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April 25, 1991

91-63

PAC affirms merger with
Christian Life Commission

By Tom Strobe

WASHINGTON (BP)--Members of the Southern Baptist Public Affairs Committee, meeting possibly for the last time, endorsed their dissolution as a separate entity during their semi-annual meeting April 18 and 19 in Washington.

The PAC unanimously voted to affirm the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee's decision to merge the committee into the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. In its resolution, the PAC also "strongly recommended" the Southern Baptist Convention approve the action at its annual meeting in June in Atlanta.

Sam Currin of Raleigh, N.C., told other committee members before the vote, while some had expressed reservations about the merger he believed they "should go out united."

The SBC Executive Committee voted at its meeting in February for the merger and for the transfer of the PAC's proposed budget of \$32,500 to the Christian Life Commission. In March, trustees of the CLC approved changes to the commission's charter clearing the way for the merger.

If approved at the 1991 SBC meeting, nine at-large PAC members would become trustees of the CLC. They would serve until their eligibility is ended, enabling those who qualify to complete a second four-year term.

When all former PAC members have completed their eligibility, their positions on the CLC board would be eliminated. Thus, the CLC would revert to its normal number of trustees, now 32, by 1998 after temporarily increasing to 41.

The action will reduce from three to two the number of organizations with SBC connections that address religious liberty concerns. The SBC added a religious liberty assignment to the CLC's program statement in 1990. The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs also deals with church-state issues.

One of the responsibilities of the PAC, which was formed in 1987, is to act as the SBC's representative to the Baptist Joint Committee. Under the proposed merger, CLC trustees will determine which 11 members serve on the BJC.

CLC Executive Director Richard D. Land, a nonvoting member of the PAC, told the committee it was the consensus of the CLC's executive committee that the remaining PAC members who so desired would be among the 11 representatives to the BJC. He also said if the convention approves the merger this course would be recommended to the commission in September.

In other business, the PAC selected Tim and Beverly LaHaye as joint recipients of its 1991 Religious Liberty Award. Tim LaHaye, a well-known author, is president of Family Life Ministries and associate pastor of Montrose Baptist Church in Rockville, Md. Beverly LaHaye, also an author, is president of Concerned Women for America.

PAC members voted to recommend to the CLC it continue the presentation of the Religious Liberty Award and the publication of Southern Baptist Public Affairs, the committee's quarterly magazine.

They also adopted a resolution commending Albert Lee Smith for two years of service as chairman. Smith and Currin completed their service on the PAC at the meeting.

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Three lawyers who appeared at the meeting expressed their viewpoints on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the proposed legislative remedy to the Employment Division v. Smith decision of April 17, 1990. In its ruling, the Supreme Court rejected a 28-year-old test that required the government to show a "compelling state interest" in order to overrule free exercise of religion claims.

Sam Ericsson, executive director of the Christian Legal Society, said the RFRA is necessary because it will "roll back the law to where it was April 16, 1990." He said the legislation is in danger because "people are now trying to protect their respective agendas." Ericsson apparently was referring to groups with pro-life concerns who fear the bill might aid those who say abortion is a religious right.

Mark Troobnick of Concerned Women for America said the "bill does not give a new right to abortion." Although it has been reported CWA has withdrawn from support of the RFRA, Troobnick said such a decision has not been finalized.

During a question-and-answer session, Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Christian Life Commission, said pro-life concerns about the RFRA are legitimate. He said groups such as the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights support the RFRA and assert it would strengthen freedom to abort.

The CLC is seeking ways to neutralize any claim to a right to abortion that might result from the present proposal, Land said, adding, the CLC is negotiating with various groups in an attempt to resolve the current impasse.

"We're not going to sacrifice religious liberty" or the rights of unborn children, Whitehead said.

In his speech Ericsson said he believes the state of religious liberty in America was much better in 1990 than in 1980. He pointed to such factors as the growing Christian-school and home-school movements as well as the legality of equal access, which provides for student-initiated, student-led worship on college and high school campuses. The Equal Access Act, which Ericsson said was written "over pizza" at the CLS office, is succeeding. According to USA Today, 7,000 of the country's 24,000 public high schools have Bible clubs or groups as a result of equal access, he said.

