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Note to editors: The following story is an 8/20/91 update of the BP story posted on 8/19/91. Paragraphs 7, 8 and 9 are new material.

Gorbachev overthrow casts
cloud over hopes he fostered By Art Toalston

MOSCOW (BP)--With Mikhail Gorbachev's ouster as Soviet Union president, a cloud of uncertainty now hangs across that nation -- and the world religious community that rejoiced over his reforms of communism.

"Gorbachev accepted the fact that communism as it was being practiced wasn't working, was suppressive and didn't benefit the people," said Isam Ballenger, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. "He demonstrated interest in the people."

World history will record Gorbachev as a key figure for the changes he instituted within the vast communist system, Ballenger predicted.

Legislation guaranteeing religious freedom within the Soviet Union was enacted during Gorbachev's six years of "glasnost" (openness) and "perestroika" (restructuring).

Long before the legislation was passed, however, Gorbachev's moderating influence gave churches in the Soviet Union and the fading communist bloc of Eastern Europe courage to venture into once-banned work. They began ministries with children and young people, evangelistic campaigns, religious publishing and broadcasting, and social ministry in hospitals -- even mental wards -- as well as prisons and homes for the elderly and handicapped.

For Southern Baptists, the Gorbachev era opened doors for the first-ever Foreign Mission Board workers in the Soviet Union. George and Veda Rae Lozuk of Fort Worth and Corpus Christi, Texas, arrived in Moscow earlier this year.

Three other career missionaries are now assigned there -- Stephen and Marilyn Haines of Sterling and Leesburg, Va., who arrived in Kiev Aug. 1, transferring from Colombia; Danny and Libby Panter of Pascagoula and Jackson, Miss, scheduled to arrive in Moscow Aug. 22, transferring from Togo; and Mel and Nancy Skinner of Trenton, Mo., and Mena, Ariz., appointed as missionaries Aug. 13.

The Panters, who are in Amsterdam after flying out of Togo Aug. 19, have papers to enter the Soviet Union, said Paul Thibodeaux, Foreign Mission Board associate director for Eastern Europe. Thibodeaux said he will keep in touch with them in case further events in the Soviet Union necessitate a change.

Although the U.S. State Department has advised Americans to leave the Soviet Union, Thibodeaux said the Lozuks and Haineses will make their own decisions, consistent with Foreign Mission Board policy for missionaries to determine whether they should stay or leave potential trouble spots. The Panters, meanwhile, are intent on entering the Soviet Union, Thibodeaux said.

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Since the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Thibodeaux noted, Southern Baptists have placed 49 workers in the Soviet Union and former Eastern bloc nations. They are seeking an additional 44 people for other career missionary positions or long-term volunteer work there. One new worker, Nikolai Alexandrenko, a Russian native, taught at Louisiana College for 40 years until his retirement in 1989. He arrived in the Soviet Union Aug. 12 to teach Bible courses for six months at a new Baptist seminary in Odessa.

Gorbachev's ouster may affect other plans by Southern Baptists to travel to the Soviet Union, but Foreign Mission Board officials had not decided on any long-term recommendations Aug. 19. A key factor, Ballenger said, will be whether the Soviet military takes harsh measures to counter protests or civil disobedience in the days ahead.

Currently, 55 volunteers are scheduled to travel to the Soviet cities of Frunze and Yalta for a Bible distribution project Sept. 2-10; a Texas Baptist task force will travel in Estonia Sept. 12-15; and Southern Baptist Convention President Morris Chapman, pastor from Wichita Falls, Texas, his wife and three other couples will visit the Soviet Union Sept. 24-Oct. 2.

A 14-member team of North Carolina Baptist College students returned home Aug. 14 after two weeks of church reconstruction work in Leningrad. No further teams are scheduled for the project this summer.

Efforts to contact Southern Baptist workers and Soviet Baptist leaders by telephone after Gorbachev's ouster in the early morning hours of Aug. 19 were unsuccessful, Thibodeaux reported. "At this point, it looks like an overload on the phone system, rather than a cutoff of communications," he said from his office in Vienna, Austria.

