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Land issues statement on  
board's decision on BJC

By Louis Moore

NASHVILLE (BP)--In response to a unanimous request by Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission trustees, Richard D. Land, the commission's executive director, has issued a statement concerning the decision not to send official representatives to the upcoming board of trustees meeting of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

In action last June, the Southern Baptist Convention merged the Southern Baptist trustees on the BJC, who then were known as the Southern Baptist Public Affairs Committee, with the Christian Life Commission board. That action included a provision to leave the decision whether to send trustees to future BJC meetings to the discretion of the CLC board.

Even though the SBC eliminated all funding to the BJC in fiscal 1991-92, the BJC's bylaws allow for the SBC to send 11 trustees for fiscal 1991-92 and 10 trustees for fiscal 1992-93. After that the BJC's bylaws allow for only one SBC trustee without funding being restored.

Following is Land's statement:

"The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs informed the Christian Life Commission in a letter dated July 8, 1991 that in response to the 'hostile action' of the Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta deleting the last \$50,000 in Convention contributions that the Baptist Joint Committee would recommend and implement the following policy: 'any member body that is entitled to representation on the board will be responsible for its own travel expenses (including room, board, etc.) unless that body makes some reasonable pledge to the BJC's next fiscal budget.'

"The CLC's Executive Committee requested that I write the BJC and request that they reconsider such action, given the long history of substantial Southern Baptist Convention support and the fact that the BJC is currently drawing substantial interest from the \$300,000 capital needs allocation made to the Public Affairs Committee (1964 SBC Annual). I made this request for reconsideration on August 16, 1991.

"The BJC responded in a letter dated August 26, 1991 and declined the CLC's request for reconsideration.

"Consequently, the CLC in its board meeting, September 10-12, 1991, discussed this issue at length and recommended that in light of the BJC's action and in light of their fund-raising letter of August 28, 1991, which distorts and denigrates the CLC and its positions, the CLC recommended 'that a staff member based in Washington, D.C., be asked to attend the BJCPA meeting in October and that any CLC Commissioners who volunteer to go and who are willing to pay their own expenses may do so as observers.' They also instructed 'the Executive Director to make a statement on the Commission's position concerning the BJCPA's actions and that a press release be issued.'

"It was further noted that the CLC was taking this position pursuant to its charter, which was amended by the Convention in June to read that the CLC shall 'determine which, if any, of its directors shall represent the Southern Baptist Convention on the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.'"

Baptist Sunday School Board executives  
witness hunger for Scripture in Russia By Chip Alford

NASHVILLE (BP)--On Johnnie Godwin's first trip to Moscow in 1983, he was detained in customs because he brought along an English Bible.

Only eight years later, he was able to distribute thousands of New Testaments printed in the Russian language to Muscovites eager for spiritual truth.

"The changes taking place in the Soviet Union are incredible," said Godwin, vice president for general publishing at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. "There is such a feeling of euphoria because the Russian people are experiencing religious freedom for the first time in decades. And they are also excited about the potential for democracy, even in the midst of economic chaos."

Godwin and Andy Dodson, director of the distribution services division at the board, along with their wives, Phyllis Godwin and Norma Dodson, were in Moscow Aug. 30-Sept. 10 for the Moscow International Book Fair. The fair, however, was canceled by Soviet officials in the political confusion surrounding the failed coup, so the two men lent their time and energy to the Moscow Project.

A Scripture distribution program sponsored by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA) and the International Bible Society, the project involved the distribution of 4 million Russian New Testaments in the Soviet capital.

Wherever they went -- in Red Square, Gorky Park, subways, hotels, churches, inside the Kremlin or on the streets -- the two men handed out New Testaments and copies of Godwin's book, "What It Means to be Born Again." The book, originally published in English by the board's Broadman Press, had been translated into Russian and shipped for distribution at the book fair.

"I think my greatest memory will be of outstretched hands reaching for New Testaments after all had been given out," Godwin said, adding most of the millions who received Bibles "clasped them to their chests as a cherished book that had been denied to them for 70 years."

Dodson described the trip as a "life-changing experience" that left him with a changed set of priorities.

"The people there are so hungry for religious things, for words of affirmation, for Scripture. Many of the people we gave New Testaments to began reading them immediately. It really helped me see what is important in life," he explained.

Godwin said the "climactic event" of the trip for him was a Saturday night concert sponsored by Youth for Christ and held inside the Kremlin. More than 6,000 people attended the event, he said, which featured performances by American contemporary Christian artist Larnelle Harris, the Spirit of America choir, a South Korean choir and a message from Korean evangelist Billy Kim.

"The first time I was in the Soviet Union was two days after the Korean airliner had been shot down by the Russians," Godwin recalled. "It was thrilling to me that only eight years later we had not only a Korean choir but a Korean minister preaching to these people, loving them, caring for them, and sharing the gospel inside the walls of the Kremlin. And over half of those people attending responded by raising their hands and accepting Christ."

Other highlights of the trip for Godwin included two reunions with Russians he met on earlier trips to Moscow.

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At a banquet inside the Kremlin, he was approached by a Russian Orthodox editor who wanted to interview him about the Moscow Project and the commitment of evangelicals to bringing the gospel to the Soviet Union. Godwin eventually recognized the man as Alexander Ogorodnikov, a Russian Orthodox priest he first met on a 1987 trip to Moscow.

"The first time I met him he had only recently been let out of prison," Godwin recalled. "He had been there for eight years because he started a Bible study in his home.

"He was afraid to meet me at my hotel, so I talked with him in a darkened part of Moscow, outside the reach of city lights and the KGB. We walked around in the dark and I recorded his testimony on tape.