"I don't think the Lord wants a prayer amendment, because I don't think the Lord wants teacher-led devotional exercises ... I believe, reading my Bible, that the only person who can lead in worship in a way that God honors the worship is somebody who is related to the Father ...," Ericsson said.

"For us to go down the path of a prayer amendment is both unbiblical, and I think it's unwise constitutionally," he said.

Since 1964, a school prayer amendment has been introduced "for political reasons" every presidential election year with the exception of 1988, Ericsson said.

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SSB presidential search
committee interviewing

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
4/28/91

SHREVEPORT, La. (BP)--The 10-member presidential search committee for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board is conducting interviews but the chairman says a recommendation is "not impossible by the Atlanta SBC meeting but probably unlikely."

Wayne Dubose, search committee chairman and pastor of Summer Grove Baptist Church in Shreveport, La., told Baptist Press the committee met two days this week and is periodically holding interviews in different locations. Dubose, however, declined to elaborate on how many were being interviewed or where, other than usually at airport locations easily accessible for the committee members, or how many recommendations had been received.

Although the chairman and committee appear to be extremely cautious about their search, a Nashville newspaper published a story April 23 indicating former SBC president Jerry Vines had recommended Paige Patterson, head of Criswell Bible College in Dallas.

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Ray Waddle, religion editor of The Tennessean, obtained a copy of the letter Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., wrote to the search committee recommending Patterson.

Vines told Baptist Press he did recommend Patterson, calling him a knowledgeable churchman and effective administrator who understands publishing and doesn't shy away from controversy.

"I do not believe anyone should be selected as president of the Sunday School Board who would not be controversial," Vines wrote in the letter.

Dubose affirmed Patterson had been recommended but declined to elaborate on the recommendation. He said there had been a number of "repeating recommendations" but the committee is interviewing based on the criteria developed by the committee and the persons' qualifications to run a large business enterprise.

"We have no deadline," Dubose said. "We want the best man for the job. We are sensitive to where the denomination is right now but we also want to exercise real wisdom in our search."

Last week Dubose met with employees of the Sunday School Board and invited them to give input to the committee. He said 1,500 forms were left for employees to fill out and send to the committee. The SSB has about 1,800 employees.

Dubose said the committee also would make a report to the SSB trustees' executive committee, meeting this week in Nashville.

The search committee will nominate a person to succeed Lloyd Elder who turned in his resignation as board president in January following a number of disagreements with the trustees.

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Muslim-Christian battle
kills 80 in Nigeria

Baptist Press
4/25/91

LAGOS, Nigeria (BP)--Renewed violence between Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria has killed at least 80 people, according to witnesses.

The worst confrontation occurred April 23 in the city of Bauchi, reported the Associated Press. A dozen churches were set afire, the report said. Southern Baptist missionaries in Nigeria said a Baptist church and parsonage were burned in Bauchi.

Bauchi is near Jos, where Baptists have significant work, and Gombe, where Southern Baptist missionaries Wiley and Geneva Faw live. The Faws, both of Waynesburg, Ky., were reported to be safe at home April 24.

Witnesses said thousands of Christians now are trying to flee the Muslim-dominated north to southern Nigeria, where more Christians live.

The latest fighting reportedly started the previous week in a town near Bauchi over whether Christians and Muslims should use the same slaughterhouse. Security forces later broke up Muslim riots in the region, and the military governor declared a dusk-to-dawn curfew after the April 23 deaths.

Muslim attacks on Christians are not new to northern Nigeria. Thirteen people were killed and numerous Christian churches were burned in 1987, including 13 Baptist churches. Five Baptist pastors lost their homes. Several Muslim mosques also were burned.

Muslim-Christian tensions reportedly have increased in Nigeria, Africa's most crowded country, as more young people have joined fundamentalist Muslim groups that demand obedience to strict Muslim law by all citizens.

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Vision can unite SBC,
Lewis tells WMC leadership

By Steve Barber

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--If Southern Baptists are unable to "rekindle the fire" of a missions vision, then "our denomination is dead," Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis told state World Missions Conference leaders at their biennial meeting, April 18-19.

"God is waiting to do a mighty thing among Southern Baptists," Lewis said. "What's going to do it? Not another Peace Committee. We just need to get our mind, heart, and soul on reaching this nation and world for Jesus Christ and be one in this obsession: We are going to put missions in first place in all we seek to do. This will unify, excite, and ignite us."