The fruits of Gorbachev's years in power "can be summed up in one word: hope," Thibodeaux said. The Soviet leader fostered "hope for a day of radical change for the church as well as hope of renewed economic vigor for the country." He led the Soviet people "from a hard-fisted Stalinistic time to one of more democracy than the people had ever dreamed of."

Gorbachev himself may not have envisioned how much change would flow from his glasnost and perestroika initiatives, Thibodeaux said, noting, "It was like a snowball rolling down a hill. It kept getting bigger and bigger."

With an apparently hard-line regime linked to the military and KGB secret police seizing power, the question now is whether there will be "a reverting back to the old Stalinist period," Thibodeaux said. He hopes the new government will focus on political and economic matters, leaving the country's new religious freedoms intact.

Elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the picture also is uncertain, Thibodeaux said. "The process of reform is so far along in some countries that there would not be a base of hard-line leaders to take them back to Stalinist times." But freedoms might diminish in other countries not as far along in the democratization process, he said.

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New wave of anti-Semitism
bemoaned by Lausanne group

By Art Toalston

7-FMB

Baptist Press
8/20/91

ZEIST, Netherlands (BP)--A statement against resurgent hatred of Jews was adopted during a meeting of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism in Zeist.

The statement, which also expresses regret about the reluctance of Christians to share the gospel with Jews, was adopted by 150 Jews who believe in Jesus as the Messiah and gentiles involved in Jewish evangelism.

Renewed hatred of Jews extends beyond ongoing tensions in the Middle East to a resurgence of anti-Semitism in some of the Soviet republics and in parts of Eastern Europe, said Jim Sibley, a Southern Baptist representative in Israel. Sibley was elected as one of four members of the consultation's coordinating committee during the Aug. 5-9 meeting.

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The consultation stated, "We lament the resurgence of hatred against the Jewish people, against the state of Israel and we abhor every action or attitude which threatens Jewish survival."

On Jewish evangelism, the consultation noted, "We lament the teaching that the church has replaced the Jewish people in the purposes of God and the widespread reluctance to share the gospel with Jewish people."

Sibley said he and many others at the consultation believe God has had a chosen remnant throughout history: "Jewish people who have remained faithful to the Lord and have received salvation through the Lord." Today's believers in Jesus, Jewish and gentile, "are grafted into the chosen remnant of God," said Sibley of Dallas, who has worked in Israel for eight years.

The consultation statement also:

-- Implores Jews "to recognize that the era of redemption has begun with Yeshua (Jesus in Hebrew) of Nazareth. He is indeed the promised divine Messiah of Israel, as well as the light to the nations, revealing God's presence and saving power to all who receive him."

-- Urges Christian churches to stand "against powers that promote anti-Semitism" and to affirm the urgency of Jewish evangelism. The statement rejoices that many Christians are returning to "the New Testament pattern of taking the gospel to the Jew first."

-- Credits Jewish believers in Jesus for "making a creative contribution to the life, worship and witness of the worldwide church." In Israel, for example, Jewish believers effectively use street drama, music and easy-to-read, eye-catching tracts with telephone numbers for further information, Sibley said. That evangelistic method that could work well in many cultures, he said.

Other members of the consultation's coordinating committee besides Sibley are the organization's new president, Ole Christian Kvarme of the Norwegian Bible Society; Kai Kjaer-Hansen, a theologian from Denmark; and Susan Perlman of the San Francisco-based Jews for Jesus.

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Hospitality House still ministering
to inmates' families after five years

By Ken Camp

N-Texas

Baptist Press
8/20/91

DALLAS (BP)--When Bob Norris became director of the Hospitality House in Huntsville, Texas, five years ago, he expected a ministry to "the criminal element." Instead, he found out his guests are victims.

Launched as a joint project of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and Tryon-Evergreen Baptist Association, the Hospitality House opened its doors on Aug. 16, 1986, as a temporary home for the visiting families of inmates in Texas Department of Corrections facilities.

Since then, more than 22,200 people from 45 states and 28 countries have visited the facility. About 250 people have made professions of faith in Jesus.

"The people who come here are victims of what their loved ones have done, and they're filled with pain and hurt. A lot of the time, these are people just like the neighbors next door to you, except their husbands, sons or fathers have gotten into trouble," Norris said.

