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Indianapolis housing requests
should be postmarked Oct. 1

NASHVILLE (BP)--Hotel reservations for the 1992 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting should be mailed Oct. 1, according to Convention Manager Richard P. Rosenbaum Jr.

The meeting will be June 9-11 in the Indianapolis Convention Center and Hoosier Dome.

Housing request forms are available from the offices of the state Baptist convention executive directors and the September issue of The Baptist Program magazine, Rosenbaum said.

The forms provide complete instructions for filing. They also list hotels in the 6,500-room Southern Baptist block, their rates, distances from the convention center and the amount of deposit each requires.

Requests postmarked Oct. 1 will receive priority. The SBC Housing Bureau will assist in finding rooms for others after requests postmarked Oct. 1 have been filled.

The SBC Housing Bureau will fill the requests Oct. 15, after all forms postmarked Oct. 1 have had time to arrive in Indianapolis.

Registrants may not submit more than one request per person. The housing bureau's computer will cancel all copies of multiple requests by the same individual.

Multiple registrants may submit as many as, but not more than, ten individual requests in the same envelope.

The convention's block of 6,500 rooms is spread among 60 Indianapolis hotels. However, many rooms that are not in the SBC block will be available through travel agents or direct from the hotels.

Plans for messenger transportation are still being worked out. "We are presently evaluating the need for an in-town shuttle system. With more than 5,000 parking spaces nearby, this (shuttle service) may not be necessary," said Rosenbaum. He added during football season the dome easily will accommodate as many as 60,000 people, most of whom drive.

Handicapped people and others with special needs should contact Housing Information, SBC Executive Committee, 901 Commerce Street, Suite 750, Nashville, TN 37203; telephone (615) 244-2355.

Information concerning campground and RV parks and tourist information is available through the Indianapolis Convention and Visitors Association, One Hoosier Dome, Suite 100, Indianapolis, IN 46225; telephone (317) 639-4282; FAX (317) 639-5273.

NOTE TO EDITORS: Jim Newton covered the Sept. 1-6 conference on "Evangelism in Post-Marxist Situations" in Budapest for the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization.

Religious revival sweeps
some 'post-Marxist' countries

By Jim Newton

BUDAPEST, Hungary (BP)--A religious revival is moving through parts of Romania, Bulgaria and the fragmenting Soviet republics, but not in all "post-Marxist" countries.

Speakers from eight such nations of Eastern Europe voiced that assessment in a six-day summit on "Evangelism in Post-Marxist Situations." The Sept. 1-6 conference, which attracted 180 participants from 56 countries to Budapest, Hungary, was sponsored by the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization.

Peter Kuzmic, president of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Oaijek, Yugoslavia, warned the kind of civil war currently taking place in Yugoslavia could break out in several of the new republics of the former Soviet Union and other parts of Eastern Europe.

The coup in the Soviet Union shouldn't have surprised most Christians, Kuzmic said. Gorbechev was bound to fail, the Yugoslavian observed, because "he was trying to be both the pope and Martin Luther at the same time, and that's impossible."

The situation in Yugoslavia is the most complex in Europe, but the principles involved in the conflict apply in several other post-Marxist countries, Kuzmic said.

Under communist rule, both nationalism and religion were at best tolerated, at worst suppressed and persecuted. "Now with the collapse of Marxism and the removal of totalitarianism, whatever has been repressed is now exploding," he explained.

Religious division could quickly become worse in Yugoslavia, Kuzmic warned, if the government recognizes the Catholic Church as the official state church of Croatia and the Orthodox Church as the official church in Serbia.

Baptist ministers from Bulgaria and Romania said revival is sweeping their countries, but warned Christians from other parts of the world about providing too much assistance.

Romanian Baptist evangelist Petru Dugulescu reported Romanians at last have the freedom to evangelize, but now they have "too much evangelism" from religious groups from the West.

"Some of this evangelism is good, and some is bad," Dugulescu said. "When you have too much evangelism, it loses its value, and the people feel they have heard the gospel and don't need to hear it again."

Dugulescu, a former pastor who was arrested and persecuted by the overthrown communist dictatorship, said he preached to more than 100,000 Romanians celebrating the end of revolution on Dec. 22, 1989. In response to his message, the crowd chanted "God exists" and recited the Lord's Prayer.

In Bulgaria, more than 2,100 people made public spiritual commitments during recent evangelistic crusades, reported Nickoli Nedelchev, Baptist pastor from Sofia, Bulgaria. But he added the churches have not effectively followed up contacts with new believers.

