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91-130

Children of Chernobyl
treated with hope

By Wendy Hollingsworth

HMB-F

SOUTH WINDSOR, Conn. (BP)--Fifteen survivors of the Soviet Union's Chernobyl nuclear disaster received a hearty dose of hope this summer through a Southern Baptist congregation in Connecticut.

The 80-member Connecticut River Valley Fellowship in South Windsor, Conn., was host to 13 Soviet children and two chaperons for six weeks. The trip was arranged through First Baptist Church of Mogilev, a city in the Soviet Union's Byelorussian republic. It was jointly sponsored by Mogilev businessmen and Soviet government.

Most of the children are from Mogilev which is 156 miles north of the Chernobyl disaster site. When the nuclear reactor exploded in 1986, winds blew radioactive material over surrounding cities, including Mogilev.

Since the disaster, children are no longer allowed to play outside. Foods such as blueberries and mushrooms from the forest are forbidden. The citizens of Mogilev avoid unnecessary exposure to the sun to not exacerbate their already high levels of radiation.

In the United States, the "Russkies" visited Washington, D.C., Virginia Beach, Va., and New York City. Local business leaders donated free passes for go-cart rides, miniature golf and video games, T-shirts, jeans and tennis shoes.

But the group's trip was more than fun and games. The stay in Connecticut offered hope because studies show residual levels of radiation decline by about 25 percent if exposed individuals are removed from the contaminated area for a month to six weeks.

The trip also offered the visitors the hope found in Jesus Christ.

"There has been a lot of propoganda against Baptists from the government," said Allison Culpepper, member of the Connecticut church. "Before they came to America, some of the kids were told that we sacrificed our children during the morning service."

Chaperon Gueorgui Tchekhovski said the largest Protestant movement in Mogilev is the Baptist church. However, there are only three Baptist churches in the city of 500,000. They have a combined membership of 800.

The Connecticut congregation tried various approaches to minister to the children during their visit. Children's Bibles printed in Russian were distributed to the group.

Culpepper asked Natasha Zaikina, a confident 15-year-old who wants to become a translator, if she had been reading her Bible. Natasha answered in broken English, "Yes, I have read it all."

Pastor Richard Culpepper remembers when the girl first came. "Natasha was so hard at first. But I've seen her change since she's been here. She told me she was open to God's Word now."

In spite of the language barrier, Elizaveta Terechtchenko, one of the chaperons and a journalist with a democratic newspaper in Mogilev, made a profession of faith. She plans to be baptized after returning home.

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Some of the children who did not attend church in Mogilev before the trip to America said they will attend regularly after they go home. "I didn't know the story of God's love was so believable," said Natasha.

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

Wendy Hollingsworth is a senior at Shorter College in Rome, Ga. She was an intern for the Home Mission Board's MissionsUSA magazine this summer.

Art Toalston recommended
for Baptist Press editor

N-60

Baptist Press
8/27/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board staff writer Art Toalston, Jr. will be recommended to fill the new position of Editor at Baptist Press, according to Harold C. Bennett, president of the SBC Executive Committee.

Bennett's recommendation, which has been affirmed by the committee's officers, will be considered by the administrative subcommittee of the Executive Committee when it meets Sept. 17 in Nashville.

If approved, Toalston, 40, would begin no later than Jan. 2, 1992.

The new position was created from two former positions at the national office of Baptist Press, the denomination's daily news service. An earlier reorganization of the Executive Committee's staff had separated Baptist Press and the public relations function with each headed by a vice president. Baptist Press news editor and the features editor were then combined into one editor position.

Toalston has been with the FMB in Richmond, Va. since January 1985 following positions with a number of newspapers as a religion editor/writer. He was also co-news director for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas during 1984 while attending the seminary.

As staff writer/secular news coordinator at the FMB, Toalston is responsible for coverage of missions news in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa as well as coordinating news releases to secular news media, including television and radio.

As Editor, Baptist Press, he would be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the news service, said Herb Hollinger, vice president for Baptist Press, with considerable work in editing and working with the various BP bureaus and SBC agencies.

Toalston and his wife, Karen, have one child, a daughter born June 19.

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Ethnic groups share,
celebrate diversity

By Frank Wm. White

SSB-F

Baptist Press
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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Through separate services, seven Southern Baptist groups were able to worship freely in their own styles while in joint services they celebrated their unity during the Conference for Small Sunday Schools held Aug. 19-23 at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

Although ethnic and language sessions have been a feature of the conference for several years, the 1991 conference was the first to include separate worship services for Anglo, American Indian, African-American, Hispanic, Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean participants.