Lewis told the conferees, who administer WMCs in their state conventions, they would "do as much to achieve that goal as anyone I know, anywhere."

He called their work to "proclaim the missions cause and kindle the fire of missions vision" in their states to be "the greatest work I know of in this earth."

James N. Griffith, executive director-treasurer of the Georgia Baptist Convention, also praised the work of WMCs in the face of "a terrible scarcity of knowledge" about Southern Baptist missions efforts.

"I know of one 30-year-old leader in a growing church in the Atlanta area who asked me, 'Why don't we just pay off the Cooperative Program?'," Griffith said. "It is an urgent necessity for all of us to magnify the vision of a world in terrible need."

"Magnify Your Missions Vision" was introduced as the new theme for World Missions Conferences at the Orlando meetings, as were new materials for use by state leadership, associational staff, and local churches in planning and promoting the conferences.

WMCs are associational missions education events that bring Southern Baptist missionaries into Southern Baptist churches to raise awareness and understanding of missions. Every church hears two foreign missionaries, two home missionaries, and one state or associational missionary.

State WMC directors elected Reggie Quimby, associate director of Brotherhood for the Alabama Baptist State Convention, their representative on the WMC administrative council. Bobby Stafford, director of associational development for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, was elected alternate.

Special presentations at the conference included the Bernard King Award, recognizing outstanding work in promotion of WMCs in an "old line" Southern Baptist state, to the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

The Ella Keller Award, for work in promoting WMCs in a new work state convention, was presented to the Alaska Baptist Convention.

World Mission Conferences are directed by the Brotherhood Commission in cooperation with the Home Mission Board, the Foreign Mission Board, and Woman's Missionary Union.

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Land testifies in D.C. on
National Endowment for the Arts

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
4/25/91

WASHINGTON (BP)--Richard D. Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, told a congressional subcommittee it must act to reform the National Endowment for the Arts "before the outrage escalates to the point that you will be forced to abolish it."

The Christian Life Commission would prefer the NEA be reformed rather than abolished, thereby salvaging the endowment's positive contributions, said Land, testifying April 18 before the Interior Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations.

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Reform should include congressional standards that limit what the NEA can fund and President Bush's replacement of John Frohnmayer as chairman with a person who is "sensitive to the concerns of millions of evangelical Christians" and other concerned citizens, Land said. He told the subcommittee the CLC's most recent request for the president to remove Frohnmayer came March 4.

Southern Baptists and other evangelicals have been "extraordinarily patient" during the continuing revelation over the last two years of NEA grants for "pornographic, sacrilegious, offensive and indecent 'art,'" Land said.

"While we have been patient, there is a time for good manners to cease," Land said. "That time has come. Our patience is at an end. Unless Congress and the Bush administration reform the NEA, we will be forced to join the chorus of outraged Americans who have said, 'Enough is enough! Abolish the NEA.'"

Land was among five witnesses who criticized the endowment's funding practices. The other four critics, including Phyllis Schlafly of Eagle Forum and Beverly LaHaye of Concerned Women for America, called for abolition of the NEA.

Among the recent examples of NEA "abuses," Land said, are:

-- A \$12,000 grant made this year to Frameline to support the 1991 San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival;

-- A \$25,000 grant for "Poison," a new movie that includes scenes of homosexual intercourse and rape, made in 1990. Todd Haynes, a professing homosexual who wrote and directed the film, told The Independent, a London newspaper, that "Poison," includes "humiliation, abuse, unabashed homoeroticism and a certain level of what I suppose you'd call masochism," Land said;

-- A \$15,000 grant for "No Trace of the Blonde," a stage performance to be written by Holly Hughes, who describes herself as an "openly lesbian performance artist," made in 1991. Hughes told Baptist Press in an earlier interview she planned to use the grant to discuss lesbian themes. The grant also "may violate the First Amendment since it uses federal funds to promote the religion of Santeria and voodoo, Land said." Santeria is an Afro-Cuban cult that includes animal sacrifice in its rituals.

The decency provision in the 1990 congressional reauthorization of NEA funding was a failure, Land said. Congress' directive to the chairman to make sure grants consider "general standards of decency" is inadequate, Land said, because, among other reasons, "it seems to give greater freedom to the NEA to fund objectionable 'art' than the NEA had before its adoption."

