



January 28, 1991

91-13

NOTE TO EDITORS: The following three stories cover several aspects of the Muslim world -- its potential reaction to the Persian Gulf war, its worldwide growth and challenge to Christians, and its rapid expansion in Europe. The second story, "Burgeoning Muslim world remains stubborn evangelistic challenge," was originally released directly to Baptist state papers several months ago and is provided here in updated form for other readers of Baptist Press.

War may topple Saddam
but fuel Islam extremism

By Art Toalston

N-FMB

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The Persian Gulf war may eradicate Saddam Hussein's clout in the Middle East, but it also may leave fertile ground for Islamic fundamentalism.

Muslim fundamentalists may gain new momentum from longstanding issues in the Middle East that could become even more explosive after the war ends.

The gap between rich and poor Arab nations likely will continue to widen after the war, for example. Islamic movements may emerge as "the only refuge" for the poor, said Ibrahim Abu-Rabi', a Muslim Arab from Nazareth, Israel, and a Rockefeller Foundation fellow at the University of Texas in Austin.

Regionalism has intensified in the Middle East in recent months, Abu-Rabi' said. Oil-rich Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia as well as Egypt, Syria and north African Muslim countries increasingly view themselves as distinct societies than rather parts of the broader "Arab nation," he said.

If the Gulf states in particular keep more and more of their wealth to themselves -- a gripe among poorer Arab countries long before the war -- Islam could become "a symbol of salvation from a general feeling of despair among the Arab population," Abu-Rabi' predicted.

"We might see many charismatic figures talking in the name of Islam as a way of counterbalancing the inequities," he said.

Islamic fundamentalism also could help fuel a major upheaval in Jordan, where the issue of a homeland for Palestinians will continue to fester after the war, added George Braswell. Braswell is professor of missions and world religions at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., and a Southern Baptist worker in Iran from 1967 to 1974.

Half or more of Jordan's 4 million people are Palestinian Arabs. Their families lost their land when Jewish settlers carved out the state of Israel in 1948 and expanded it in subsequent clashes with Arabs.

Jordan's King Hussein, who has ruled the country since the 1950s, is "sitting on a powder keg" of Palestinian frustration that could lead to revolt and his overthrow, Braswell said. And Palestinian activism for a homeland increasingly is becoming intertwined with Islamic fundamentalism.

Islamic and Arab anger against the United States could be kindled even by a convincing victory over Saddam, warned Dudley Woodberry, associate professor of Islamic studies at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif..

"If the damage to Iraq is too great, we can expect even the Arabs who have sided with us to have sympathies for Iraq," Woodberry said.

"Arab honor is tied up with this," he said, noting that maintaining personal and family honor is "the major value of the Arabs." Arab honor was prized even several centuries before the rise of Islam in the seventh century, and it extends to nations and the Arab people in general, he said.

--more--

Resenting the years they were colonized by Western powers, Arabs feel they were suppressed and used as pawns, Woodberry said. Arabs also resent the U.S. financial and military support of Israel that helped the Jewish state seize land formerly owned by Palestinians and other Arabs.

"To be crushed once again affects every Arab, no matter which side they're on," Woodberry said. "It would take very little to swing sympathy the opposite direction."

The presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia also offends many Muslims. "From the beginning of Islam, many Muslim jurists have issued injunctions saying that the Arabian peninsula, as the holy site of Islam, should be reserved to Muslims," Abu-Rabi' said.

Both Sunni and Shiite Muslims are troubled by "an 'infidel' force trampling on holy Muslim territory," Braswell concurred. "We have gone to the heartland of their religion."

For both branches of Islam, the Saudi Arabian city of Mecca is the focus of the pilgrimage, one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Every physically and financially able Muslim is commanded to journey there at least once in his or her lifetime. Even today, no non-Muslim is permitted to visit the city.

The Saudi Arabian city of Medina is another key Islamic site. The Prophet Muhammad reported his first revelations, gained his first followers, built his first mosque, and was buried there.

For Shiites -- the minority branch of Islam encompassing about 15 percent of the world's Muslims -- the Iraqi city of Karbala near Baghdad also is a key pilgrimage site, Braswell said.

For Middle East Christians, tension abounds in a clash between a U.S.-led coalition and Saddam's troops, said David Goodenough, a Cyprus-based consultant to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

Many branches of Middle East Christianity existed centuries before the U.S. came into being. But Muslims tend to link the region's Christians, who comprise about 7 percent of all Arabs, "with the kind of power base that can gather this kind of force" to subdue Iraq, Goodenough said. Muslims even link Arab believers with President Bush when he says he is a Christian who prays.

