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91-138

**BJCPA signs land purchase,
asks Foundation for funds**

By Herb Hollinger

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs has signed a contract to purchase property in Washington and has asked the Southern Baptist Foundation for nearly \$400,000 it contends the agency has invested for the BJC.

The BJC and the Foundation, questioned by Baptist Press, confirmed the purchase agreement had been signed on Sept. 9 and a request for the money has been submitted. Although details of the building at 511 C Street, NE, in Washington were lacking the purchase price is \$345,000 and a \$100 deposit was given by the BJC.

At stake is an account at the Foundation which contained \$381,927, as of Aug. 1.

However, the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission's trustees have also asked for the money which was allocated as part of a capital needs budget item in the 1964 SBC budget. The CLC contends the funds belong to the public affairs committee which has been merged into the CLC. The CLC has been given a religious liberty program by the SBC.

In addition, the SBC meeting in Atlanta in June eliminated any funding for the BJC in the 1991-92 budget which the CLC contends is further proof the convention intends for the CLC to be the sole SBC religious liberty agency in Washington.

It appears the question will be a top item for the SBC Executive Committee which meets Sept. 16-18 in Nashville. The request for the money from the CLC has been directed to the Executive Committee as well as a request from the Foundation for any clarification of conditions by the committee regarding the 1964 allocation.

The BJC's request for the funds also noted if the Foundation does not release the funds to the BJC it could be held accountable. Although no BJC official has actually said the agency would sue the Foundation or any SBC entity, it does appear the BJC is not discounting that option.

The account was established in 1964 using a \$300,000 allocation from a capital needs budget approved by the SBC in Atlantic City. A footnote to that allocation says, "The \$300,000 allocation to the Public Affairs Committee to be subject to conditions approved by the Executive Committee or the Southern Baptist Convention."

A recommendation from the SBC Executive Committee which was approved by the 1968 SBC for the 1969 operating budget had a note at the bottom which reads: "2. Permission is granted to the Joint committee on Public Affairs to use for operations the interest from \$300,000 capital reserves held for them by the Southern Baptist Foundation."

Since 1969 the BJC has received interest amounting to \$534,951 from the Foundation.

NOTE TO EDITORS; This is a revised version of the story that ran 9/12/91, BP137. Please use this version.

Chinese exploring possibility
of teaching MasterLife course

By Terri Lackey

NASHVILLE (BP)--MasterLife has become the universal language in discipleship for Christians in countries spanning the world and now the Chinese are considering adopting it, a discipleship leader said.

Before its translation into English in 1978, Indonesian was the native language of MasterLife. The discipleship training course has now been translated into more than 50 languages, according to Willis, manager of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's adult section of the discipleship training department.

Willis left for China Sept. 6 for a three-week trip to discuss with Chinese Christians the possibility of adapting MasterLife into a workable discipleship training course for their people. MasterLife is already translated into Chinese -- Christians in Hong Kong and Taiwan use it -- but cultural adaptations for the Chinese would have to be made, he said.

"It has been translated into Chinese for several years," Willis said. "There are five languages spoken in China, but they all use the same written language."

Willis said while the languages do not sound alike, they are written alike.

"We would have to contextualize it. So we are going to meet with the key leaders to talk about those kinds of possibilities," he added.

The "key leaders" are members of the Chinese Christian Council, a Protestant Christian group. That group invited Willis to discuss the possibility of bringing MasterLife into the country.

Willis said an official government report estimates 3-5 million Christians reside in China, but an unofficial report puts that figure at closer to 30-50 million. He said the National and International Religion Report estimates 28,000 Chinese accept Christ each day.

"When the missionaries were forced out of China by the communist government in 1949, there were approximately 750,000 Christians in the whole country. And that was over a 100-year span of having missionaries in the country," Willis said. "Now there are close to 50 million."

The sheer number of new Christians means Christian leaders are scarce, Willis said.

"Almost all of their pastors are 80 years old. There is a great vacuum of leadership," said Willis.

