Press
10/17/90

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Full-time Southern Baptist workers will begin assignments in every Eastern European country except Albania within a year.

The workers will play a key role in helping Eastern European Baptists evangelize their nations and strengthen their churches, said Keith Parker, director of Southern Baptist work in Europe.

But they also face the challenge of helping Eastern Europeans sift through a flood of aid offers from Christians in the West, Parker said. Those offers, while generous, could disrupt Baptist unions, or conventions, by ignoring key priorities they have adopted for work in their countries, he said.

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As communism began its dizzying tumble from power last year, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board consultations with Eastern European Baptists resulted in plans to expand the number of Southern Baptists assigned to the region from 10 to nearly 100. The mission board also mobilized funds to help Baptists take advantage of opportunities considered unthinkable a few months earlier in this former communist stronghold of more than 425 million people.

The board has made three major allocations this year to assist European Baptists: \$1 million for Bibles, gospel films and other resources for church planting, evangelism and discipleship; nearly \$1.25 million for church construction and renovation and other capital projects; and \$1 million from hunger relief donations for seeds and supplies for needy Romanian farmers.

But full-time personnel are "the long-lasting way to build trust and make an impact," Parker said. "One solid missionary who can relate to the people, win them to Christ and plant indigenous churches and win the trust of national pastors and learn from them, and them from him, is of far more value than all the cars, chapels and moneys the Foreign Mission Board can give."

Southern Baptists are well on their way toward placing numerous career workers in Eastern Europe, along with dozens of one- and two-year volunteers, many of whom will use English-language instruction to build relationships for sharing their faith, Parker said. And the board stands ready to open work in Albania whenever opportunity permits, he said.

Southern Baptists' first full-time workers in the Soviet Union, George and Veda Rae Lozuk, will begin work in Moscow in November. Baptists in the Leningrad and Kiev areas have asked for Southern Baptist workers, Parker said.

During the board's October meeting, trustees approved opening work in Bulgaria. The board will transfer a veteran couple there as soon as possible.

Southern Baptists' first contingent in Romania will consist of six volunteers. Two animal husbandry specialists and two nurses have begun short-term work there. A doctor and his wife, a nurse, will join them soon. Parker anticipates a request from Romanian Baptists for the official opening of Foreign Mission Board work there with several full-time personnel.

A Southern Baptist couple, the denomination's first representatives to Poland, moved there in September, and two Southern Baptists will begin work in Czechoslovakia early next year, Parker said. Screening is continuing for four other couples to work in Czechoslovakia, he said. Southern Baptists already have personnel active in Hungary, Yugoslavia and former East Germany.

Parker said the long-awaited Baptist seminary in Moscow will open, initially in a local church, in January with 15 to 20 students.

The Foreign Mission Board allocated \$200,000 for the seminary in 1989 from the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions for release when Soviet Baptists obtain a permanent site. Leaders of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists are negotiating with the government for property.

Three Southern Baptists are part of a six-member group assisting the seminary in behalf of the Baptist World Alliance. John David Hopper, a Southern Baptist missionary and president of the Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland; Lewis Drummond, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.; and Larry McSwain, dean of the school of theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., have been involved in the BWA effort to help the seminary develop its curriculum and select guest professors.

An additional \$300,000 in Lottie Moon funds was allocated in 1989 for a range of projects in Eastern Europe, including Albanian-language gospel broadcasts. Even years before, Hopper and Parker and other mission personnel were traveling to the region to preach, teach and encourage pastors and lay people. And the board was facilitating little-publicized efforts such as Bible distribution and undergirding church building projects.

Dollars can be mixed blessing
to Eastern European churches

By Art Toalston

F. FMB

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--U.S. dollars will not necessarily help the churches of Eastern Europe.

"Dollars can be destructive; they also can be very constructive," said Keith Parker, who directs the work of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Europe. "It's how those dollars are applied to the churches' needs."

The Foreign Mission Board is intent on using the funds it has budgeted to help Eastern European Baptists in a cooperative way -- to meet key needs in evangelism, Bible distribution and other areas singled out by Baptist bodies in the region, Parker said.

Accountability is another of the cornerstones of Foreign Mission Board aid to Eastern European Baptists, he noted.

"We're defining very clearly what's really needed in the Eastern European countries," he said, citing the work of Baptist Response-Europe, a cooperative venture by the Baptist World Alliance and a range of Baptist unions, or conventions, in Eastern and Western Europe and North America.

By coordinating Baptist aid efforts, Baptist Response-Europe has been recognized by governments in Eastern Europe as a bona fide humanitarian agency exempted from customs charges on relief aid sent to a country, Parker said.