Such linkage "is not an academic issue in the Middle East," Goodenough said. "It's a part of life in the Middle East" and -- for Christians in the region -- it "makes life very, very precarious."

--30--

Burgeoning Muslim world remains
stubborn evangelistic challenge

By Art Toalston

N. FMB

Baptist Press
1/28/91

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The number of people praying to the Allah of Islam is increasing faster than the number praying to God in the name of Jesus.

Islam became the fastest-growing of the world's major religions long before the Arab oil states jolted the world by flexing their economic muscle, long before the Ayatollah Khomeini routed the Shah of Iran, and long before Iraq invaded its tiny oil-rich neighbor, Kuwait.

Muslim populations have climbed into the millions in countries as far removed from the Middle East as Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, China, the Soviet Union and India.

Of the world's 5.3 billion people, nearly 1 billion now are Muslims.

Since the turn of the century, Islam has soared 468 percent worldwide, with high birthrates accounting for much growth, missions researcher David Barrett said. Christianity has grown by 315 percent since 1900, he said.

--more--

Further Muslim growth is certain. Muslims comprise the majority in some 40 countries -- and they are increasing eight times faster than the populations of such developed countries as the United States, according to the Population Reference Bureau, which monitors population trends.

While communism lost a grip on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe within a few decades, Islam's strength is buttressed by fundamentalist movements advocating strict adherence to the faith, centuries of tradition, eras of triumph and times of perseverance. These factors fuel Islam's predominant Sunni branch worldwide, Shiite branch that rules Iran and more than 75 sects.

From its earliest days, Islam aimed to grow. Within 100 years after its revered apostle, Muhammad, died in 632 A.D., Muslim warriors had claimed not only the Middle East but an empire stretching from Spain into parts of India and China, extending 4,500 miles wide and 1,000 miles deep.

Within several hundred years, merchants had carried Islam to east and west Africa, Indonesia and other parts of Asia. And Sufi missionaries -- members of Muslim religious orders committed to deep piety -- made converts in other regions now in the Soviet Union and China and below Africa's Sahara Desert.

Christian researchers now count some 1.3 billion people as "unevangelized" -- never having heard in a clear way how to place their faith in Christ. Muslims comprise as many as 70 percent of the world's unevangelized people.

With mission workers making greater use of modern research methods and computer technology, new approaches to Muslim evangelism are at hand.

At the forefront are nonresidential missionaries, who seek avenues of witness to a country, city or language group beyond reach of traditional methods, often because of restrictions against or animosity toward Christians.

Nonresidential missionaries specialize in a specific Muslim culture, rather than a textbook approach to Muslim beliefs. They typically start by studying the target population, from language to customs and beliefs. Some peoples may seem to be Muslim yet also embrace various ancient animistic beliefs. Nonresidential missionaries will network with other Christians focusing on the target population, perhaps lobbying Bible societies to make Scriptures available or initiating gospel broadcasts in the language.

The advent of the nonresidential missionary, however, does not signal the end to decades of direct ministries to Muslims.

Southern Baptist workers in the Middle East, for example, help Arab Baptists produce evangelistic broadcasts, books, tracts and discipleship materials. They help correspond with people who write for counsel, prayer and Bibles in Arabic. They are on faculties of several Baptist schools.

"Muslims are sometimes tolerant, sometimes hostile," said Dale Thorne, who directs Southern Baptist work in the Middle East and heavily Muslim north Africa. "Differing attitudes call for differing strategies in the attempt to give a meaningful and challenging witness to the message of Christ."

Muslims experience the same anxieties as everyone else. "Our present world of Islam is a world of problems, some simple and some very intricate and complex," Inamullah Khan, secretary-general of the Pakistan-based Muslim World League, was quoted as saying in the organization's journal.

Among the tensions Khan cited: hundreds of thousands of Palestinians made refugees by the state of Israel and the oppression millions of Muslims feel in countries where they are in the minority.

Such problems are but a few of the challenges facing Christian workers who yearn to share the gospel with Muslims.

"Islam challenges the very heart of Christianity in denying the deity of Christ," said Pete Dunn, a Southern Baptist media worker in the Middle East. Muslims also believe that someone other than Christ died on the cross and that the Koran has superseded the Bible as God's authoritative word to mankind.