"Their greatest need is someone who will listen to them without condemnation -- somebody who will care, understand them and accept them as they are."

But guests at the ministry center also often have physical needs. In the last five years, the Hospitality House has provided food for about 10,000 persons and clothing to many others.

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"Until recently, we were getting hunger funds from the Home Mission Board, but those are no longer available," Norris said, noting needs have outpaced Southern Baptist gifts to world hunger. "Now we're having to rely on churches to donate canned goods and bottles of juice."

The Hospitality House also has distributed about 1,000 bundles of Christmas toys to the children of inmates. Often, Norris points out, these are the only gifts the children will receive on Christmas morning.

Texas Baptists share in the witness and ministry of the Hospitality House through their gifts to the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions. The 1991 allocation for the ministry is \$30,000.

The Hospitality House also receives a portion of its funding from Tryon-Evergreen Baptist Association and from individual Texas Baptist churches. Even so, Norris said, funding is an ever-present concern as needs increase.

"The prison population continues to grow. This time next year, it could be 65,000. And you can multiply the number of inmates times 4.2 to get the total number of affected family members. The needs are tremendous," he said.

Manpower needs at the ministry center also are great. Mission Service Corps volunteers have been used in the past, but the Hospitality House has been without a full-time volunteer ministry assistant for several months.

"It appears that few are called to this kind of ministry," Norris said. "There aren't many who are willing to be involved day after day in the hurt and the pain of these people."

Nevertheless, Norris is hopeful about the future of the Southern Baptist ministry in Texas to prisoners' families. Working with the Texas Department of Corrections and the Texas Baptist Men Criminal Justice Ministry, he hopes in the months ahead to see a statewide network of support groups for prisoners' families linked by a computer database in Huntsville.

"Baptists were on the cutting edge of prisoner family ministry when the Hospitality House was founded five years ago," he said. "We need to get back on that cutting edge. The challenge is great, the numbers are growing, and the need for ministry is going to increase."

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Brotherhood volunteers
prepare for hurricane

By Jim Burton

n-BH001

Baptist Press
8/20/91

BOSTON (BP)--With Hurricane Bob threatening the New England Coast, the Greater Boston Baptist Association and the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission of Memphis, Tenn., have initiated a disaster response plan.

Brotherhood Commission National Disaster Relief Coordinator Jim Furgerson and Kentucky Brotherhood Director Bob Simpkins are travelling to Boston to begin damage assessment after the storm with Jack Parrott, associate executive director of the Boston association.

"We have sufficient cause to expect damage that we have requested help," Parrott said.

Torrential rains hammered the Boston vicinity Monday morning, threatening thousands of tourists on Cape Cod, Parrot said. With only two bridges onto Cape Cod, the evacuation process was slow. Local officials said once the winds hit 70 miles per hour, those bridges would be shut down.

Southern Baptists have a mission at Provincetown and a church, Chatham Baptist, on Cape Cod.

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With winds reported at up to 115 miles per hour, Parrott said local officials predicted the storm to enter Providence, R.I., and move across the South Shore and Cape Cod before striking Boston within the I-495 perimeter.

Furgerson activated the Kentucky and Ohio Brotherhood disaster relief units Monday morning, sending them to Harrisburg, Pa., the designated staging area.

"It is a calculated risk to move units before a disaster," Furgerson said. "But we have to be close to respond when the need is the greatest."

North Carolina, Tennessee and Texas Brotherhood disaster relief units are on standby.

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Baptist volunteers await word
about status of Soviet Union trip

By Karen Benson & Mike Day

Baptist Press
8/20/91

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--A team of young adult volunteers is expecting word by Thursday morning, Aug. 22, from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board about whether their planned Sept. 2 departure from Birmingham, Ala., to the Soviet Union is still on.

The team has been preparing for months to distribute 70,000 Russian language New Testaments in three cities in the Soviet Union Sept. 2-10, as well as to conduct a variety of other ministries and worship services in each city at the invitation of Soviet Baptists.

After reports began being broadcast early Monday morning, Aug. 19, of the coup which ousted Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, Foreign Mission Board representative Dewey Merritt, associate director in the Volunteers in Missions department, notified tour leaders the trip is still planned, although the situation would be reassessed within 72 hours.

