



BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas, 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5100
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

December 20, 1991

90-172

NOTE TO EDITORS:

The is a follow-up story on "Chapman invites SBC committee appointment recommendations."

Thank you,
Baptist Press

Chapman request recommendations
for key SBC appointments

By Maria Sykes

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention President Morris Chapman issued an open letter, released Dec. 12, seeking recommendations of people to be appointed to key SBC committees.

"I am initiating the process which will lead to choosing individuals to serve our convention as members of the 1991 Committee on Committees, Resolutions Committee, Credentials Committee and Tellers Committee," wrote Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church in Wichita Falls, Texas.

The convention president appoints the four key committees that will serve June 4-6, 1991, at the annual meeting in Atlanta.

The Committee on Committees, composed of 2 members from each qualified state, nominates the Committee on Nominations and other committees not otherwise provided for.

The Resolutions Committee, made up of 10 members, consisting of 3 members of the Executive Committee, handles all resolutions presented during the annual meeting.

The Credentials Committee, which included 28 members last year, oversees registration.

The Tellers Committee, consisting of 15 members last year, tabulates all votes taken at the annual meeting.

Chapman noted qualities he is looking for in making his appointments: "I hope to appoint persons whose spirit reflects a deep love for and a fresh walk with our dear Lord Jesus Christ.

"Persons serving on these committees should have a genuine burden for lost souls. I know that every Southern Baptist recognizes the importance of recommending persons who have qualities and abilities which are uniquely suited for serving on a SBC committee.

Chapman explained, "Only the names and information submitted on a completed recommendation form will be fully considered.

The information should include:

-- The full name of the nominee; complete mailing address; home and business telephone numbers, including area code;

--more--

-- The committee to which the nominee is being recommended; any previous service on any SBC committee and/or board;

-- Whether the nominee is employed by a church or any denominational entity or is a layperson, including the correct title or occupation and complete business mailing address;

-- The nominee's church affiliation, including the church mailing address and telephone number; total church membership and the amount and percentage given through the Cooperative Program unified budget during 1989-90;

-- The number of baptisms during 1989-90 in the nominee's church, and whether the nominee plans to attend the 1991 annual meeting.

Chapman identified again other personal qualifications. The nominees appointed must:

1. Be a cooperating Southern Baptist;
2. Have a commitment to perpetuating an allegiance to God's perfect Word through the institutional life of Southern Baptists; and
3. Be in agreement with the Peace Committee's statement on scripture.

"While I will stay within these cooperative and theological guidelines in my appointments, I will, as I pledged, reach beyond perceived political parameters," Chapman stated.

Recommendation forms may be obtained by writing Martha Gaddis, The Executive Committee, 901 Commerce Street, Nashville, Tennessee, 37203.

Chapman asked people wishing to make recommendations to send the completed recommendation form to him personally at First Baptist Church, 1200 Ninth Street, Wichita Falls, Texas, 76301. The envelope should be marked "SBC Committee Recommendations."

The open letter concluded, "My wife, Jodi and I pray for each and every Southern Baptist a blessed Christmas and a joyful New Year. May our Lord guard, guide and keep you in His loving care."

--30--

Christian pastor executed
amid new repression in Iran

Baptist Press
12/20/90

LONDON (BP)--A Christian pastor has been executed in Iran amid a new wave of repression against Christian believers and churches in the country.

Sources inside Iran reported that Hossein Soodmand, 55, an ordained Assemblies of God minister, was hanged Dec. 3 after being tortured during two months of imprisonment.

Soodmand's body was not released for burial. Fellow pastors who visited a prison in Mashad, a city in northeastern Iran, were told of the hanging and were shown a coroner's report stating Soodmand was dead. Authorities escorted them to an isolated grave and told them it contained Soodmand's body. The pastors said the grave was not in a cemetery but in a location they deemed "not a respectable place" for burials.