The death and destruction so-called Christian crusaders inflicted on Muslims centuries ago still fuel friction between the two faiths. "The tragedy of the 'Christian' Crusades is a historical blight on Christianity that Muslim historians keep alive for each succeeding generation," said Finlay Graham, Southern Baptist Middle East missionary from 1947 to 1986.

Christians also must know how Islam insulates adherents through Sharia, an order and justice system based on the Koran. It addresses individual, community and national concerns, said Dwight Baker, missionary in the Middle East and India for 36 years. "If a person wants to know what to believe or do in almost any circumstance, Islam has a ready response," Baker said.

Muslims know an open commitment to Christ will bring harsh resistance from relatives and the community. Anyone who leaves Islam breaks "the most sacred ties of family, tribe, nation," Graham noted, "and brings upon himself social ostracism, being branded henceforth as a traitor. Freedom of religion is an idea foreign to Islam." For instance, a Muslim man in Kenya states, "I have no son," to anyone who asks about his son who dared to believe in Christ.

Christians in the Middle East as well as Asia and Africa have endured burning, vandalism or defacing of their churches and sometimes their houses. Missionaries in the Middle East know their phones may be monitored and their mail censored and that the authorities keep files on them.

The number of new missionaries venturing to Muslim lands is "but a trickle," Finlay Graham added, compared to those intent on serving elsewhere.

And now Christians in Islamic nations must face the potential backlash of Muslim anger over the war to eject Iraq from Kuwait.

Meanwhile, an untold number of Muslims actively propagate their faith. Some are Saudi Arabian businessmen helping to finance shipment of 1.6 million Korans into the Soviet Union or construct high-power Islamic radio stations in Europe and the Middle East. Several thousand are full-time missionaries in more than 80 countries sent out by the Ahmadiyah Islamic sect based in India.

Jerry Rankin, who directs Southern Baptist work in southern Asia and the Pacific, recalls going to Indonesia as a missionary in 1970, bolstered by his study of world religions and certain he could "argue religion with any Muslims and convince them of the truth of Christianity."

In Indonesia, he encountered Muslims unwilling to budge in their beliefs. The experience sent Rankin into solitary prayer, fasting and Scripture study.

"I came to realize we were there -- the only missionaries among 5.5 million people on the eastern end of Java -- because the only way for Jesus Christ to ... be made known to these people was through his incarnational presence in my life," Rankin said. Reading the Book of Acts reminded him early Christians "simply made Jesus Christ known in a positive witness."

"I just got out in the marketplace, on the streets," Rankin says. People asked who he was and why he was there. The chats yielded opportunities to mention his faith in Jesus and his desire to share that life-changing experience with others. Some people invited him to their homes for a visit. Friendships grew. "It just defies explanation, but people began to be saved."

In many cases, Muslims will ponder a Christian's sincere witness. Some, ultimately, will embrace Christ despite the storm over a break from Islam in a family and community.

--more--

"Islam is a challenge," acknowledged Frances Fuller, a Southern Baptist publications worker in the Middle East, "but it's not the enemy."

Satan is "the enemy competing with us for the souls of men," Fuller said. "The lost are his victims. Could Islamic renewal be God's way of making us notice these people who were lost long before they scared us?"

--30--

Craig Bird, correspondent for Africa, contributed to this story.

Islam growing
rapidly in Europe

By Mike Creswell

NCMB

Baptist Press
1/28/91

BRUSSELS, Belgium (BP)--Muslims are growing rapidly throughout Western Europe, and feeble Christian churches so far have been unable to respond.

Estimates of the number of Muslims in the region range from 6 million to 12 million people. The Geographical Society of Great Britain puts the number of Muslims or those coming from Islamic cultures at about 7.5 million.

Most immigrants from north Africa, the Middle East or Asia came legally -- many as temporary workers who stayed. European nations have toughened laws, but illegal immigration also continues. And high birthrates among Muslim immigrants will fuel rapid Muslim growth in Europe for years, experts say.

Already France's Muslim population, estimated at 2 million, is the second-largest faith group in the country after Catholicism. Muslims far outnumber Catholics who attend church regularly. In parts of southern France the populace exceeds 25 percent Muslim. In England, more than 1.2 million Muslims make Islam the third-largest faith group after Anglicans and Catholics.

Often funded by oil-rich Middle Eastern nations like Saudi Arabia, Muslims have built hundreds of mosques across the continent. Mosques in England exceed 1,500, British Muslims say. In London they have increased from two in 1970 to 400. In Brussels, Belgium, the city's principal mosque sits a few blocks from the European Community headquarters in the heart of the city.