"We are talking about over one-fifth of the world's population and the potential of that with all these people who are new Christians means some people really do need to be trained in the Bible," Willis said.

Other MasterLife developments, according to Willis, include:

-- Korea celebrates its 10th anniversary of MasterLife.

-- MasterLife is being taught in East Germany, Romania, Bulgaria and Estonia. "Representatives from those countries have attended MasterLife workshops in Europe and are now translating it into their language," Willis said.

-- MasterLife has been translated into 17 of the 25 African languages. It was translated into basic English (a fourth-grade reading level) for Africans in 1983.

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- Prisoners that are taught MasterLife use the basic English edition.
- MasterLife is an accredited course in five of the six Southern Baptist seminaries.

Christians in several countries study MasterLife. Some of those include: Yugoslavia, Brazil, India, Mexico, England, Philippines, and Australia. Some translations include: Arabic, Hebrew and Spanish. Workshops in Europe have been held in countries which include France, Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Poland.

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Sellers Home ministry transferred
to Louisiana Children's Home

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
9/13/91

ATLANTA (BP)--The maternity home ministry of Sellers Baptist Home and Adoption Center in New Orleans will be relocated at the end of this year when the program is transferred from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board to the Louisiana Baptist Children's Home.

The HMB executive committee and the board of trustees of the Louisiana Baptist Children's Home agreed to the transfer in their September meetings.

"I have known the staff of the Louisiana Baptist Children's Home for years, and I have the utmost confidence that they will continue the professional care provided at the Sellers Home," said Paul Adkins, HMB vice president for ministry.

The maternity home services will move to Tallulah, La., where a 13,000 square-foot home was donated to the Louisiana Baptist Children's Home. Plans for the building in New Orleans are indefinite, Adkins said. The home in Tallulah will continue to use the Sellers name.

John Williams, Louisiana Children's Home director, suggested the transfer after the home in Tallulah was donated. He said Louisiana Baptists do not have a maternity home, though 85 percent of the women at Sellers are from Louisiana. Williams said a survey among state pastors revealed strong support for the maternity home in Tallulah.

The eight-bedroom, six-bath house in Tallulah is ideal for the ministry, Williams said. The two-story home on 4.5 acres can accommodate 15 to 20 women plus house parents, he noted.

The ministry will continue to provide services to women who keep their babies as well as women who place their infants for adoption.

The HMB executive committee voted to contribute \$600,000 to the children's home over the next three years to share the cost of transferring the ministry. The contribution will begin with \$300,000 in 1992 and decrease to \$100,000 in 1994.

In addition, the children's home will be allowed to take equipment and furnishings from the New Orleans building to the Tallulah home when the transfer is made.

Adkins said the Home Mission Board will continue to refer clients to the Sellers home and to maternity homes sponsored by other state conventions. The toll-free number for referrals to maternity homes, 1-800-552-9243, will not change. The toll-free number for information about starting a crisis pregnancy center is 1-800-962-0851.

The Sellers Home began operation in 1933. Last year it accepted 56 women, and it has placed more than 2,500 children for adoption since its beginning.

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**Co-chairmen appointed
for Crossover Indianapolis**

By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (BP)--James Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church of Snellville, Ga., and Freddie Gage, evangelist based in Euliss, Texas, have been appointed co-chairman of Crossover Indianapolis.

Morris Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, and Southern Baptist Convention president, said he appointed the two men to the post because they are "committed to evangelism and they're personal soul winners."

Crossover Indianapolis is part of Crossover America, Chapman's plan to present the gospel to the estimated 172.8 million non-Christians in the United States.

Crossover Indianapolis will be conducted before the 1992 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Indianapolis June 9-11. It will include door-to-door gospel presentations, special evangelism events such as street preaching, youth rallies and church planting.

As co-chairmen, Merritt and Gage will help enlist people to participate in the activities. The Home Mission Board evangelism section will work with Southern Baptists in Indiana to plan the events.