Soodmand was one of a handful of Iranian pastors who have left Islam and accepted the Christian faith. He had been asked by church leaders to move from Mashad to Gorgan, a city northeast of Tehran, to lead a congregation there. A church Soodmand led in Mashad was closed by the government in 1988.

The pastor had been conducting private meetings since the closing of the Mashad church, but sources said the government knew of the meetings.

--more--

When Soodmand arrived in Gorgan he was arrested by local authorities, blindfolded and taken away for interrogation, sources said. He then was ordered to leave Gorgan and return to Mashad.

Upon arrival back in Mashad, he was arrested again and imprisoned. During the following four weeks, Soodmand reportedly was subjected to public mockery for his faith and ordered to pray aloud repeatedly. He also was tortured, sources said, but no details were available on the extent of the torture.

He was released on bail for a time, then rearrested and imprisoned for another month. His hanging was reported to have taken place Dec. 3, but the news did not reach sources outside Iran until mid-December.

Soodmand reportedly was accused of spying, a charge friends dismissed as preposterous. "He was harmless, a meek man who will be remembered for his quiet spirit," said one man. After becoming a Christian believer, Soodmand began a ministry that spanned 24 years.

He first worked with the Iranian Bible Society as a colporteur, selling Bibles across the country. He later worked as evangelist in a Christian hospital in Isfahan and also worked with a mission for the blind.

It was in the latter ministry that he met his wife, Mahtab, who is blind. She was allowed to visit her husband only twice during his imprisonment and was denied a final meeting with him before the execution, sources said. Since his death, she reportedly has suffered a breakdown and is being cared for by church friends. The couple has four children, ages 10 to 15.

Iranian-born Christians in the West who monitor church ministry inside Iran said the execution is part of a new, harsh round of systematic repression against Christians -- especially those who are former Muslims.

"Now they are willing to kill," said one Iranian Christian leader now living outside Iran.

Several believers have disappeared during the past year and are feared dead, sources said. Mehdi Dibaj, another church leader and ex-Muslim, has been held in prison for more than five years. Christian workers now are more concerned than ever about his fate.

Along with the closing of some churches and Christian bookstores, Christian conferences in Iran have been banned. Government approval now is required for Christian weddings or even church outings. Authorities have warned Iranian Christians not to contact the West.

Last July authorities closed down the Iranian Bible Society after repeatedly calling in the society's general secretary for questioning. After the leader left the country, the government Office of Religious Minorities confiscated the society's files and locked staff members out of their building.

The government announced the society had been dissolved and that permission would not be given for it to operate again.

Before the closing, the government had increasingly impeded the society's work. The group was not allowed to send its annual report to churches in the country or import Persian-language Bibles or Scripture portions.

When the Bible society sought permission to print a gospel portion, the Office of Religious Minorities said Jesus could not be referred to as "Son of God" or "Lord," but only as "prophet." The designation of "prophet" is given to Jesus in the Koran, the holy book of Islam. The society did not agree to such changes, since they would have altered the Bible's text.

--more--

Amid the increasing repression, Iranian Christian leaders outside Iran said they find published comments by a key Iranian government leader especially ironic. The Dec. 12 issue of Kayhan Havai, an Iranian newspaper, quoted Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, head of the Iranian judiciary, as saying: "no one is in jail in Iran for his beliefs." The front-page article defended Iran's use of the death penalty and rejected as biased a report on human rights in Iran prepared by a United Nations envoy.

Christianity is one of the four religions officially recognized by the Islamic government of Iran, but Iranian Christian observers said that in practice the recognition includes only ethnic Armenians and Assyrians, not believers from a Muslim background. The Christian population in Iran totals less than 1 percent of the nation's nearly 66 million people.

The new repression probably is an effort by the Iranian government to head off increasing response to the gospel across Iran, they said. Efforts by Christians inside Iran and Christian radio programs broadcast into the country from outside are increasingly effective in presenting the gospel.