Muslim immigrants tend to be poorer than other Europeans. But Muslim associations are springing up across Europe to win more political and economic clout. In England the first Islamic political party organized in 1989.

Many Europeans -- already upset about so many immigrants -- have had their attention drawn repeatedly to Islam's presence by several spectacular events, such as Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the ensuing Gulf war and the much-publicized Islamic death threats against British author Salman Rushdie for his novel, "The Satanic Verses."

In other events, the imam of the main mosque in Brussels was gunned down in 1989 in a professional killing. In France, disputes broke out over whether Muslim schoolgirls could wear their Muslim head scarves to school. In Lyon controversy raged over Muslim plans to build a new \$15 million mosque.

In the face of often brutal opposition, Muslims have campaigned for -- and in some areas won -- the right to have their religion taught to their students in public schools and to have approved foods served to them in school dining halls. In short, Muslims are settling in for long-term residence.

Across Europe, right-wing political parties have taken up the issue of immigrants as one of their causes. Some call for expulsion of immigrants.

Although relatively few Europeans have converted to Islam, the number is growing, according to Bill Wagner, consultant for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board on evangelism and church growth. And Muslims have targeted Europe as one of their key areas of outreach to non-Muslims.

--more--

Stronger Muslim nations send missionary assistance to weaker brothers in Europe. For example, hundreds of imams, or religious leaders, visit immigrants from Turkey each year during Ramadan, a key Muslim holy time.

Still, adherence to Islam weakens among second-generation Muslims, said Robert Somerville, president of the French Baptist Federation. Citing a sociological study, he said that while about half of first-generation Muslims say their daily prayers as demanded by the faith, only 3 percent of their children do. About 45 percent of first-generation parents read the Koran, Islam's holy book, but only about 13 percent of their children do.

But Europe is a fertile mission field for committed Muslims. Unlike Muslim growth in the United States, where Christian groups have both numbers and influence, Muslim growth in Europe is taking place in a virtual spiritual vacuum. "The worldwide body of Christ needs to discard the myth that Europe is a Christian continent," writes researcher Dudley Woodberry, professor of Islamic studies at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif.

Most Christians in Europe are Christian in name only because their name is carried on state church rolls. Evangelicals generally are so weak they have their hands full trying to reach secular-minded Europeans.

In many areas white Europeans and their churches have moved out of areas settled by immigrants. Many abandoned church buildings are now Islamic mosques, including the former church of William Carey, the English missionary who launched the modern Christian missionary era through his work in India.

European Muslims widely outnumber evangelical Christians. Cathedrals abound in Europe, but Muslims even outnumber practicing Catholics. An uneasy mix of zealous Muslims with Western Europe's weak evangelical presence, ubiquitous secularism and watered-down, waning Catholicism has drastically changed some neighborhoods as well as the texture of the entire region.

Still, some mission groups and some German churches have reached out to Muslims. As a result more Turkish Christians live in Germany than Turkey, said R. Max Kershaw of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.

But because of their own needs, Baptists only now are realizing the importance of Muslim ministry, Wagner said. "World events such as the Gulf crisis have made European Baptists rethink their mission to Muslims."

The most important fact for Southern Baptists to know about Islam in Europe, Wagner said, is that Islam considers Europe its No. 1 mission field. "Many of the people I visit in Islamic countries tell me they feel called to be missionaries for Islam in Europe," he said.

Some workers said Southern Baptists need to understand the challenge Islam poses in Europe and do more to meet it.

"I find that more and more groups are becoming interested in Muslims," said an American missionary based in the Paris area. About a fourth of his congregation is comprised of converted Muslims.

"I notice more and more young people -- you see it in all the groups -- who're becoming interested in the Muslims. Maybe that's more from the Europeans than from the Americans. I don't know if the United States is completely aware of the need yet."

Islamic fundamentalism, which has moved the Muslim world towards more stringent beliefs, also has toughened possibilities for response to the gospel. A German mission agency reported the number of Muslims there who consider themselves "religious" has jumped from 58 to 70 percent.

"Many Muslims reject Islam, yet they don't accept the church either. They become secular like most of France is secular. Still, because of their religious roots, they're left with a spiritual hunger," said the associate pastor of a French church that has reached many Muslims for Christ.

"Conversion is an enriching experience" for those who accept Christ, he said. "For young people who come out of Islam, there's a new perspective on life -- another reality of life. They're liberated from the yoke of Islam."