The Foreign Mission Board, in all its efforts to aid Eastern Europeans, "can assure that every penny given for evangelism or Bible distribution or a relief project through Baptist Response-Europe is accounted for," Parker said.

Southern Baptists reduce overhead costs, as well as waste or even seepage of goods into the black market, by working closely with Baptists in each Eastern European country, he said.

However, the Foreign Mission Board has been criticized repeatedly by some Southern Baptists who feel it has not responded quickly enough to the new evangelism opportunities in Eastern Europe. Some, frustrated with what they see as needless delays, have proceeded with their own direct efforts.

But the board, in consultation with Eastern European Baptists, has begun an expansion in the number of personnel assigned to the region from 10 to nearly 100. The board also has mobilized more than \$3 million in funds to help Baptists in the region in evangelism, church planting, relief ministries and capital projects.

Parker cautioned that go-it-alone aid by U.S. churches to Eastern European Baptists, while generous, could ultimately prove harmful.

Divisiveness among Baptists in the region regularly results when Western aid, even for church construction or renovation, ignores priorities adopted by national Baptist bodies in evangelism, Bible distribution, church planting, discipleship and other matters, Parker said.

A number of pastors, for example, are offered cars -- and the Western donors rarely check these offers with the Baptist unions, Parker said.

Vehicles regularly are given to prominent city pastors who usually speak a second language such as English and are the ones foreign Christians tend to meet when they visit. Some pastors already have cars but welcome better ones, even though public transportation is ample and used by most church members.

Western visitors often overlook pastors who lead churches in a number of smaller towns. These pastors generally take long, arduous train rides from city to city every week.

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"Many well-intentioned people are coming in and undercutting the very thing that has helped Baptists survive over the years -- their solidarity" in the face of government oppression, Parker said. "It's bringing a level of disunity within their fellowship that they have never known in their history."

Parker said the scenario often goes like this: a stranger from the West visits a church and offers various sorts of assistance. "Then the church says to the Baptist union, 'We don't need you. We don't need the other churches. We're going to do our thing.'"

A further problem occurs when a Christian visitor downplays whether he is a Baptist but later seeks to advance doctrines far removed from the church's Baptist heritage, Parker said. Then the church begins to split.

In at least one instance, a dozen or more different visitors from the West arrived one Sunday at a church in Romania, each asking to speak about his "vision" for the congregation, Parker said.

Christians should review aid for Eastern Europeans, he said, through the question: "Does it enable them to become self-supporting or cripple them through dependency?" Unchecked aid can harm churches just when they are developing a sense of stewardship for the new era ahead in Eastern Europe.

Foreign Mission Board assistance, Parker said, is balanced with a concern for planting churches that will become "of the people ... stable, ongoing, self-supporting congregations of believers."

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Care urged in use of
aid to Russian Baptists

By Art Toalston

F-FMB

Baptist Press
10/17/90

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The Foreign Mission Board has been criticized repeatedly by some Southern Baptists who feel it has not responded quickly enough to the new evangelism opportunities in Eastern Europe, according to Keith Parker, director of Southern Baptist work in Europe, said recently. Some, frustrated with what they see as needless delays, have proceeded with their own direct efforts.

Parker reported to Foreign Mission Board trustees that one challenge he sees ahead for the Foreign Mission Board will be to help Eastern Europeans cope with a flood of aid offers from the United States and Western Europe that, while generous, could ultimately prove harmful.

Divisiveness among Baptists in the region regularly results when Western aid, even for church construction or renovation, ignores priorities adopted by national Baptist bodies regarding evangelism, Bible distribution, church planting, discipleship and other matters such as transportation, Parker said.

A number of pastors, for example, are offered cars -- and the Western donors rarely check these offers with the Baptist unions, Parker said.

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Western visitors often overlook pastors who lead churches in as many as seven smaller towns. These pastors generally take long, arduous train rides from city to city every week.

"Many well-intentioned people are coming in and undercutting the very thing that has helped Baptists survive over the years -- their solidarity" in the face of government oppression, Parker said. "It's bringing a level of disunity within their fellowship that they have never known in their history."

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All Christian aid for Eastern Europe, he said, should be reviewed through the question, "Does this enable them to become self-supporting or cripple them through dependency?" Unchecked infusion of aid can harm churches just when they are developing a sense of stewardship for the new era in Eastern Europe.

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Prof finds doors re-opening
to Russian home, family

By Gary W. Griffith

FID(LA)
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Baptist Press
10/17/90

PINEVILLE, La. (BP)--Nikolai Alexandrenko has been denied two freedoms since emigrating to the United States in 1951 -- the freedom of returning to his birthplace near Bryansk, Russia, and the freedom of telling his Russian family about Jesus Christ.