"Indiana is beyond the Bible Belt, and this is our opportunity to make an everlasting impact on the state," Chapman said. "Indiana Baptists are excited about this, and I pray that we will not fail them."

Chapman said he hopes pastors will encourage people from their congregations to be part of Crossover Indianapolis. He noted people do not have to be messengers to the annual meeting to participate in the evangelism thrust.

For more information about Crossover Indianapolis or to sign up to participate, contact the Metropolitan Baptist Association of Central Indiana, 952 N. Pennsylvania Ave., Indianapolis, Ind. 46204.

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**Soviet, East Europe evangelicals
now face state church threat**

By Art Toalston

**Baptist Press
9/13/91**

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Communism may be down for the count, but not state religion in the former Soviet Union or elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

The Russian Orthodox Church currently has no status as Russia's state religion, nor does any other ancient branch of Christianity have such status in Eastern Europe. But observers agree the influence of Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism in the former communist bloc is on the rise, often in tune with rising nationalism.

That's a deep concern to Baptists. In the Soviet republic of Georgia, "Orthodox groups have literally barred the doors to some Baptist churches within the last year," according to Mark Elliott, director of the Institute for East-West Christian Studies at Wheaton College in Illinois.

In some cases Orthodox priests led the assault against Baptist congregations, Elliott recounted.

The threat of state religion will be on the agenda when Baptist leaders from throughout the dismantled Soviet Union meet in Moscow Sept. 18-19 to discuss future directions for Baptist work in their respective republics.

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Baptists and other evangelicals in the Soviet Union fear sweeping reforms in their country could allow "past state churches to resume the role they had prior to communist times," said Paul Thibodeaux, Austria-based administrator for Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board work in Eastern Europe.

Gregori Komendant, president of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the Soviet Union, initiated the September meeting in Moscow, the first gathering of Baptist leaders since the tumultuous tumble of communism after the abortive coup by Soviet hard-liners last month.

Komendant has invited at least one Western observer to the meeting: George Lozuk, Southern Baptists' first missionary to the Soviet Union, who began work in the country earlier this year.

Lozuk and Thibodeaux met with Komendant after the failed coup. Thibodeaux described Komendant as "very committed to decentralizing the direction of Baptist work from Moscow and very supportive of Baptist movements in each republic charting their own course." The Baptist union, then, would assist Baptist endeavors in each republic, Thibodeaux said of Komendant's thinking.

"I would see it paralleling what's happening on the political scene nationwide," Thibodeaux said.

Republic-level Baptist bodies already exist in Russia, the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Estonia, Latvia and Moldavia.

In heavily Catholic Lithuania, Baptists have four churches and 160 members. Baptist numbers in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia also are small, and one Moscow-based superintendent previously has overseen Baptist work in the three regions. Baptists are even smaller in the predominantly Muslim republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizia (now known as Kyrgyzstan), Turkmenistan and Tadzhikistan.

Assessments vary of the Russian Orthodox Church's potential influence in that vast emerging republic -- as they do for the Roman Catholic Church in heavily Catholic Poland and the Yugoslavian republic of Croatia, and for Orthodoxy in Romania, Bulgaria and the Yugoslav republic of Serbia.

Russian Orthodoxy is too weak from years of communist control to be a significant political force, stated Maxim Kniazkov, a former Soviet news correspondent now living in Chevy Chase, Md.

Nor will the Orthodox church have much clout with Russian President Boris Yeltsin, whose bravery in opposing the coup has made him the top leader in the now-fragmented Soviet Union.

"Yeltsin is not a religious person," said Kniazkov, who worked for Tass, the Soviet news agency, in Washington, D.C., France and Mozambique before embarking on a U.S.-based career in international affairs reporting in 1990.

Describing his religious view in a Sept. 6 ABC-TV interview program with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, Yeltsin said: "... the services, the ritual aspect, I don't really observe those, although I've been in church quite often, because during the service there's a kind of internal feeling of moral cleansing."

Yeltsin added, "I'm also superstitious, by the way." Gorbachev, meanwhile, reaffirmed he is an atheist.