A Southern Baptist worker in northern Europe said evangelism among Muslims must include entire families because people who leave Islam most often are renounced by their families and can face severe persecution.

The Foreign Mission Board has four missionaries assigned to Muslim work in Germany and is placing two in France. Also, several nonresidential missionaries in Europe work with Muslim people groups. A couple has moved to Belgium for a year-long survey of Muslim ministry possibilities.

Since much of this work is sensitive and fraught with danger, participants are reluctant to get publicity. In one case people at a conference on Muslim evangelism got threatening letters later. Christian workers with Muslims in one country moved because of harassment from Muslims.

In England the mission board is helping sponsor a school to train Iranians for evangelism in their own country. Half a dozen Iranians are studying now. Several Southern Baptist workers are teaching classes at the school.

The European Baptist Federation has had a Muslim Awareness Committee for six years and sponsors meetings to encourage outreach to Muslims by churches.

Only a few churches have been able to reach Muslims, however. One is a Baptist church in northern France. There, a combination of personal outreach by members, evangelism-minded leaders and spirited, open-format worship services have been effective in reaching Muslims.

Muslims can be reached for Christ, but usually only after long, patient friendship, said one evangelical missionary in France. On average, each conversion takes 15 months, he said. But he shortens that time by training converted Muslims to become evangelists themselves.

Visions often accompany Muslim conversions. An Iranian woman said she was injured in an explosion and was in a coma when two angels came to help her. She said she did not truly understand the experience until she arrived in England and a Christian woman told her about Christ.

When she attended her first church service, she wept. "The beauty of this church was love I'd never experienced. This was real love," she said. Now a Christian, she said she's "waiting for the Christian revolution in Iran."

Such stories of conversion are all too rare, say many who work with Muslims. Yet response is possible, especially among second-generation Muslims. And some Christian workers believe even some Muslims who recently arrived in Europe are open to the gospel.

Workers acknowledge that Muslim evangelism will be slow and potentially dangerous, even in the context of a continent where all evangelism is slow.

Until Christians set a higher priority on Muslim evangelism, it could hardly be otherwise.

--30--

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

DOM sees associations
as potential unifiers

By Pat Cole

N-CO
SATS

Baptist Press
1/28/91

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--The local Baptist association may in the future step up its role as "an agent of church unity," predicted a Louisiana director of missions.

--more--

"Much has been written about church problems today and very few answers have really proved successful," said A. Lawrence Clegg, director of missions for four Louisiana associations. "Look for the association to take an increasing role working for church unity."

Clegg addressed the 1991 annual director of missions consultation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. The conference, which focused on "Theological Perspectives on Issues Confronting Baptist Association," was sponsored by the seminary, Long Run Baptist Association and Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

The association's responsibility is not to "usurp the independence" of local congregations, Clegg cautioned. "It is rather to assist the church, as the church requests, in working out its difficulties in the best possible manner," he said.

Clegg qualified his observations, noting they were presented to "stir your thought processes rather than to make strong assertions that the association is irrevocably moving in a certain direction." Nevertheless, he offered several trends associations may encounter.

In addition to addressing conflict in local churches, Clegg said associations have "the potential to bring diverse forces back together" in the Southern Baptist Convention: "Remember that, in the last analysis, the association is the only 'grassroots' organization Southern Baptists have. The association really speaks for the people, is made up of the people, and has the heartbeat of the people."

Associations may become increasingly involved in local church planting as well as enlisting support for state, home and foreign missions, he added.

Directors of missions, he said, should sense they "are part of a great scheme of witness to the entire world."

Associational leaders have in recent years become convinced that they must serve churches through "contextualized consultations," said another speaker, James V. Hamblen, executive director of Pilot Mountain Baptist Association in Winston-Salem, N.C. Associational conferences and workshops, which became popular in the '50s and '60s, "did not meet all of the particular and peculiar needs of congregations," he said.

Associational staff members should take initiative to offer assistance to congregations, he said: "The executive level staff members should maintain some sort of organized visitation system by which the congregations come to know those staff members and feel comfortable in asking for help when the occasion arises." Staff members can benefit from training in consultative techniques, group dynamics/behavior and conflict management, he added.

G. Willis Bennett, provost at Southern Seminary, stressed the need for associations to confront social problems in their communities. "In every locality, there are issues within the community context that need to be addressed by the church which cannot be addressed apart from a collective effort," he said.

