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NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #75
Nashville, Tennessee 372
(615) 244-235
Herb Hollinger, Vice President
Fax (615) 742-8919
CompuServe ID# 70420.1

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 75248-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232
NASHVILLE Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

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91-72

NOTE TO EDITORS: This story contains information available as of noon Friday, May 10. At that time, discussion had begun on the constitution and bylaws. Further discussion and voting on this topic, as well as voting on mission endeavors, literature options, funding mechanisms and election of officers is scheduled for Saturday morning. Complete coverage will be available on Baptist Press Monday, May 13.

Moderates forming new group;
claim it's not new convention

By Mark Wingfield

U-20

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptist moderates started construction on a new house May 10 but repeatedly said it is just an addition to their old mansion, the Southern Baptist Convention.

In general assembly May 10, more than 5,000 people began discussions toward adopting a constitution and bylaws for an organization to be called Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. In sessions slated for May 11, the group was to finalize the constitution and bylaws as well as lay out blueprints for a world missions center, funding mechanism and church literature.

As of Friday morning's session, the proposal on funding a world missions center had been introduced, but not discussed or voted upon. Steering committee member Alan Neely, who presented the missions document, said the proposed \$507,295 budget would give 37 percent to home missions causes and 63 percent to foreign missions causes. Neely is professor at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, N.J.

The proposal calls for establishing a missions coordinating council that will select projects, screen personnel and train them for missionary assignments. A permanent director and location for the center will be determined later.

John Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church in Ashville, N.C., was expected to be nominated as moderator of the group. He would replace Daniel Vestal, pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta, who has been chairman of the interim steering committee of The Baptist Fellowship since last August.

Despite the fellowship's structure, speakers stressed their continued ties to the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Let me say it clearly," said Nancy Ammerman, interim steering committee member and associate professor of sociology of religion at Emory University in Atlanta. "Choosing to do something new with other Baptists does not mean we are choosing to leave the Southern Baptist Convention. Nor does it mean we are trying to form a new denomination."

Reading a statement from the interim steering committee, Walter Shurden said: "This does not require that we sever ties with the old Southern Baptist Convention. It does give us another mission delivery system, one more like our understanding of what it means to be Baptist and what it means to do gospel."

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Shurden, a church history professor at Mercer University in Macon, Ga., read the statement titled, "An Address to the Public from the Interim Steering Committee." In a later interview, Shurden said this statement, originally intended to be a preamble to the constitution, was written in a fashion similar to the public statement given in 1845 to explain the purpose of the constitution and bylaws of the Southern Baptist Convention. Shurden said he and Cecil Sherman, pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, were the primary writers of the statement.

Forming this new group is merely a confession there is a division within the SBC, the statement said. "To spend our time trying to reclaim a human institution is to make more of that institution than we ought to make. When we make more of the SBC than we ought, we risk falling into idolatry. Twelve years is too long to engage in political activity. We are called to higher purposes."

The statement from the interim steering committee offered an explanation for the proposed constitution and bylaws. It listed six areas where moderates differ with the conservatives who have gained control of the Southern Baptist Convention in the past 12 years:

1. Bible. "The Bible neither claims nor reveals inerrancy as a Christian teaching. Bible claims must be based on the Bible, not on human interpretations of the Bible," the statement said.

Inerrancy -- generally defined as the belief that the Bible is literally true in everything it says -- was the rallying cry for conservatives as they gained control of presidential appointive powers in the SBC.

2. Education. "Fundamentalists educate by indoctrination ... We seek to enlarge and build upon such truth as we have," the statement said.

3. Mission. "Fundamentalists make the mission assignment narrower than Jesus did. They allow their emphasis on direct evangelism to undercut other biblical ministries of mercy and justice. This narrowed definition of what a missionary ought to be and do is a contention between us," the statement said.

4. Pastor. "They argue the pastor should be the ruler of a congregation ... Our understanding of the role of the pastor is to be a servant/shepherd."