Based on frequent reports from Christians who have left the country, one observer said, "I feel there are thousands in Iran who are interested in Christianity. Possibly this has alarmed the government."

Disillusionment with Islam has helped produce a "significant minority group" of Muslim converts, he said. Pressures brought by the government have produced more unity among Christians and strengthened their witness, he added.

Some other Iranians also reportedly are uncomfortable with government repressive measures against Christians. Sources said when prison officials were relaying news of Soodmand's execution, one employee wept openly.

--30--

CORRECTION:

In the (BP) story "Chapman invites SBC committee appointment recommendations," dated 12/13/90, change the last graph to read as follows:

In the open letter which concluded with a Christmas and New Year greeting to all Southern Baptists from the president and his wife, Jodi, Chapman assured Southern Baptists that "every person who submits a recommendation can be assured of my careful and prayerful consideration."

Thank you,
Baptist Press

Moscow Choir completes U.S. tour;
Singer sent home with 'ministry money'

Baptist Press
12/20/90

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--A recently completed concert tour of the U.S. by the choir from Moscow Church of Evangelical Baptists garnered praise as well as some ministry money for the Soviets. About \$22,800, generated above expenses by love offerings and book and tape sales, will be sent back to the Soviet Union by the tour sponsors as funding for the ministries of the choir, called Logos, and the Soviet Evangelical Baptist Union.

The Oct. 25 - Nov. 13 tour, cosponsored by the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America and New Call to Peacemaking (a cooperative effort of the Church of the Brethren, Friends and Mennonites), covered 4,000 miles in 13 states and 35 performances. An estimated 18,400 people heard the sounds of Soviet presented by the 43-member chamber choir and orchestra, which already has been invited back to perform another program now in preparation. The repertoire of the group, formed several years ago as a youth choir of the Moscow church, consists of classical church music, contemporary and traditional Russian hymns and Western Protestant music as well as contemporary American gospel songs.

--more--

"The tour's biggest success was the fulfillment of its purpose -- to change perceptions about our Soviet brothers and sisters and to see them from a biblical perspective, not a political perspective -- (to see them) as the Church," said tour coordinator Clyde Weaver, who made the journey with the musicians. Weaver said the farewells as the group departed from host families in each U.S. city "illustrate the degree to which church folk could identify with them (the Soviets) as part of the Church, the world and God's family. Music cuts through all the pretensions and speaks to one's heart."

Testimonies of the choir's impact followed each stop. In New York City, about 300 people turned out at Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem to hear the choir, said the church's pastor, Calvin Butts. "You're talking about people (in the Abyssinian congregation) who have fought and struggled for peace for years through the Civil Rights Movement and other actions. So we resonate immediately with those who come to give voice to the work for justice and harmony."

Choir members also reported transforming experiences from their trip. Sergei Rebrov said during the Nashville stop, "For many years we thought about each other and read in the newspaper that Russian people and American people have bad feelings towards one another. But now during our meetings (on the tour), we feel the love of your people. We feel that we are one family in Jesus Christ."

One event gave the choir and tour officials some moments of concern. One of the musicians, a 24-year-old bass player, left before the Lancaster, Pa., concert and did not return. A note he left behind said he had planned before the tour to defect, and he hoped the choir would understand that for personal reasons he had to leave. "The gist of the note was 'I'm sorry. I just can't go back but I hope you'll love me anyway,'" said Weaver. He said he hopes the incident, the first in which anyone has defected from a Christian group, does not inhibit the choir's return.

Founded in 1984, the BPFNA is a network linking Baptists involved in justice and peace issues throughout North America. Its board of directors is composed of members affiliated with 11 Baptist conventions and five racial/ethnic groups in Canada, the U.S., Puerto Rico and Mexico. The organization has no official sponsorship of any convention. Its primary purpose is to encourage greater Baptist involvement -- at local, national and international levels -- in justice and peace concerns and to help clarify understanding of such involvement as essential to Christian discipleship.