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Baptists and other evangelicals have no reason to fear Orthodoxy, said Kniazkov, a Russian Orthodox. Minority religious movements "cannot pose any threat to the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church," he said. Evangelicals may face localized opposition here and there, he said, but otherwise they "will be allowed to operate freely, and I'm sure about that."

Others, however, aren't so sure. The Russian Orthodox Church and the Georgian Orthodox Church are attempting to become the state churches of their respective republics, claimed Steve Weber, Eastern European director of the religious research organization Issachar. Weber addressed the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization earlier this month in Budapest, Hungary.

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

"By far the biggest single concern evangelicals face in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe is the re-emergence or attempted re-emergence of state churches," Mark Elliott said.

Strife between majority and minority churches, he predicted, will be the "saddest theme stories written about in the next decade in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. These tensions were frozen under communism and now they're thawing out in a rather violent fashion. To the extent governments formally or informally re-establish close ties with the majority church, smaller churches and the small remnant of atheists are likely to suffer.

"Oddly enough, it appears that evangelicals and atheists may be in the same boat."

Yeltsin and Russian Orthodoxy may forge some ties, Elliott said. "Yeltsin wants to hold the Russian people together and the church is something most Russians have had in common. It wouldn't be surprising if he didn't see Russian Orthodox assistance as valuable. And the church would be more than happy to lend support because there seems to be strong sentiment in the church to move back in the direction of a state-sanctioned church."

Russian Orthodoxy, although weakened by its concessions to communism over the years, retains strength among workers and peasants "who are faithful (and) more willing to overlook the compromise in the hierarchy," Elliott said. More educated members remain suspicious of the church for its centuries of "siding with authority and power and privilege and possessions," he said, yet they do respect priests who held to their faith under communist repression.

Orthodoxy gets energy for targeting evangelicals and Catholics from a belief it is the true church ascended from the apostles, he said. The Orthodox regard Catholics and Protestants as the result of misguided theology, as people who have no business wooing people away from their historic faith.

"Orthodoxy," he added, "literally means correct praise or right worship."

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New missionary request list:
'dream' 10 years ago now real

By Donald D. Martin

Baptist Press
9/13/91

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Missionaries for Eastern Europe and church planters top the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's 1992 personnel request list.

It also includes personnel requests for the Soviet Union, Albania and people groups once thought impossible to reach with the gospel.

The new list would have seemed almost a fantasy if presented in the early 1980s, said Harlan Spurgeon, vice president for mission personnel.

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"Someone would have called you a dreamer if you came forward with a list like this 10 years ago," Spurgeon said. "When you look at this selection you can't help but be excited. The list today represents unreached peoples and countries we would have not dreamed about reaching just a few years ago."

Each year mission administrators list the top missionary positions vital to long-term goals. This year administrators drew from more than 500 personnel requests to compile a list of the top 33 needs.

"The 33 global personnel requests represent urgent strategic needs around the world," said Spurgeon. "Requests for missionaries to serve among unreached people groups appear on this list. Other strategic needs have been generated by the changing world events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union."

Needs in Bangladesh ranked first on the list, followed by requests for a missionary to work as an evangelist and church planter among the Fulani people in Nigeria and a church planter for Mexico City. In all, 15 of top 33 requests call for church planters. Five requests target work with a particular people group bound by a common culture and identity, but not necessarily a single country.

Five requests from Eastern Europe also made the list. They include evangelists to work in Albania and Latvia and a seminary teacher in Czechoslovakia.

Administrators are excited by the growing number of missionary requests from Eastern Europe, made possible by the crumbling of the Soviet Union's communist empire.

"I've used all kinds of words to try and explain what has happened, from incredible to phenomenal to astounding," said Isam Ballenger, vice president for the board's work in Europe. "It's one of the most significant events of the century."