Nedelchev asked Christians around the world to pray that help from the West will not spoil Christians in Bulgaria. "We need a lot of things, but if we aren't careful, our churches will become dependent on aid from the West," he said. "Bulgarians need to accept responsibility ourselves, rather than ask rich Americans to support us."

Sali Rahaani, a native of Albania who lives in England and broadcasts an Albanian-language radio program into his homeland, said a recent evangelistic effort in Albania resulted in 143 conversions to Christianity.

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Rahaani beamed the gospel into Albania for 20 years before he received the first letter last year from a Christian believer there. In the past year, as restrictions on religion began to ease, he has received more than 200 such letters from Albanian believers.

Jaroslav Kratka of Czechoslovakia said people in his country are learning to live in freedom, which is sometimes harder than living under persecution.

Now that Czechoslovakia's borders are open, the country is open not only to good influence but to bad. Much more pornography, drugs, crime, and other negative influences are coming into the country, Kratka said.

Henryk Wieja, a physician who operates a Christian medical clinic in Poland, reported evangelical Christians there are such a minority in a country that is 96 percent Catholic that they have been preoccupied with protecting their denominational identity. He also emphasized the need for discipleship training so Polish believers will understand their faith more deeply.

Hans Gunter Bache of Berlin compared the post-Marxist era in former East Germany to the post-Nazi era in Germany after World War II. "Our people need inner healing," and it may take several years for it to take place and for people to adjust to change and learn to accept new responsibilities, he said.

Based on reports from Christian leaders from the Soviet republics and eight post-Marxist Eastern European countries, a 12-member international listening team offered recommendations adopted by the Lausanne committee for effective ways to evangelize post-Marxist countries. They include:

- Avoid going to the cities where other Christian groups are working and go instead to cities where no one has gone. Don't speak at Sunday worship services, but use the time instead to teach and equip young leaders.

- Spend as much money on follow-up as on evangelistic campaigns and media events.

- Distribute Bibles in the national languages of the Soviet republics, not just Russian, because "people of the newly independent republics have no desire to study about Christ in the languages of those they consider their oppressors."

- Encourage the establishment of new churches that meet in homes, schools, and former Communist Party meeting halls because of the shortage of church buildings.

- Send missionaries who will learn the language, live with the people and develop materials for discipleship programs.

- Help national leaders develop a strategy for evangelism, especially to reach the cities and smaller towns.

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Christians in Soviet republics
ask for help from Third World

By Jim Newton

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BUDAPEST, Hungary (BP)--A delegation of Christians from the Soviet republics urged Christians from Africa, Asia and Latin America to help them evangelize the unreached people in what previously was the Soviet Union.

Eight Soviet Christian leaders issued the appeal during a Sept. 1-6 summit conference on "Evangelism in Post-Marxist Situations." The conference, held in Budapest, Hungary, was sponsored by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.

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Christians from the Third World can be more effective than American or European Christians in helping evangelize the people of the Soviet republics, said Johannes Reimer. Director of the Logos mission organization in Germany, Reimer chaired the presentation by the Soviets.

When the doors of freedom flew open suddenly in the Soviet Union, about 200 religious groups -- most from the United States and Europe -- "invaded" the land. Soviet Christians expected major financial assistance from the Americans and Europeans.

Over and over, participants from post-Marxist countries said that instead of money, they need people who will plant their lives in the Soviet republics, learn the language and demonstrate what it means to be a Christian in a post-Marxist society.

Soviet Christians would not expect financial support if Christians from Africa, Asia and Latin America came to the Soviet republics to help them in evangelism, Reimer said. Instead, they would only expect Third-World Christians to show them how to be effective in evangelism.

Scores of unreached people groups in the Soviet republics have cultural characteristics similar to people from Asia and Africa, he added.

Andrei Bondarenko, Baptist pastor and vice president of the Latvian Christian Mission, said most Christians in the Soviet republics don't know how to do evangelism correctly and need help and training from other Christians. Even though the Soviets have not known how to be effective, the "response has been like an explosion," he said.

Alexander Semchenko, president of a Protestant publishing company in Russia, said one of the greatest needs is literature for Christian education and discipleship training. A major problem, however, is getting copyright permission from English-language publishers for translation into Russian.

A tremendous need also exists for religious material published in Braille for the blind. "But we can't do it on our own. We need help," he said.

The Soviets said they need Bibles in the languages of all the 15 Soviet republics, not just in Russian.

During the three days of the recent coup attempt in the Soviet Union, Baptists in Moscow gave out five New Testaments for each of the tank crews surrounding the Russian parliament building, reported Peotr Krauchuk, Baptist superintendent for central Russia. Two of the tank crews decided not to drive their tanks any farther and left, he said.

Olga Avetisouua of the Uzbekistan republic stressed the need for translation and publication of the entire Bible in her native tongue.