The conference was sponsored jointly by the Sunday School Board's Sunday school division and the special ministries department which includes language church development/new work, Black church development and Hispanic church development sections.

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With a total registration of more than 1,300 participants including youth, children and preschoolers, about half of the approximately 830 leadership conference participants were Anglos or representing ethnic groups for whom there were no special conferences.

Hispanic and Black leadership conference participants totalled approximately 160 each. Approximately 60 participants attended the leadership conference sessions for American Indian, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese.

Although there were special sessions for only seven language and ethnic groups, Peter Kung, manager of the language development/new work section, said at least 12 ethnic groups were represented in conferences.

Language leadership conferences were led by board personnel and church leaders from the various groups. Separate worship services and Bible study sessions featured pastors and other church leaders from each ethnic group.

"The separate services did not separate us. They made it free to be who you are," said Jerry Dailey, pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church in San Antonio, Texas, and preacher for the African-American services.

The groups held a joint opening service and had two evenings of separate services before reuniting for a joint service on the final evening.

"We had very free, moving worship services and then we closed with a joint service that brought it all together," Dailey said.

The conference showed Southern Baptists can have different identities and have unity in Christ said Dailey

The Hispanic services resulted in a revival among participants with more than 50 persons making rededications and other personal decisions, said Tito Fafasuli, manager of the Hispanic church development section.

The separate services provided "worship more like the way our churches are worshiping," Fafasuli said. "The language and culture with our own hymns and way to worship make people more free."

Bill Banks, manager of the special ministries department, said he at first thought language was what defined ethnicity. "Language is part of it but not the most important part. Cultural distinctives are important for worship."

Worship in a person's own language allows freedom to worship without concentrating on translating, Banks pointed out.

While many Anglo Southern Baptists have traditional favorite hymns that aid worship, other language groups have different favorite hymns. Some of the language hymns were incorporated in the joint service to reflect the diversity of the group. Many of those hymns have been included in the 1991 "Baptist Hymnal."

But, in their separate services, language groups were able to sing their favorite hymns in their own languages and styles.

The separate worship services provided for more involvement of the spiritual and emotional side rather than only the intellectual aspects of information provided during conferences, Kung said.

He pointed out cultural involvement is restricted in an Anglo-dominated worship situation.

Even though the joint services provided involvement from each of the ethnic and language groups, the freedom for cultural worship was available only in the separate services, Kung explained.

Although seven simultaneous services were available for the different ethnic groups, each service included participants from other ethnic backgrounds. Many Hispanic and Anglo conference participants joined the African-American services filling the room to overflowing with many persons on the walkway outside the room looking in.

The conference for small Sunday schools in 1992 will have Anglo and Black church development sessions only. Instead of sponsoring language sessions at that conference, the special ministries department will sponsor the National Language Church Development Conference in Orlando, Fla., Aug. 3-6, 1992, with sessions for as many as 11 language groups.

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Couple finds pioneer work
in venture out of Texas

By Frank Wm. White

SSB-F

Baptist Press
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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Three years ago newlyweds Peter and Lynette Bowen ventured from their native Texas in pursuit of education and found a role in Southern Baptist work in a newer convention area.

After graduating from Hardin-Simmons University, a Baptist school in Abilene, Texas, the Bowens wanted to go someplace outside of Texas for graduate work. From a stack of university catalogs they found the University of Rochester in New York which fit their needs and accepted their applications.

Two weeks after their marriage, they loaded their belongings and headed for New York where Peter is studying biopsychology and Lynette is studying teaching English as a second language.

Peter is the son of a Texas pastor and Lynette grew up in First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas.

Through summer mission projects in northeast Arizona, Lynette Bowen realized areas with new Baptist work need workers who would be there for the long haul rather than college students who moved in for a week of Vacation Bible School.

That understanding played a part in their decision to venture outside Texas. Because of their church involvement and the rich church heritage of Texas, they believed they should give to others. "To those to whom much is given, much is required. It was time for us to pay back some of what we had been blessed with," Lynette explained.

It was only after they had selected Rochester the Bowens learned the area was identified by the Home Mission Board as the least churched area in the United States. They were more deeply in newer convention territory than they had anticipated.

Although there are several new missions starting in the area, the Bowens have chosen to be involved in Pinnacle Road Baptist Church, a congregation that is about 20 years old. They teach a young adult Sunday school class. Peter is Sunday school director and Lynette fills in a variety of other roles.