Southern Baptist plans for reacting to the world's new political climate and their hopes for the future are evident in the 1991-92 list. People to fulfill those directions include:

- Church planters to work in several regions in the Soviet Union.
- An evangelist and church planter to work with the unreached Kanuri people in Nigeria.
- A professor of agriculture to teach in a university in South Yemen.
- Veterinarians to develop ministries with unreached people groups in Madagascar and Nigeria.

Last year the mission agency filled about half of its 30 priority positions.

"We never meet (every need on) this list," Spurgeon admitted. "We're fortunate to meet half of the list. The point of prioritizing is that we meet more of these high strategic needs this way. Many of these (positions) would get lost in a full list because many of them are difficult work. Many of them wouldn't stand a chance if we didn't spotlight them."

Prospective missionaries are free to look beyond the priority list to other needs, but the top needs are given the widest distribution possible, Spurgeon said.

"We're also trying to keep the priority list as short as possible because we feel it packs more punch," he said. "But now that we're in 121 countries and trying to represent the needs of some 300 people groups, it's becoming really difficult to narrow down the list. I'm pleased to see the diversity in these. This year's list leans toward evangelists, but I also see requests for engineers, educational consultants and physicians.

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"Some appear on this list because they represent urgent needs that have gone unmet for several years. I would hope we would find people with a passion for reaching others. We're asking that Southern Baptists pray fervently that the Lord of the harvest provide laborers for these urgent personnel needs."

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Baptist young woman team member
doesn't quite fit the mold

By Karen Benson

MOSCOW (BP)--There was at least one member of the 26-member Baptist Young Women Enterprisers Abroad team to the Soviet Union who didn't quite fit the mold.

It wasn't this member hadn't done the required 50 hours of training and preparation for the trip. And it wasn't that this member hadn't raised the money needed to finance the trip to distribute Russian language New Testaments and perform other ministries throughout the Soviet Union.

It just so happens this particular member of the Baptist Young Women Enterprisers Abroad team is not a woman.

But Dan Brown, 33-year-old pastor of Mt. Garfield Baptist Church in Palisade, Colo., didn't let his gender stop him from signing up for the team, sponsored by Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union for women ages 18-34.

The reason is simple. It was a chance to fulfill a lifelong dream to share Christ in the Soviet Union.

Besides, his wife, Jan, insisted.

It wasn't important they didn't have the money for the trip. Nor that time was short to raise the funds. Jan learned of the opportunity last May through a friend in Baptist Young Women, the missions organization in Southern Baptist churches for women ages 18-34. The deadline for placing a deposit and reserving a spot was July 15.

Immediately, when Jan learned of the trip, she knew her husband had to go. "Dan has had an intense interest in the Soviet Union ever since he was about 12 or 13 years old," she said.

"He began to follow current events in the Soviet Union. He took Russian language in college and was so good at it his professors wanted him to major in it. He has always had the desire to travel there."

Since becoming a Christian after graduating from college, her husband's interest in the Soviet Union expanded to include a concern for the spiritual development of the Soviet people, she said. He developed "an appreciation and understanding of the lack of Bibles over there," she said. "The lack of God's word there has always bothered him. He has a burden for people who have never had the opportunity to learn about God."

Jan, herself, didn't have a desire to go to the Soviet Union. But she desperately wanted Dan to have the chance.

The nature of this particular trip -- distribution of Russian language New Testaments in Moscow (in the Russian Republic), in Yalta (in the Crimean region of the Ukrainian Republic) and in Bishkek in Kyrgystan (formerly known as Kirghizia) -- cinched it.

It was through reading the Bible by himself that Dan had become a Christian, not through church experiences or being led to Christ by other Christians. Instead, his acceptance of Christ as his personal Savior came through reading the Scriptures on his own.

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"After graduating from college, I started what I thought would be a great career in business counseling," Dan recalls. "But it didn't work out, and I went through an intense personal struggle for several months. I discovered it was harder than I thought, and I quickly lost confidence in myself. I thought I'd be so good at it, and it ended up terrible. I felt very, very low.