She warned of the possibility of Muslims replacing communists in control of the Uzbekistan government. "We know what the communists brought us, but we don't know what would happen if the communists and Muslims unite in controlling the country."

Already Christians have felt the repression of a new law adopted in July in Uzbekistan. The law prohibits Christian missionaries and public evangelism. Avetisouua expressed fear the borders will be closed and help from Christians in other countries cut off.

"I ask you in the name of God, please help us while there's still time," she pleaded.

The Budapest summit participants from the Soviet Union are members of a Soviet Lausanne Committee organized as a result of a conference in Moscow last October.

Researcher warns of obstacles
to evangelism in Soviet Union

By Jim Newton

BUDAPEST, Hungary (BP)--People in the Soviet republics are crying for forgiveness and salvation to fill the spiritual void created by the death of Marxism, Russian-speaking researcher Steve Weber reported to the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.

Weber and Tom Houston presented an interim report on a nine-month Soviet research project during a Lausanne-sponsored summit in Budapest Sept. 1-6 on "Evangelism in Post-Marxist Situations." Weber is Eastern European regional director of the religious research organization Issachar. Houston is international director of the Lausanne committee and key organizer of the Budapest summit.

Despite spiritual vacuum and hunger for the gospel, churches in the Soviet republics face many problems, according to the research, which Houston said will be used as a framework for developing evangelism strategies in post-Marxist nations. Grants from the British and Foreign Bible Society and World Vision funded the project.

The problems include opposition from established churches, ineffective results from mass evangelism and little follow-up, ignorance of the Bible, lack of unity and cooperation among Christians and the wrong kind of help from well-meaning Christians in the West, Weber said.

Perhaps the greatest barrier is the bid to restore national churches with special privileges in some new republics, he added.

The Georgian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church each are attempting to become the national churches of the Georgian and Russian republics, and they oppose evangelism efforts of Protestant and evangelical churches, Weber charged.

In the Muslim-dominated republic of Uzbekistan, a new law was adopted in July that prohibits missions, missionaries and public meetings for evangelism. Weber warned that other Muslim republics in what previously was the southern section of the Soviet Union also appear to be moving toward establishing Islam as the official state religion.

In Lithuania, the Catholic Church is positioning itself to wield political power and make religious catechism classes mandatory in public schools.

One of the shocking results of his research, Weber said, is a response from 70 percent of those interviewed who said religious assistance from the West has not been very helpful. About 200 Western religious organizations have sent teams into the Soviet republics to provide assistance, he reported, but often not the kind of help needed.

Religious leaders in the Soviet republics repeatedly told Weber they need long-term help from Christians who will come and show them how to be effective in evangelism, not just tell them how to do it.

"When Americans come over here to help, they often make the Soviet Christians feel inferior," Weber said. "Some Americans want to hold mass evangelism services that Soviet Christians think are entertainment shows."

Weber said his research indicates the Soviet general public has virtually no knowledge of the Bible. Although many people are interested in religion, the average person has a negative impression of all Protestants because of brainwashing they received in schools dominated by communist ideology.

Another major barrier to evangelism, Weber said, is lack of unity and cooperation among Christians of different denominations, which leads to fierce competition and distrust. "Distrust and disunity is (much) higher than anything I've experienced elsewhere in the world," he said.

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Preliminary results of a questionnaire mailed to a cross section of 3,000 people in Hungary, Yugoslavia and Poland (1,000 in each country) revealed Poland is the most "religious" country, but is also the country where people read the Bible least.

More than half the Polish respondents said they never read the Bible, compared to 49 percent of the Hungarians and only 12 percent of the Czechoslovakians. Czechs, with 7 percent, ranked highest in the percentage of those who said they read the Bible several times a week, compared to 5 percent of the Hungarians and only 2 percent of the Poles.

More than 60 percent of the Poles said they believe in a personal God, compared to 27 percent of the Czechoslovakians and 22 percent of the Hungarians. While half of the Poles said they believe Jesus is Lord, only 18 percent of the Czechs and 4 percent of the Hungarians agree. Most Hungarians and Czechoslovakians said they believe Jesus was a great teacher.

Among the Polish respondents, 96.4 percent identified themselves as Roman Catholics; 46 percent said they attend worship services once a week. Only 7 percent of the Hungarians and 11 percent of the Czechoslovakians said they attend worship services once a week. About 48 percent of the Czechoslovakians and 64 percent of the Hungarians said they were Roman Catholic.

The research revealed most people in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia have a shallow understanding of the Bible and its message, Houston said. Although the research needs further study and interpretation, it gives perspective on the task to be done in these countries, he added.