5. Women. The statement said conservatives generally believe women should be submissive to men in church leadership roles, but moderates believe women are "equally capable of dealing with sacred issues."

6. Church. Describing Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as "ecumenical" and "inclusive," the statement said: "We are eager to have fellowship with our brothers and sisters in the faith and to recognize their work for our Savior. We do not try to make them conform to us; we try to include them in our design for mission."

The proposed constitution and bylaws for Cooperative Baptist Fellowship say the purpose of the group is "to enable the people of God to carry out the Great Commission under the lordship of Jesus Christ, in a fellowship where every Christian exercises God's gifts and calling."

Those attending the general assembly were scheduled to adopt the constitution and bylaws Friday morning, May 10. However, after more than one hour of discussion with less than half the document read, further discussion and voting was postponed until the next morning.

The major amendment approved in Friday's discussion was to change the name of the organization. The interim steering committee had recommended naming the group "United Baptist Fellowship."

Due to concerns the fellowship would be confused with United Baptists in some areas of the United States, the alternate name was chosen.

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Membership in the fellowship is defined by financial contribution, although no minimum contribution is stated. A portion of the bylaws stating that individuals, churches and institutions giving \$1,000 or more will be designated "founding members," while those giving \$100 or more will be designated "sustaining members" was deleted.

The proposed documents call for the group to be governed by a moderator, moderator-elect and recorder who will serve with a 79-member coordinating council. The moderator may serve only one term, and members of the coordinating council will serve three-year terms.

The proposed bylaws also call for an executive committee to conduct business between the quarterly meetings of the coordinating council. The executive committee will be composed of the fellowship's officers, heads of standing committees and the immediate past moderator.

Ironically, the proposed constitution and bylaws give the coordinating council and executive committee greater powers than the SBC Executive Committee has. The power of the SBC Executive Committee and SBC president has been a persistent thorn in the flesh of SBC moderates for the past 12 years.

In addition to customary responsibilities, the fellowship's coordinating council would have authority to amend the bylaws without a vote of the general assembly. Additionally, the coordinating council is proposed to be a self-perpetuating board, with a nominating committee composed strictly of current members of the coordinating council.

The proposed constitution calls for members of the coordinating council to be elected according to a formula established by states and regions. Texas would have the most representatives with a total of six. Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia each would have five. Ten other states would have three or four representatives each, while the remaining states would be grouped in regional clusters with three representatives each.

Also, the proposed constitution includes a "sunset clause," calling for the constitution to expire at the close of the general assembly in 1993 unless reaffirmed by a majority vote of those in attendance.

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(Sarah Zimmerman and Linda Lawson also contributed to this story.)

Vestal denies Fellowship
constitutes new convention

By Linda Lawson

N-CD

Baptist Press
5/10/91

ATLANTA (BP)--Saying he plans to attend the June 4-6 Southern Baptist Convention meeting as an elected messenger, Daniel Vestal steadfastly denied formation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship constitutes a new convention.

However, Vestal, moderator of the interim steering committee of The Baptist Fellowship, said during a May 10 news conference the new organization of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship provides him and other Southern Baptist moderates a channel for participating in cooperative missions.

The constitution and bylaws of the new group were expected to be adopted May 11 in the concluding session of the convocation of the fellowship meeting at The Omni in Atlanta.

"I want to serve the Lord," said Vestal, pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta. "I can't do it in the SBC. Unless I'm willing to perpetuate their kind of control, I'm shut out. You can shut me out of the SBC, but you can't shut me out of serving Christ."

The constitution and bylaws of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship provide an organization and structure a way to receive funds, Vestal said, but since they do not provide for election of delegates or messengers from churches, the Fellowship is not a new convention, Vestal said.

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"I think we're still a fellowship, loosely knit," said Vestal. "We still love many of the institutions of Southern Baptists. We love what they represent and are doing. We have not abandoned those institutions. We still give a great deal."