However, the retired professor and preacher may exercise both freedoms in the coming months. He anxiously awaits word on going to Russia via short-term foreign missions service.

He has applied through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's Cooperative Services International to teach and preach in his home country. Last year, he retired after 30 years as professor of languages and religion at Louisiana College in Pineville, La.

Hearing Alexandrenko speak of the historical changes that have occurred in the Soviet Union and its satellite countries since last December, one cannot help but be swept up in the excitement and significance of the events.

"I did not think that changes would come that fast," Alexandrenko notes. "Of course, when I retired last year in May, I was praying for changes in Russia to come. I said: 'God is not working on my schedule. Eventually changes will come, but not in my lifetime.' "But it came."

The 68-year-old Russian compares the sudden fall of the Berlin Wall to that of biblical Jericho. He relates the opening of the Iron Curtain and the restatement of religious freedom in Russia to the children of Israel crossing the Jordan River and entering the promised land.

"I believe God works in history all the time," Alexandrenko says. "But in my generation, I've never seen God so actively working in history since last December.

"But I prayed for that to happen every day for 40 years since I became a Christian. I've prayed that the people there in the countries which we formerly called the Eastern Bloc would have the chance to hear the gospel as I did and make up their own mind and be converted."

During those 40 years, Alexandrenko has longed to tell his family of the peace and fulfillment he has found as a follower of Jesus Christ. But that was impossible due to the circumstances under which he left his native country, he says.

Under excruciating pain from bullet holes in his chest and leg, he allowed himself to be captured in 1943 by German soldiers during World War II. In such situations, Russian soldiers were brainwashed to kill as many Germans as possible but use their last bullet on themselves.

"We were never to surrender to the enemy, or you were automatically a traitor," Alexandrenko says. "That's why I did not return to Russia after the American forces liberated my concentration camp near Munich. And that's why I would not dare try to track down my family or write them after the war, for fear they would be persecuted."

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However, Alexandrenko has seen a drastic change in the attitude of Russian government officials concerning so-called "war crimes." Policies of glasnost and perestroika in Russia allayed Alexandrenko's fears and he tried to contact his family by mail during the summer. He realized his nine brothers and sisters could have moved from the area of his birthplace, or might all be dead, but he hoped and prayed.

In July, Alexandrenko received a letter from his 74-year-old sister, Natalia, who he had not seen in 50 years, and one from his 64-year-old brother, Vladimir, who he had not seen in 60 years. They gave brief information on their families, extended an invitation for Alexandrenko to "come visit soon" and wrote that his seven other siblings had died.

"Right away I sent them a letter answering their questions and sent pictures of my wife, Mae, and six children and seven grandchildren," the professor says. "I was excited and surprised that my sister was still alive. In Russia, living is hard. And my brother wrote that I probably did not remember him, since I saw him last when he was four years old.

"But I remember," Alexandrenko says. "I do not have any pictures or personal items of them, but I remember."

The first letters were short, and Alexandrenko eagerly is awaiting a second letter from his brother and sister. He is interested to find out their response to his Christian testimony, which he wrote briefly in his second letter.

"To be open and up front, I reminded them that before I left home I was the Communist Youth organizer in high school and the leader of the Militant Atheists," Alexandrenko says. "But now, after learning how God works in mysterious ways, I'm not only personally a believer in Jesus Christ but a Baptist preacher to boot."

The Russian native has seen many of God's "mysterious ways," beginning with his first exposure to Scripture. After his liberation from concentration camp, he was in a refugee camp trying to start a fire in a barrack's stove.

Removing some excess paper that had been crammed into the fire box, Alexandrenko found Bible verses scribbled on them. One verse read, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20).

"I knew at that point I had to find out more about the verses and their meaning," Alexandrenko recalls. Soon, he accepted Christ as his personal savior in a Baptist church in Munich, began preaching to his fellow Russian soldiers and committed himself to sharing his faith with others for the rest of his life.

Consequently, Alexandrenko has great hopes of personally sharing the plan of salvation with his sister and brother. He says their first letters gave him no conclusive indication of their spiritual condition, but one thing in Natalia's letter gave him cause for optimism.

"In school, we were all taught to be atheists," he relates. "However, in my sister's letter, she wrote that God must have spared me in the war and it was a miracle."

Last year, Alexandrenko received the same response from a Russian writer who was visiting the Central Louisiana area.

"I mentioned to him I was in World War II and was born in 1922," the professor recalls. "He said: 'You are one of the very, very few Russian males born that year who survived the war. A study was done and only 2 percent of the males born that year survived the war that killed 30 million Russians.' "

Alexandrenko has come to the "conclusion that from 1943 when I was captured by the Germans, I have not been living my life," he says. "It was time given to me by God as lagniappe. I should have been killed like two of my brothers who were in the army at the same time."