"Faulty theology" has caused churches to "individualize" ministries rather than unite to tackle community problems, Bennett said:

"We need a theology that causes us to recognize that God has created life to be experienced within community. We need a theology that recognizes that within community people belong to each other and their lives are intertwined. It is within community, as well as within families and churches, that people love, hurt, serve, abuse and bless each other every day. Life in community is a gift of God, and a gift which needs to be infused with love and high ethical ideals if God's intentions for the whole of the social order are ever to be realized."

Karen Smith, assistant professor of church history at Southern Seminary, called for associations to reclaim the "covenant relationship" which she said was emphasized in the earliest Baptist associations.

For early Baptists, "both the independence of the local church and inter-dependence or associationalism were to be embraced as significant features of Baptist ecclesiology," she said.

Associations built their fellowship on "covenant commitment based on the call of Christ, voluntary associations and mutual agreement rather than strict doctrinal conformity," Smith said.

--30--

Whitehead temporarily
three-quarters time at CLC

By Louis Moore

N-CO
CLC

Baptist Press
1/28/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission's executive committee has approved a request from the commission's general counsel, Michael K. Whitehead, to reduce his status temporarily from full-time to three-quarters time in order for him to return for personal reasons to his previous residence in Kansas City, Mo.

The initial approval of this arrangement is for a six-month period and will be reviewed at that time. The action was effective Jan. 15. Whitehead told the CLC's executive committee the unexpected death in late December of his former law partner, John Crews, created financial, legal and personal complications that require his presence in Kansas City. From 1983 until 1990 Whitehead and Crews were associated in the law firm of Crews, Smart, Whitehead & Waits.

"We are disappointed, of course, that the tragic death of Michael's former law partner necessitates his temporary return to Kansas City," said CLC Executive Director Richard Land. "We are confident that Michael will be able to continue to fulfill his responsibilities to the commission during this interim period. Both Michael and the commission are committed to the resumption of his duties on a permanent, full-time basis in Washington as soon as possible."

--30--

Video brochure introduces
newcomers to church

By Sarah Zimmerman

F-AMBS

Baptist Press
1/28/91

ATLANTA (BP)--A high-tech version of an age-old visitation tool creates many people's first impression of Heritage Baptist Church.

Bob Bullis, pastor of the Suwanee, Ga., church, uses "video visitation" to introduce newcomers to the mission congregation northeast of Atlanta.

The video is a 10-minute VCR tape which prospects can view at home. It shows episodes of the church life and concludes with members' testimonies about why they attend Heritage.

"This is a non-threatening way of introducing people to our church," Bullis says. It also gives him two opportunities to visit prospects.

Primarily, Bullis takes the video to people who are new to the community, getting names and addresses from a monthly newcomers list. He visits prospects, asks if he can leave the video, and returns a week or more later to pick up the video.

"The tape sometimes sparks a family discussion about where they should be in church," Bullis says. "When we follow-up, they're prepared for a church visit."

Heritage is a mission of First Baptist Church of Buford, Ga. It is in a growing area sprinkled with small farms, mobile homes, new housing additions and urban development. Many newcomers are from the northern United States and never have heard of Southern Baptists, Bullis says. They are typically Catholic, Lutheran or Presbyterian.

Baptisms shown on the video are the first baptisms by immersion many non-Baptists have seen, the pastor says. Prospects often question the scene when Bullis returns for the tape.

--more--

That gives Bullis a chance to share his testimony. He was raised as a Methodist in Maryland. He says the first time he saw a baptism in a Baptist church, "I knew I'd never done that," and it led to his profession of faith.

Some people refuse to take the tape, but about 80 percent of the people watch it, if only to satisfy their curiosity. "If it continues to open doors, I'll continue to use it," says the graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Bullis said he got the idea for a video brochure from the advertising campaign for "Here's Hope" revivals sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in 1990. He was told it would cost \$1,000 a minute to produce the video, but with a professional producer donating his time and Bullis writing the script, the total cost was about \$3,000 for 20 tapes.

It was imperative to Bullis that the tape be first-class. "We didn't want the church image to be ruined by a poor tape," he says.

"People watch well-done movies at their home, and we want them to know that Christianity isn't second-best."

A professional crew came to the church three times to film scenes from Vacation Bible School, Sunday morning services and Wednesday night programs.

The background music for the video is "The Mission" sung by Steve Green. Bullis says the copyright agreement the church received for the music is good for two years, but he hopes the church grows so quickly the tape is obsolete before the copyright permission expires.

--30--

(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press