He said about 200 churches have voted to channel funds through the Baptist Cooperative Missions Program, Inc., the funding mechanism of the fellowship. About \$1.5 million has been received and disbursed.

Vestal said attitudes among the steering committee of The Baptist Fellowship vary concerning a continuing relationship with the SBC.

"Some have not given up on reconciliation within the SBC. There is sentiment among some to disengage," he said.

Vestal said he envisions the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship building relationships with other Baptist bodies.

"My vision is we could provide for fellowship around ministry with all kinds of Baptist bodies in this country and around the world."

Walter Shurden, professor of church history at Mercer University in Macon, Ga., and a member of the interim steering committee, said openness, inclusiveness and an ecumenical spirit represent major differences between the fellowship and the Southern Baptist Convention.

He characterized formation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as "historic. I don't think this thing is going to fizzle."

Vestal, Shurden and Patricia Ayres, vice moderator of the interim steering committee from Houston, said the freedom to express opinions, raise questions about the proposed constitution and bylaws and offer amendments represented healthy diversity.

"This is the first time in 12 years some of these people have been to a meeting where they can talk. Granted, it creates chaos on the platform, but vive la chaos!"

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship provides leadership opportunities for women "to exercise their gifts, be affirmed and lead and instruct the rest of us," Ayres said.

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Iran feeding effort delayed;
Baptist physicians needed

By Art Toalston

N-FMB

Baptist Press
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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Already lacking funds, Southern Baptist relief work in the postwar Middle East now lacks volunteer physicians.

Meanwhile, the start of Southern Baptist feeding operations for Kurdish refugees in Iran was delayed May 9 by the failure of an engine of a cargo plane carrying equipment and volunteers.

One of the C-130 cargo plane's four engines failed about two hours after the plane left London carrying equipment for two large outdoor kitchens, six Southern Baptist disaster relief volunteers, a journalist and a photographer. The plane continued flying to Cyprus, arriving there about five hours later.

The engine problem means a delay of four or five days in opening outdoor feeding stations for Kurds in Iran, said Tim Brendle, director of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's Persian Gulf Response unit.

The ministry that owns and operates the aircraft, LeSEA Global Feed the Hungry in South Bend, Ind., planned to fly it to Portugal May 11 for a replacement engine, Brendle said. The possibility of a temporary substitute cargo plane also was being explored.

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The C-130 was to fly from Cyprus to Iran May 10 to launch a feeding operation in a Kurdish refugee camp near the city of Sanandaj, about 300 miles west of Tehran and 180 miles northeast of Baghdad. A subsequent flight was scheduled for the week of May 13 to open a second feeding station in Iran.

Four feeding operations originally had been planned, but plans now call for deployment of the equipment and volunteers at two sites, each with about 50,000 refugees among the 1.5 million Kurds in Iran. The feeding effort is a joint outreach by the Iranian Christian Fellowship of London, evangelical congregations in several Iranian cities, Southern Baptists, and LeSEA.

No problems occurred during the C-130's initial run May 5 to Turkey to deliver medical supplies for Kurdish refugee care in Iraq. LeSEA purchased the 30-year-old cargo plane six months ago and upgraded it to federal standards at a cost of about \$2 million.

The relief effort in Iraq is being organized by Global Partners of London and involves Southern Baptists and MAP International, a health ministry based in Brunswick, Ga.

But a shortfall of physicians is affecting Global Partners' ability to offer medical help to Kurds returning to northern Iraq. Four Southern Baptist physicians have assisted in relief work and three more currently are scheduled for short-term work there. But a continuous supply of volunteer physicians is needed, each committed for three or four weeks, according to Alvinia Michalec, Foreign Mission Board medical volunteer enlistment assistant.

The shortfall may be eased by an appeal for volunteer physicians among the Baptist Medical-Dental Fellowship's members, Michalec said.

Also needed on an ongoing basis are volunteer nurses and support personnel, each committed for three or four weeks. Currently 11 nurses and a physician's assistant are making plans to aid the refugee effort.