"After several weeks, I thought I'd start going to my mother's church (a different denomination). I quickly discovered that that was the only time during the week that I felt any peace."

After several weeks of attending church and really enjoying it, Brown met a Christian man who encouraged him to "seek the kingdom of God."

"So, I went to my pastor to ask him, 'How can I know God?' 'How can I seek his kingdom?' That's when I got the shock of my life. I left there one hour later knowing nothing more than when I arrived," Brown said.

"One day several weeks later, I decided I wanted my own Bible. I went out and bought my very first Bible. It was the Open Bible, with Christian Life Study outlines in the middle of it. Over a two-week period, I read through 15 studies. Through reading those, and Scriptures, and commentaries with it, I discovered my need, the love of Christ, and how I could have a life in Christ."

As a result, Brown accepted the Lord at home by himself one day. "I felt almost an immediate call, or at least a desire, for full-time ministry for Christ," Brown said. Within 14 months of his conversion experience, he was enrolled in Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif.

He has since served as an associate pastor in the Denver area, as associate pastor and minister of youth in Pueblo, Colo., and as minister of discipleship at a Baptist church in Archer City, Texas. Now, he and Jan, who have a 4-year-old daughter, Melissa, minister at a mission church in Palisade, where attendance has built to about 30 regular Sunday attenders.

But the tug to share Christ overseas has never left him. "Since I've been a Christian, I have longed for the opportunity to go overseas anywhere to broaden my perspective of the needs, and to share my testimony with those who don't know Christ," he said.

"When Jan came home one day and said, 'How would you like to go to the Soviet Union for 10 days?' -- I nearly dropped my teeth!" Brown said.

When he learned it would be with a team of Baptist Young Women, that didn't faze him one bit. "All I said was, 'Sounds good to me!' he said, laughing. "I have always had a healthy respect for WMU. That's really grown in the last 15 months."

As soon Jan told him of the possibility, "we made a decision almost on the spot," Brown said. "Jan's enthusiasm just floored me. She didn't want to go. But she wanted me to go. She was willing to commit so much to this without she, herself, going. I immediately started through the training. With my pastoral duties, it took extra time, but it was worth it."

Too, the Lord's timing was "amazing," Brown said. "Shortly after hearing about the trip and making a decision, we received our very first tax refund from the IRS. That provided a little over one-third of the amount needed from that one check, alone," he said.

A \$500 gift from his parents, gifts from members of their church, a Vacation Bible School love offering from children in a neighboring church (which was matched by that church), money Jan earned taking care of an ill, elderly woman, plus other gifts from individuals added up to just the right amount needed to finance the trip.

Dan started brushing up on his Russian, and in the short months from May until the Aug. 30 orientation weekend and Sept. 2 departure, he crammed in the 50 hours of training required for participation in the BYW Enterprisers Abroad program.

In the end, it was worth every sacrifice of time and money, Brown said.

He was one of the first to give his testimony in Moscow's Red Square. Standing on boxes filled with Russian language New Testaments, he shared through an interpreter how Christ had changed his life, and how Christ could do the same for the Soviet people. After that Red Square service, Brown personally led a young man in the crowd to the Lord.

He also sang a solo in a morning worship service in Bishkek, and preached a sermon at the church that afternoon. At the conclusion of the afternoon service, he led another young man to Christ.

Throughout the days in the Soviet Union, Brown personally talked (in Russian) to hundreds of people one-on-one as he distributed Bibles, Russian language tracts and other Christian literature in the Russian language.

"These wonderful people are so eager to talk about Christ, to receive his word, and to even talk with foreigners about God and the hope he offers them. What a wonderful sign this is for the opportunity to help spread the gospel in this vast country," Brown said.

"I am just overwhelmed by their hunger for God and his word, and by the friendliness and love of the Soviet people."

Southern Baptists in Colorado and members of Brown's own church can expect to be hearing more about the needs in the Soviet Union, as Brown returns with a series of challenges for them.

"I personally plan to challenge my church to become involved in a sister-church relationship with a church in Kirghizia, to keep the needs of Soviet Christians in general before them, and to encourage much greater mission awareness around the world," Brown said.