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As a result, Alexandrenko says he is excited about the possibility of mission service in Russia but not impatient. He does not know when he will receive word from the Foreign Mission Board concerning his application. "I'm really living my second life, and I should have been dead 45 years ago. I'm not worried about the timing of my serving in Russia. If nothing works out this year, something will work out next year. And if necessary, I will collect my money and go to the village and town where my sister and brother live and preach there on my own."

Whenever the opportunity arises, Alexandrenko says his wife, Mae, will not be going with him on his first trip to Russia, because it would be much easier for him to travel, witness and preach on his own. But he optimistically insists he will have a second opportunity to visit his homeland and take his wife.

"I have been asked: 'What if you go to preach in Russia and officials say the old laws apply to you because you left under the rule of (Communist Premier Joseph) Stalin? What if they arrest you and put you in jail?' " Alexandrenko says.

"I say: 'So what. At my age, I don't worry. If that happens, I'll preach in jail.' "

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Griffith is a reporter for the Louisiana Baptist Message, newsjournal of the Louisiana Baptist Convention. Photo available on request from Baptist Message.

Houston's Chinese Baptist Church reaches out to Dominican Republic

By Ken Camp

N-Texas

Baptist Press
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DALLAS (BP)--Missions involvement by a southeast Texas Chinese church in a predominantly Spanish-speaking Caribbean country might seem odd, but it was a logical step for Chinese Baptist Church, Houston, according to pastor Victor Wong.

"Our church has always been very mission minded. Currently, 28 percent of our general budget goes to missions-related causes, but we wanted to do missions as well as give to missions," said Wong.

He noted that 14 percent of the church's undesignated receipts support missions through the Cooperative Program, 3 percent goes to Union Baptist Association and about 11 percent provides funding for other missions causes.

While Houston's Chinese Church had taken mission trips before to nearby states, Wong said his congregation decided it was time to be involved in hands-on foreign missions. When he contacted the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, he was told about the need for Chinese involvement in Central America and the Caribbean.

"Since this is our first major attempt at doing a systematic foreign missions project, we didn't want to go somewhere with no Chinese Baptist work where we would have to start from scratch, so we decided on the Dominican Republic," Wong said.

Due to close diplomatic ties between the Dominican Republic and Taiwan, Santo Domingo has a significant Chinese population, Wong noted, and Southern Baptists support a missionary couple who work full-time among the country's Chinese.

The Houston church learned that James and Sheila Wang, Southern Baptist missionaries in Santo Domingo, were scheduled for a stateside furlough and their congregation--Chinese Baptist Church--needed leadership in their absence.

After sending an associate pastor, James Wong, to do surveys in the capital city and meeting personally with missionary Wang at a missions fair in Houston, Chinese Church decided to plan a series of mission trips to Santo Domingo.

The church has five mission trips scheduled beginning just after Christmas and ending in early July, with each being led by one of the church's five ministerial staff members. Their work will include discipleship training, Woman's Missionary Union, youth ministries, music and Sunday School teacher training, as well as providing leadership for worship services.

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"Rather than send one group down for a short period of time, we decided to divide them. Since only one member of our pastoral staff will be gone at any time, it will not hinder our work here. And by extending the time of the trips over nearly seven months, it will provide a more long-term benefit for the church in Santo Domingo," Wong said.

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Houston church preaches
release to deaf inmates

By Ken Camp

N. Texas

Baptist Press
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DALLAS (BP)--Woodhaven Deaf Baptist Mission, Houston, is proclaiming spiritual release to captives who have never heard the gospel--or anything else.

Once each month, volunteers from Woodhaven, a mission of First Baptist Church, Houston, are visiting and holding worship services for deaf inmates in the Texas Department of Corrections.

Since Woodhaven began the ministry in August, 17 of the 24 deaf inmates at the Ellis II Unit near Huntsville have made professions of faith in Christ, according to pastor Arthur Craig.

"It's something we've been wanting to do for two or three years," said Craig.

He noted that an effective program logistically was difficult when deaf inmates were scattered throughout the TDC system. The long-awaited breakthrough came in August when all of the deaf prisoners were moved to Ellis II.

About 12 of the prisoners who have professed faith in Christ are from the Houston area. Working with Emmett Solomon, Southern Baptist chaplain and administrator of TDC chaplaincy programs, Craig has made arrangements to baptize those inmates in the prison chapel baptistry.

"We want to start doing discipleship with them and try to develop a leader from within the group who could lead Bible studies," said Craig.

"Our goal is first of all to make sure that all of the inmates are saved and then disciple them. Then, when they are released, we want to see them actively involved in a church."

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