Medical personnel open to short-term work among the Kurds may contact Michalec at the Foreign Mission Board, P.O. Box 6767, Richmond, Va. 23235 or 804-353-0151.

Until the shortfall ends, Brendle said, volunteer doctors will be sought from other evangelical groups.

In funding the relief effort, now expected to total \$2.4 million or more, the Foreign Mission Board committed all its general relief account, made up of Southern Baptists' donations for world emergency needs other than food. The board also has earmarked most of its \$1 million 1991 contingency fund for Mideast relief, but \$225,000 of that amount will be spent in Bangladesh in the aftermath of an April 30 cyclone that claimed more than 125,000 lives.

The board has two relief accounts -- general and hunger -- that rely on donations from Southern Baptists above regular church giving. Hunger funds remain adequate for requests from the mission field and regularly run far ahead of donations for general relief, which are running short.

Donations for Persian Gulf ministry or general relief work may be sent to the Foreign Mission Board, P.O. Box 6767, Richmond, Va. 23230. Texas Baptist Men and the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission also have created special funds for Kurdish relief work. Donations may be sent to the Baptist General Convention of Texas treasurer's office, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246, or the Brotherhood Commission, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38104.

News reports of turmoil in relief efforts in Iran have not dampened planning for the Southern Baptist feeding effort inside the country, Brendle said. Southern Baptist disaster relief volunteers for the feeding operation have received visas from the Iranian government and cargo flights will go to cities closest to the refugee camps, he said.

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A three-member medical team representing Korean Baptists encountered no problems during a recent survey trip to Iran to explore possible avenues of ministry among Kurdish refugees, Brendle reported.

Sam Yeghenzar, pastor of the Iranian Christian Fellowship in London, added in a telephone interview he has regularly reviewed unfolding plans for the feeding operation with officials of the Iranian government and the Red Crescent, the Middle East equivalent of the Red Cross.

Inside Iraq, Southern Baptist husband-and-wife physicians Kerfoot and Marietta Walker of Tyler, Texas, have been doing medical screening in the Kurdish refugee camp opened by U.S.-led coalition forces near the city of Zakho.

The Walkers and two other Texas physicians, Robert Mann of Arlington and Terry Elder of Corpus Christi, comprised Global Partners' initial Southern Baptist medical team that arrived in Turkey in late April. They initially worked among Kurds in southeastern Turkey but soon needed to move their equipment and supplies to Zakho as refugees began streaming back to Iraq.

The Walkers were planning to work in Zakho into the week of May 13. Mann's and Elder's short-term work ended May 6. Elder spent one day as part of a coalition team surveying other medical needs among Kurds in Iraq.

"The effort to move everything to Zakho was time-consuming" and included a delay of several hours at the Turkey-Iraq border, said Terry McMahon, a Foreign Mission Board videographer who observed the volunteers as they worked in Iraq. The doctors were disappointed they didn't get to do as much medical work among the refugees as they had hoped, McMahon said from Turkey. "But they realized how important it was to get established in a place that will have some long-term effect ... so future teams in Zakho would be able to hit the ground running."

Global Partners is among several non-government organizations providing personnel at Zakho, McMahon said. The workers meet in a tent each night by kerosene light to refine and coordinate their efforts, he said.

The Walkers, in screening refugees, "are seeing 300 to 400 people a day ... like an assembly line." They take only a half-hour break during the day to eat an "MRE" -- a military "meal ready to eat" in a small pouch. "It's very efficient, not particularly tasty, but nourishing," McMahon said.

The Walkers live in a small tent in a camp fashioned from "what apparently is a recently plowed field," McMahon said. "When it rains there it becomes a swamp." During the day, temperatures soar toward 90 degrees.

The refugee camp at Zakho may receive as many as 10,000 refugees. But the most ominous challenge probably lies ahead, McMahon said. Coalition officials met with Kurdish leaders who came out of the surrounding mountains May 7. The Kurdish men said 200,000 to 300,000 refugees were ready to leave the mountains if they can go to a place secure from the threat of Saddam Hussein's forces.