John Buchanan Jr., policy chairman of People for the American Way Action Fund, testified prior to Land. Criticisms of the NEA by the "Religious Right" represented a "transparent caricature" and "that which is atypical has been portrayed as typical," Buchanan said.

Buchanan, an ordained Southern Baptist minister, used as one of three examples a letter to Congress he said "charged erroneously that a 1991 grant would be used 'to produce a sexually explicit performance which will include two twelve-year-old girls.' The critic further claimed this may represent a 'possible violation of federal law pertaining to minors.' These allegations were directly contradicted in a subsequent statement from the artist. The funded work has not been created yet and the grant proposal says nothing about children being used as actors."

His reference apparently was to a letter from Don Wildmon of the American Family Association concerning the grant for Hughes' "No Trace of the Blonde."

Portions of the grant application from Hughes were attached to his written testimony, Land pointed out to the subcommittee members present. A summary of the project description in the application says, "The work will be created for up to five performers with two pubescent girls, black and white, about 12 years old, as the main characters."

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Also attached to Land's testimony was a statement from Hughes in response to Wildmon's letter, which apparently was based on information from the Baptist Press article and the grant application. Hughes said she has no "intention of using actual 12-year-olds or adolescent actors in this project. These characters may be represented by myself with another actor, or by hand puppets, or in some other way."

"While Ms. Hughes now argues that adult actors or hand puppets will portray 12-year-old girls (the wording in the grant application seems to indicate otherwise), that hardly redeems the grant as worthy," Land said. "Even the portrayal of 12-year-olds in a performance dealing with explicit sexual themes is outrageous. ... the fact that the possible use of children appears to only have become an issue after we raised it demonstrates how morally bankrupt and corrupt the NEA screening process is."

After one critic's testimony, Rep. Bill Lowrey, R.-Calif., said he is "not sure that Congress has found" an appropriate way to deal with the abuses of the NEA.

The NEA needs to "exercise some judgment. That doesn't mean censorship or content restriction. It means judgment," added Rep. Norman Dicks, D.-Wash.

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Minority advisory committee
suggested by consultation

By Louis Moore

Baptist Press
4/25/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--Participants in a race relations consultation sponsored by the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission are asking SBC President Morris Chapman "prayerfully to consider appointing a multi-ethnic advisory committee to assist him and/or the Committee on Nominations to help achieve" the goal of "significant (more than token) multi-ethnic representation" on SBC boards and professional staffs.

Such a committee would help the 15-million-member denomination achieve racial and ethnic balance in its power structures, said consultation participants. During the meeting April 22-23 in Nashville various participants pointed out what they believe is a lack of blacks and ethnics in key positions within the SBC.

Former Convention President Jerry Vines told the consultation he and other recent convention presidents have deliberately sought minorities to fill SBC leadership positions but found it difficult to obtain names of qualified candidates. Nevertheless, he said he believes an examination of the past 25 years of SBC presidential appointments would show a marked increase in the number of ethnics and blacks appointed within the past decade.

Vines, who attended the meeting as Chapman's representative, said he would suggest to Chapman he seriously consider appointing the proposed multi-ethnic and black advisory committee.

The group shied away from establishing precise numerical goals for minorities on SBC boards and professional staffs. At one point, however, Victor Davis of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board said he personally would like to see "one-third of the trustees of all our boards and agencies be from black and ethnic groups." His comment prompted Dan Moon of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission to say, "You sound like you're writing a fortune cookie."

The by-invitation consultation included 18 participants who spanned the rainbow of races and ethnic groups represented in the denomination today. Among the groups represented at the meeting were African-Americans, Anglo-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans and Native Americans. The meeting, chaired by Christian Life Commission Executive Director Richard Land, focused on setting goals for Southern Baptist race relations into the next century.

In other recommendations, the consultation:

-- Urged Chapman "prayerfully to consider convening a meeting of the presidents, or equivalent leaders, of all other Baptists conventions in the United States to address racism."

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This proposal was spearheaded by Jack Kwok of the Arkansas Baptist Convention who said Southern Baptists need to work more closely with the black Baptist denominations in this country.