They are most proud of their work with the young adult class that has provided a place for young adults who did not want to be in the only other adult Sunday school class.

In an area where it is not popular to be Southern Baptist and not even common to go to church, success is measured in ways other than numbers, Lynette said. "We are having success, but it may not show up in numbers. You will beat yourself into the ground if you measure success by numbers," she said.

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Success in the young adults class can be best measured by involvement and commitment of those who are there. "A lot of our interest is in discipleship. We have some people with stronger commitments who probably would have dropped out of the church by now," Peter explained.

The two expect to finish their graduate work next summer and are not sure where they will go next, but they feel it is likely they will move where they can continue work in newer convention areas.

"In a pioneer area, the needs are so great you can burn out fast if you try to tackle them all. We try to focus on an area where we can have the most impact. We would like to stay in a pioneer area but we're not sure where that will be," Lynette said.

Peter expressed concern their departure from Pinnacle Road church will leave a hole in the work there. "I hope some people will fill in the work and be more permanent," he said.

Much of their work there has been in equipping others to be leaders and to explore the potential they didn't realize they had, Lynette said.

They hope some of those people they have discipled will begin to take leadership roles.

The Bowens attended Conference for Small Sunday Schools at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center as their vacation along with Peter's father, O.K. Bowen, pastor of First Baptist Church in Memphis, Texas.

They termed the week encouraging.

"It's easy to get discouraged in pioneer areas. It's good to be around other Southern Baptists and hear some of the good things that are going on," Peter said.

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VBS, revival provides prospects
for church on Apache reservation

By Frank Wm. White

SSB-F

Baptist Press
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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--With more than 600 participants, Vacation Bible School at a Baptist church on the White Mountain Apache Reservation was one of the largest schools held in Arizona this summer.

Kevin Notz became pastor of White Mountain Apache Baptist Church in White River, Ariz., only seven months ago, and Vacation Bible School was one of the first projects he undertook after moving from a church at Many Farms, Ariz., a Navajo Indian reservation.

Church members passed out 1,000 fliers and advertised on the local radio station before sending vans and buses to pick up children for VBS.

With the assistance of a missions team from Edmond, Okla., the church expected about 300 to attend--not the 604 who arrived. Along with a revival conducted the same week, VBS has provided prospects to keep the church, which has had an average Sunday school attendance of 58, busy for some time, Notz observed.

"It will take us some time to get to them all. We have set up regular visitation during the week to work on the list of prospects," he said.

The revival resulted in 78 professions of faith--nearly matching the normal worship attendance of 90.

Notz also used VBS as an outreach tool at Many Farms, where he was pastor for more than five years.

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Usually, VBS participation there totaled about 200. Those prospects helped build the church which started with two members when Notz arrived and grew to 70 by the time he left earlier this year.

Notz had made a commitment to stay at Many Farms until leadership was raised up from the congregation. Two men recently were licensed to preach, and Notz believed it was time for him to step aside and let them lead the work.

At White Mountain, Notz is following a pastor who retired after 34 years and established a rapport with the people, Notz said.

"The people are hungry for the gospel. They are open to hearing about Christ," he said.

Notz, a 33-year-old Wisconsin native has dark hair and eyes that lead even residents on the reservations to mistake him for an American Indian. That characteristic and his wife, Rose, who is Navajo have helped him work on Indian reservations.

Rose was a Christian when Notz met her and two years after they married he was led to accept Christ by the pastor of an American Indian church in Winslow, Ariz.

"I prayed for two years after that before I was willing to do what God wanted me to," Notz said. That willingness led to Notz and his wife having a shared ministry to American Indians.

"Because she is Navajo, she understands the culture and has a rapport with the women while I work with the men," Notz said.

Because it was through an American Indian ministry that Notz accepted Christ, he believes it is only natural that his ministry is committed there.

Notz participated in American Indian sessions of the Glorieta Conference for Small Sunday Schools Aug. 19-23 at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

Because the conference offers general Sunday school conferences as well as the ethnic core conferences, Notz said he was able to explore opportunities in several areas that will help him develop the work at White Mountain.

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NOTICE: Aug. 30, 1991 will be the last day for use of the Jacquard computer in the Baptist Press office. After that date, Baptist Press will be available electronically only on the CompuServe system. We will, of course, continue to mail Baptist Press to all our subscribers. Contact David Haywood at the Baptist Sunday School Board for more information.

Thanks,
Baptist Press