Relief workers at Zakho were at a loss for how they will provide food and other care for the looming influx, McMahon said.

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Romanian president tells
Baptists: 'We need you'

N-FMB

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BUCHAREST, Romania (BP)--Romanian President Ion Iliescu has asked Baptists to help rebuild Romania and "restore the moral values in our people."

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Iliescu met with 12 Romanian and European Baptist leaders May 4, reported European Baptist Press Service. The meeting came during the May 3-5 Congress of the Union of Christian Baptist Churches of Romania, the first unrestricted meeting of the congress in nearly 50 years.

The Baptists gathered in Bucharest's Palace Hall -- the site of Romanian communists' last congress in November 1989, just before the revolution that overthrew communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. Baptists and other Christians participated in the revolution.

Romania has "truly changed," since Ceausescu's fall, Iliescu told the church leaders. "Just the fact that Baptists can have a congress here is already evidence of the change."

But he described Romanians as disheartened, discouraged and suffering from a lack of morals and values after decades of repression.

"The deepest crisis we face in this country is not economical or political, but moral," he observed. "It is in this area that we can see the positive role religion should have in Romania. The church has an important role to play in the future of our nation. We hope you as Baptists can help us rebuild our nation and restore the moral values in our people."

The church leaders told Iliescu Baptists are a democratic people ready to help establish democracy and moral values. Before the meeting ended, Baptist leader Alexandru Talos explained the key points of the Christian faith to Iliescu, who does not profess Christianity.

"Who could have believed a few years ago that the president of Romania would have expressed such sincere wishes?" added Paul Negrut, a Romanian Baptist leader.

Earlier the same day the churchmen met with Adrian Nastase, Romania's minister of foreign affairs. He also indicated the government's desire for help from the church. "It was a serious mistake to remove faith and religion from the life of our country," he said.

Romanian Baptists, the largest evangelical group in the nation, are opening new churches, orphanages and schools and taking advantage of new opportunities to evangelize publicly. Their seminary in Bucharest recently acquired university status.

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Living alone OK; living
without relationships not

By Terri Lackey

F-SSB

Baptist Press
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WASHINGTON (BP)--Choosing to live alone is acceptable by biblical standards, but choosing to live without relationships is not, a couple speaking to a group of single adults attending a Successful Single Living conference said.

"God created each of us to live in relationships," said Otis Andrews, a clinical chaplain for the Youth Development Center in Macon, Ga. Andrews and his wife, Deigie, spoke to about 300 single adults attending the singles conference held at Constitution Hall, May 3-4, in Washington.

"We need to have relationships with other people to survive," he added. "We are made to be related to each other."

While being single is OK, isolation is not, Deigie Andrews said. "Isolation is negative and has a negative impact on people. Life is at its best when we have positive relationships with God, other people and ourselves," she added.

The Andrews outlined four basic ways people relate to each other.

"People can move away from one another by putting up walls," Andrews said. "They think if they don't get involved, they won't get hurt."

Then, there are those people who move against others, they said.

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"Those are the people who come toward you and tell you what you need to be doing and how you need to be doing it," Deigie Andrews said. "These people want to be in control of relationships."

A third group of people are those who "move apologetically adjacent" to you, Andrews said.

"They are always doing something for other people, but they are afraid to ask other people to meet their own needs," he said.

The fourth group of people, Andrews said, are those who "basically walk beside each other in openness, honesty and truthfulness."

To become more like the healthy people who build lasting relationships, the Andrewses said a person must follow some guidelines.