-- Reaffirmed "our commitment as Southern Baptists to take the gospel to every person in the world regardless of racial/ethnic identity, and we call upon all Southern Baptists to commit ourselves to work for racial equality throughout our land."

-- Asked each agency of the convention to establish a mentorship program which would "develop ethnic and/or African-American persons for leadership positions."

Several participants said ethnic and black Southern Baptists with leadership skills need to be identified and encouraged through such a mentorship program to leadership roles in the denomination including those of trustees and elected convention leaders.

Timothy Johnson, who recently was elected first full-time black professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., said, SBC agencies should "set a goal of helping members of minority groups move from internship to mentorship to leadership."

-- Encouraged Southern Baptists to "make a deeper commitment to listen to other Southern Baptists and to discover together a greater appreciation for the diversity of the ethnic and racial heritage within our denomination."

-- Suggested the SBC "look with favor upon ethnic/African-American Southern Baptists meeting in individual groups" which would provide convention agencies opportunities "to focus their various programs to meet the needs of all Southern Baptists, including these groups."

-- Encouraged SBC mission agencies "to invest in ways to provide the means to meet the needs of congregations among whom there are economic limitations."

-- Suggested the Christian Life Commission "seriously consider holding periodic consultations which would discuss issues such as gender prejudice and other prejudice-related topics."

Other participants at the consultation were Helen Begaye, a Southern Baptist Sunday School Board consultant; Michael Cox of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board; Bob Fowler, pastor of Eastland Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas; Mike Lundy of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission; Dan Moon of the Brotherhood Commission; Margaret Perkins of Woman's Missionary Union; Oscar Romo of the Home Mission Board; Greg Sumii of the California Southern Baptist Convention; Simon H. Tsoi, pastor of First Chinese Baptist Church in Phoenix, Ariz.; and Christian Life Commission staffers Lamar Cooper, Mattie Lee Massey, Louis Moore and Robert Parham.

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Drama specialist's roles include fruit, founders

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press 4/25/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--Ev Robertson has traveled a diversified path since he premiered as a pumpkin in a first-grade play.

From fruit to founder, Robertson's love of drama and willingness to assist with the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's Centennial activities, frequently has cast him as J.M. Frost, the board's first chief executive.

Frost served from 1891 until 1893 -- only 18 months -- when he left the board to become pastor of First Baptist Church of Nashville. T.P. Bell was chief executive only three years before Frost returned to the position in 1896 and served until his death in 1916.

As a pumpkin, Robertson, senior drama specialist in the board's church recreation department, felt nervousness, but excitement when he played before the audience. As Frost in performances before employees, state convention leaders and members of First Baptist Church of Nashville, he adds to those emotions, enjoyment.

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While Robertson is too much of a professional to believe he is Frost when playing the part, he acknowledges the two have similar personality traits.

"Frost was very soft-spoken but firm in his beliefs. He was not a pulpit-pounding pulpiter. He was well-read, well-educated and a sensitive person," Robertson said.

"I think I am a soft-spoken person, which made it a bit easier for me to play the part. I am not an oratorical preacher. I am sensitive to where Frost was coming from because my personal lifestyle is more to seek to influence as opposed to seek to control."

Before playing Frost, Robertson read up on the board's founder to discover a little about his character traits. "I wanted to know more about him and find out what kind of man he was."

Frost's sensitivity and non-confrontational manner sometimes got him into trouble, Robertson believes.

"He was very sensitive to the people in opposition to the Sunday School Board being founded, to the point that he questioned whether his beliefs and need for a board were justified, especially when so many people were against it. But I don't believe he ever questioned the fact that God spoke to him regarding the board.

"Frost was strong and confident in his business dealings," Robertson continued, "but he could not handle direct confrontations that well. That is one of the reasons he brought in (T.P.) Bell (the board's second executive).

"He realized somebody needed to head up the board who could really put down effectively the people who were in opposition to it."

Another discovery of Robertson's during this year he has played Frost "about 15 times" is that some type of conflict is ever present in the Southern Baptist Convention.

"One of the things I have gained insight on is that our convention has had a lot of heated controversy. The convention itself began in great controversy in 1845," he said.

"Another thing I've discovered is that the autonomy of the local church can lead to conflict because all these separate entities are each wanting things done the way they want them done."