Even before the trip, Brown challenged his church to pray about how they could personally be involved, he said. A mission trip for the entire church might be in the making as a result of the experience, he predicted.

And the possibility that the Lord may be calling the Brown family to a place of service in the Soviet Union is a strong possibility, as well, Brown admits.

Jan, too, is preparing for what may lie ahead, she said. "God has really been dealing with me these past few weeks," she said shortly before Dan left on the trip. "He's been helping me deal with my fear of leaving family and friends, of my fear of raising a child overseas, of my fear of leaving roots. God has really been working on me," she said.

"God has blessed me with time to prepare me for this possibility -- because I know Dan will return changed."

There's no question in Dan's mind about it. He is returning changed. And it was a Baptist Young Women's Enterprisers Abroad experience that did it.

But to his way of thinking, Brown asserts, "I was the luckiest one on the team!"

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Brotherhood Commission

Religious scene in Soviet Union
is uncertain, say missionaries

By Karen Benson

MOSCOW (BP)--When it comes to the religious scene in the Soviet Union, the Iron Curtain may not be a thing of the past.

That assessment might seem odd in these days of glasnost, perestroika and historically unprecedented democratic reform.

But according to George and Veda Rae Lozuk in Moscow, Southern Baptists' first missionaries to the Soviet Union, the key word is "caution" when considering what lies ahead for the Soviet religious communities.

The reason? The very freedoms and democratic processes that are liberating the republics of the Soviet Union from central control could be the same freedoms and processes that give each republic the power to set its own religious parameters, they say.

Already, Uzbekistan and Lithuania are not feeling bound by the "Freedom of Conscience" decree approved by the central government in Moscow allowing for religious freedom in the Soviet Union. In fact, Uzbekistan -- a heavily Moslem-populated republic -- is one of the first republics to close its doors to missionaries.

In republics where the prominent religious preference is Catholicism, or Islam, or Russian Orthodox, the potential exists for the newly sovereign republic governments to shut out influences toward Christianity.

Already, some Eastern European countries, such as Poland, have moved from a "red dictatorship" (communism) to what is now being referred to as a "black dictatorship" (in this case, the Catholic Church).

These circumstances lead the Lozucs to urge Southern Baptists to pray for them to have wisdom as they navigate the uncertainties.

Yet, they remain optimistic as they work with the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists throughout the Soviet Union.

"There is the hope among evangelical Christians and Baptists here that there will be no effort made by the major religious organizations of the country which would take away some of the benefits that have been gained in recent days," George Lozuk said.

In the days since the failed coup attempt to oust Soviet Union President Mikhail Gorbachev, the tone in worship services in Moscow has been one of "buoyancy" and "expectancy," Veda Rae said.

"The tone is one in which the church members are feeling 'We're going to taste freedom' and 'We're going to taste democracy,' and yet there is a looking back over their shoulders, wondering if it's real," she said.

There also is a feeling of expectancy, yet uncertainty, about what will happen to the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, which in the Soviet Union is akin to the broader Southern Baptist Convention. The UECB, now mainly Baptists, is the organization through which Baptists and some other evangelicals in the separate republics have coordinated and cooperated.

In a nutshell, the Lozucs admit they simply don't know and can't predict what will happen to the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. "No one knows which way this will go -- what will happen," George Lozuk said.

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Realities of history suggest "the spirit of what you do in the church follows so much what happens in politics," he said. "In politics, they are declaring independence, and at best, there will be sort of a loose federation," he said. "I'm sure this idea will be discussed (among Christians in the republics). The question becomes, 'How are we going to work together now?'"

While there already is a degree of political independence and freedom among the republics, "there will need to be some economic interdependence" among them, he said. All republics would operate as independent republics, he said, "but they would still need to continue to work together."

That model will probably hold true in the religious community, he suggested. "They are still working together."