Those include:

- Valuing oneself. "Sit down and make a list of what you like about yourself;"
- Displaying positive personal regard for others;
- Abandoning the search for perfection. "In friendships, mates or children, no one can meet all of our needs."
- Speaking the truth in love. "We have to be truthful with each other. Speaking the truth keeps it clean between people."
- Giving and asking forgiveness;
- Allowing others to grow, mature, change and be different. "Learn to appreciate how you are different from one another."
- Laughing a lot. "Not all relationships are always funny, but we need to laugh in relationships often."
- Knowing when to hold on to a relationship and when to let go. "Sometimes friendships just don't work out."

Meanwhile, Jim Towns, a professor at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas, and a general session speaker at the conference, said people are grouped in four basic personality types.

Those include people who are basically happy-go-lucky; those who are "make-it-happen" types; those who are melancholy and experience a variety of mood swings; and the phlegmatic or the "cool, calm and balanced" people, he said.

In a session on "Stress and Security," Towns said different personality types handle stress in a variety of ways.

Towns issued a formula for handling stress which included: altering the situation if possible; avoiding unhealthy situations; accepting situations that cannot be changed; building resistance to stress through exercise and healthy sleeping and eating habits; and changing perceptions about situations that often cause stress.

Other speakers at the conference included: Mamie McCullough, author, speaker, educator and corporate consultant from Dallas; Harold Ivan Smith, a single adult author, speaker and corporate consultant from Kansas City, Mo.; and Ron Churchill, a single adult and pastor of First Baptist Church of Plant City, Fla.

The Successful Single Living conference was a pilot project sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministry department and Baptist state conventions, associations and churches in the Washington area.

Korean, Southern Baptists
seek Koreans in Soviet Union

N-FMB

SEOUL, South Korea (BP)--Korean Baptists sent their first missionaries to the Soviet Union in April.

The David Kim family will live in Soviet Central Asia and work with Korean ethnics. Soviet Baptists have invited Korean Baptists to help them reach people of Korean descent scattered across their vast country.

Soviet Baptists will start churches among Koreans in several cities, and Southern Baptists from the United States are helping in several ways.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board seeks long- and short-term personnel to live and work among more than 500,000 ethnic Koreans in the USSR. They were moved to the Central Asian region in the 1930s during Stalin's reign and have undergone great privation and suffering during their isolation there.

In early February the board, in cooperation with the Council of Korean Southern Baptist Churches in North America, assisted in placing Thomas and Grace Sohn in the country for a short-term assignment. Sohn is pastor of the Korean First Baptist Church in Dallas.

The church gave Sohn a sabbatical and helped support him as he established a congregation there. Sohn, with the assistance of Soviet Baptists, began worship services Feb. 24. By April 7, attendance had grown from 15 to about 160. The Sohns will return to Dallas in late May.

Sohn also prepared for an evangelistic project in partnership with the First Korean Baptist Church in Silver Springs, Md. A joint choir from the two churches and other Korean-American Baptist leaders were scheduled to travel to central Asia in May to visit areas where ethnic Koreans live.

Since many of the ethnic Koreans do not speak the Korean language, 20,000 Russian-Korean New Testaments were printed for distribution during the evangelistic project. The Foreign Mission Board provided the funds.

For David Kim, the call to go to the Soviet Union came in different languages and a variety of accents.

He first decided to preach the gospel while studying electrical engineering in Stockholm, Sweden. When he told a Finnish classmate about his decision to change careers, the classmate grabbed his hand and began telling him about Koreans in the Soviet Union. The man previously had worked in the Ukraine and was obviously concerned for the Koreans living there.

"I was so moved," said Kim. "I could not forget his concern. I could not forget the tears in his eyes."

At the same time, Kim met a number of Kurdish refugees in Sweden who had fled the long Iran-Iraq war. Their plight also affected him.

"Their lives were so unstable and their future so unsure," he said. But as Kim shared the gospel with them and saw the change in their lives, he said he realized God had called him to preach to all peoples, not Koreans only.

But Kim knew South Korea had no official contact with the Soviet Union. Why would God call him to a place he could not go?

The two nations established relations a few months later.

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Lounette Templeton, missionary to Hong Kong, contributed to this story.