"The trip is on right now," said Andrea Mullins, Baptist Women specialist for WMU and one of the tour directors. "What would keep us from going right now is absolute civil war, or the potential for danger to Americans."

The group includes about 30 young adult volunteers enlisted by the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union, based in Birmingham, and the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, based in Memphis, Tenn. WMU and Brotherhood are the missions arms of the Southern Baptist Convention, supporting mission education, mission support, and mission action and personal witnessing efforts in Southern Baptist churches.

Following a Sept. 2 departure, the volunteer team's itinerary includes several days in Moscow, where the New Testaments would be distributed through local pastors, through street evangelism efforts, and through the International Book Fair.

Then, the group will split into two teams, with one team going to Yalta, a small resort town on the Black Sea in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and the other team going to Frunze (which recently was renamed Bishkeek), a major city in the Kirghiz S.S.R., which shares a border with China.

In both cities, team members plan to share their Christian faith, distribute New Testaments, meet with Baptist pastors from outlying areas (including a pastor from Siberia), and distribute Bibles in public schools and libraries, in prisons, alcohol and drug centers, public services and church services.

"Yalta and Frunze were the cities selected by Soviet Christian contacts for the Bible distribution project because of the desperate need in both cities for Bibles," Mullins said.

"The Christians there have a great desire for Scriptures in their own language, and they are thrilled that we are coming to bring encouragement and support for their ministries," she said.

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"We're not doing anything that the Soviet Christians are not telling us to do. We're excited about this opportunity to link arms with our Soviet Christian brothers and sisters in the effort to share the love of Christ with their country."

The Bible distribution project is part of a larger project being sponsored by Southern Baptists and the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association.

Other entities supporting the effort include the International Bible Society, which is matching donations from individuals to purchase the Bibles for distribution, and the Holman Bible Publishers division of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville.

The 70,000 Bibles already have been shipped to the Soviet Union. Each volunteer in the group helped pay the cost of the shipping in the total cost of the trip.

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(BP) map mailed to state Baptist newspapers by WMU

Vestal returns to Texas
as pastor of Tallowood

Baptist Press
8/20/91

11- CO Texas

DALLAS (BP--Daniel Vestal will return to Texas Sept. 16 as pastor of Tallowood Church in Houston. The 46-year-old pastor of Dunwoody Church in suburban Atlanta, accepted the almost unanimous call of the church after preaching there at the morning worship service Aug. 19.

Vestal will be returning to Texas after three years at the Dunwoody church. Previously he was pastor of First Church of Midland, for 12 years.

"I feel God's leadership and that this is a part of God's unfolding will for my life and ministry," Vestal told the Baptist Standard in a telephone interview the day after accepting the Tallowood pastorate.

He will assume the pastorate in Houston on Sept. 16, but a revival commitment will delay his preaching at the church until Sept. 29.

Vestal, a candidate for president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1989 and 1990, has been a leader among moderate Southern Baptists and was instrumental in organizing the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

He was moderator of the Fellowship's convocation in Atlanta last May, currently serves on the steering committee and is a member of the committee seeking an executive director for the Fellowship.

He also recently was named chairman of the board of trustees of Baylor University's George W. Truett Seminary.

Neither denominational politics nor the Dunwoody church's lack of whole-hearted support for the missions support program of the CBF had anything to do with his leaving the church, Vestal told the Standard.

"I think any effort to interpret this move in relation to the convention would be a totally erroneous and mistaken interpretation," Vestal said. "I am making this move, going to the pastorate of Tallowood Baptist Church, because I believe God is leading me to a new place of service.

"Dunwoody Baptist Church has been very supportive and gracious to this pastor for the last three years. I love this church and I am leaving it with a part of myself invested here. I believe that they feel the same. I am going to Tallowood Baptist Church with real anticipation that this is a part of God's plan for my life."

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Tallowood is a congregation of 5,500 members and has been a leader among Texas Baptists in support of the Cooperative Program. It gave \$483,630 in support of the CP in 1990 to place fifth among Texas churches. During Vestal's pastorate at Midland, the church was the perennial leader among SBC churches in CP support.

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