Adds Veda Rae, "There is a little bit of anxiety. There is a little bit of concern. Because it's worked so well for so long, and now we don't know how it's going to work."

A meeting Sept. 18-19 in Moscow of all the senior presbyters from all the different republics may bring some answers, George Lozuk said. "They'll discuss specifically, 'What does all this mean to us?' We have anticipated a certain amount of openness already."

But in the meantime, the churches within the union are busy, Veda Rae said. "Even before all this happened, Baptists here were planning and moving on," she said.

A major effort in recent months has been organizing and training to begin Sunday Schools in the churches throughout the Union. Under communist rule, Sunday Schools were outlawed. Now, churches are free to offer them, but they have not had trained teachers, literature, or the organization to pull off the task, she said.

That situation is changing. Recently, the Baptist Sunday School Board sent a team of Baptists to Switzerland, where they held intensive training sessions for nine Baptist leaders from the Soviet Union. "They gave them a whole course in how to write (Sunday School) literature," Veda Rae said. "This group is at work now trying to produce literature for all ages. You can imagine what a job that is, when you've never had anything like it before."

But they must work fast, because already 1,000 Sunday Schools have been started throughout the Soviet Union for children. That's important, when you realize that for so many years, it was against the law for children under age 18 to even attend church, George Lozuk said. Now, they can.

And development of Sunday Schools for all age-levels (through adults) is moving on a fast track, as well.

Churches also are struggling with some basic needs, such as building facilities. Within the last year, 350 churches have been started throughout the Soviet Union, including four new churches in Moscow that have no building in which to meet. "But they're going ahead," George Lozuk said.

In fact, the openness now to the gospel is producing baptisms in record numbers -- especially now that churches can freely baptize without having to run requests for permission to baptize through the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The latest statistical report showed 16,600 baptisms in one year.

The Soviet people are open, and they are searching, the Lozucs say. But a concern is that the message of Christ may not be the first one they hear. "The Moonies are taking sizeable numbers of youth out of the country to go to universities in the United States," George Lozuk said. The Hare Krishnas, Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses are "moving in at an alarming rate -- faster than Baptists, or Protestants in general," he said.

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Yet, while Southern Baptists need to be aware of the opportunities, the open doors, the beginnings of freedom, they need to balance evangelistic zeal with prudence and an understanding of the total picture in the Soviet Union, he said.

"It's just like any enterprise," George Lozuk said. "You can't do it all at one time. It has to be a step at a time. You can't just enter here like an army. There are so many logistical problems -- getting people in, getting people who can translate for them, and so on."

Another problem is that the word is getting out that so many people in the Soviet Union speak English, he said. That simply is not true. "Well, the smile works to communicate. That's universal. But if you can't speak the language, if you can't communicate to them in their language about Jesus Christ, they still won't know."

To put it simply, "it takes awhile to take advantage of the opportunity," he said. "We need to challenge our young people to start studying Russian; to be willing to follow God's call here; to be willing to come over and live among the people; to be willing to come over in joint ventures."

In the meantime, something all Southern Baptists can do is pray, the Lozucs agreed. They cited several top prayer concerns:

1. Pray for the two couples who have just entered the Soviet Union as missionaries -- one serving in the Ukrainian Republic, the other considering an assignment to Minsk. "Pray that they can get a good start, especially in personal relationships," George Lozuk said. "Pray that they will find people who will help pave the way for them."

2. Pray for the 1,000 Sunday Schools that have been started for children, and for the efforts to develop an all-age-level Sunday School program.

3. Pray for the critical meeting on Sept. 18-19 of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists as the Christian leaders from each republic discuss their new relationship.

4. Pray for personnel willing to go to the various republics where requests have been made. "We are hurrying to get personnel in all the republics where possible, before any other doors begin to close," George Lozuk said.

But most of all, the Lozucs ask prayers for them as they lead the Southern Baptist effort in the Soviet Union.

"Just pray that we will have wisdom," Veda Rae Lozuk said. "Because we feel the Lord has a plan for us here. We just need to know it."

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