Additionally, Robertson has learned how to cut his "dress up" time by about two hours to 45 minutes. Before he agreed to play the part, "I thought I would be playing it a couple of times at the most.

"Previously, I was making all the beards each time I dressed, and it takes about two hours to make a good beard."

By playing Frost more frequently than expected, Robertson was able to talk the Sunday School Board into buying him a beard and purchasing rather than renting the period outfit.

"That has helped a lot."

Robertson said he believes he is playing an important role in revealing the history of the Sunday School Board to Southern Baptists.

"Drama has a way of making all stories interesting. People remember things they see and hear at a much better rate."

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* Soviet family enjoys
religious freedom

By Chip Alford

NASHVILLE (BP)--For Kirill and Mariyah Khadzi and their four sons, boarding an airplane in Moscow last October bound for the United States was "like stepping into a new world."

"Everyone was smiling at us, and they were very friendly," Khadzi said, referring to the crew of American pilots and stewardesses who brought a 747 loaded with Soviet political and religious refugees to the U.S. "It was a time of great joy for us."

A family of committed Baptists, the Khadzis decided to leave their home in the Soviet state of Moldavia after years of religious persecution at the hands of the Communist government. With the help of World Relief, an inter-denominational organization that finds sponsors for religious refugees, the Khadzis were relocated in Franklin, Tenn. First Baptist Church of Franklin is serving as their sponsor.

"We wanted to educate our children (about God)," Khadzi, who speaks little English, said through an interpreter. "The schools in the Soviet Union teach that there is no God and we did not want this for our children. We want our children to live their lives as believers. So, we prayed to God, 'Take us to America.'"

Capitalizing on their new religious freedom, the Khadzis already have become faithful members of First Baptist Church.

"They speak very little English, but that doesn't keep them from coming to church," said Ernest Mosley, chairman of the church's missions committee and executive vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

"They participate in everything -- Sunday school, worship services, discipleship training, Wednesday night meetings. They are here just about every time the door is open," added Mosley.

With the pain of closed church doors still fresh in their minds, the Khadzis can't understand why Christians would not take full advantage of every opportunity to worship God.

"The Communists started to prohibit the children from going to church," Khadzi said, recalling events in his home city of Bendery, Moldavia. "They said it was against the law. The KGB would stand at the entrance to the church, and when parents would try to take their kids in, they would turn them back. They said, 'If you want the kids in, we'll just close the whole church down.'"

The Soviet Christians began to meet in homes, Khadzi said, but the Soviet militia would often interrupt the services, confiscating any Bibles or religious literature.

"Sometimes they would take the leaders away to prison," Khadzi said, adding his wife's father spent six years in jail. Khadzi himself was imprisoned for 10 days because of his religious convictions.

The Khadzis said they are happy in their new home in Franklin, especially the four boys: Benjamin, 12; John, 10; Genardy, 8; and Kirill Jr., 7.

"We like America," said 12-year-old Benjamin. "The schools are very good and I have many new friends. I am picking up pretty good on English. We have a teacher that helps us."

Kirill and Mariyah also have English tutors, but mastering a new language has been difficult. "I've got to learn the language," Kirill said, explaining his eagerness to become independent. First Baptist Church is helping the family with rent and other expenses until they establish themselves.

Kirill is temporarily working at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board as an engineer's helper, and he hopes to secure permanent employment at the Nashville-based publishing house. "I have dreamed of doing work like this," he said.

While they are happy in their new church, the Khadzis have had to adjust to some cultural differences with their new Southern Baptist friends.

"In the Soviet Union we would never clap in church," said Khadzi. "It is super quiet during services because it is considered that we are in the house of prayer. And we would never sit down when we pray. We either stand or we are on our knees."

Services in Moldavian churches are usually longer than those in American churches, sometimes lasting four to five hours.

"If it was hot outside, it was hot inside, and if it was cold outside, it was cold inside. There were no comfortable and decorated buildings like we have here," he explained.

Christian women in Moldavia cover their heads with scarves and would never wear makeup or pants, Khadzi added.

"But these things don't really bother us," Kirill said, noting they are mostly cultural differences. "We are very thankful to be here. We say, thank you, First Baptist Church. Thank you, God."

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