"Now I was seeing him inside of the walls of the Kremlin, and he was boldly asking me questions about sharing the gospel in Russia. It was a tremendous experience."

Godwin also reunited with a Russian Orthodox family he first met in 1983. The family had been trying to emigrate for several years because of religious persecution and had recently obtained permission to leave for Budapest, Hungary.

"They were leaving soon and had sold everything that they owned except their clothes and some blankets," Godwin said. Although the family was leaving under difficult circumstances, he said they were happy and told him "money is not really that important."

Godwin and Dodson also were on hand for the presentation of the symbolic 4 millionth Moscow Project New Testament to the vice president of the Russian Republic on the steps of the Russian "White House." A crowd of more than 100,000 witnessed the presentation, Godwin said, along with media from around the world.

The two had the opportunity to work with many of the 54 Southern Baptist partnership missions volunteers in the Soviet Union as part of the Scripture distribution project. In addition to distributing thousands of New Testaments in Moscow, members of that team also traveled to the Soviet cities of Yalta and Bishkek to distribute Scriptures and copies of Godwin's book.

The men attended services at a Russian Orthodox church where they met a priest that had delivered New Testaments to Russian soldiers operating tanks during the failed coup. They also visited Moscow Central Baptist Church, where Dodson said about 1,000 people crammed into a space that should only accommodate half that number.

"I saw elderly people standing for the entire two-hour service," Dodson said. "These people are really committed to their faith."

Dodson said he came home challenged by the opportunities now available for sharing the gospel in the Soviet Union.

"It only costs 37 cents to print a New Testament in Russia and three cents for distribution," Dodson said, adding churches need to become involved in continued Scripture distribution and mission projects in the Soviet Union. He also said \$250 can provide the salary of a single pastor for one year, and \$500 a year can support a married pastor and his family.

"We have the opportunity now and need to take advantage of it," he said.

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

Cults destroy families,  
Baptist experts say

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Cults often come calling when crisis opens the doors to Baptist homes, two experts say. By offering new "family" relationships to replace troubled family relationships, cults prey on nominal Christians, say Paul Blizzard, a Kentucky pastor and former Jehovah's Witness, and Tal Davis, associate director of interfaith witness with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

However, the family relationships offered by cults aren't all they're promised to be, the two men say. Blizzard, who was a third-generation Jehovah's Witness before becoming a Christian as an adult, knows firsthand the trauma cults can inflict on families. Cults, he says bluntly, "kill families."

The pastor of First Baptist Church in Fairdale, Ky., and his wife left the Witnesses after church officials tried to keep their 5-week-old daughter from receiving a needed blood transfusion. He and his wife were excommunicated, and no other family members attended the child's funeral when she died at age 6.

When one member of a Christian family takes interest in a cult or joins a cult, the whole family may become traumatized, Davis says. "It can be a devastating process, equal to the impact of drug-involvement or the death of a family member."

By nature, cults seek to involve their adherents so deeply in cult-related activities that they break off contact with former friends and family members not in the cult, he explains.

For example, Baptist parents whose children become Mormons likely will not be allowed contact with their grandchildren. Converts to Jehovah's Witnesses are forbidden to have meaningful contact with family members who are not also Jehovah's Witnesses.

Baptists generally define a cult as a group that claims to be Christian yet deviates from essential Christian theology. Among groups classified as cults by the HMB's interfaith witness department are Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Worldwide Church of God, Christian Science and the Unification Church.

People of all ages and backgrounds join cults, says Blizzard, who in the past did extensive counseling with families impacted by cult involvement. "It could be anybody -- especially anybody that hits a bottoming out in their life, maybe a tragedy, or someone who is depressed.

"These people are open for cults to bring their beliefs in and say, 'We've got an answer for this.'"

Davis adds people joining cults often do so in reaction to difficult family relationships. "They're looking for a substitute family, and many times these groups will meet that need.

"At certain junctures, families will break down. It is at those junctures that cults have the most impact. That's when people are looking for answers and are open to change." If any age group is most vulnerable, it is the late-teens to early-20s, both Davis and Blizzard report.

"Cult groups are going to target young people," Blizzard says, "because the cults have instant black-and-white answers for all the great philosophical questions of life." People between the ages of 18 and 24 are leaving behind their childhood and searching for their own set of values, Davis says. "They're starting to question values, to question life in general. At that time, they are most vulnerable to cult recruitment."

Because of this searching, this is also the time in life when many people become Christians, Davis notes.

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Recently, more middle-age and older adults have been drawn into cults, he says. "One reason may be that when people get to that age in life -- with their children grown or becoming widowed -- they're looking for people who will meet the needs they have." When churches fail to meet social needs or to train their members in the Christian faith, they leave the door open to cults, Davis says.

"In many cases, when someone in a Baptist church does not perceive that the church is meeting their needs, a cult may come along and meet those relational needs," he says. "Most people who join cults don't sit down and say, 'I believe this and this and this.' They don't look at it that objectively.

"Generally, it is because someone has shown them love and care. Then once they get in, they become indoctrinated."

"Usually, those joining cults are nominal in their faith and don't know the Bible well," Blizzard adds. "A strong Baptist with a good theological base won't be roped in. This is the downfall of a lot of our churches. We don't train people in the basics of theology, in issues such as the trinity and the deity of God."

The more involved a person becomes in a cult, the more families will become estranged, Blizzard says.

"Cults isolate families. They say: 'We are your new family. Your old family doesn't really have the kind of love we can provide.'"

Cults often use family as a public relations tool but don't provide all they promise, Davis says: "Many of these groups portray an image of wholesome family, but the image often doesn't match the reality.

"Jehovah's Witnesses talk about strong families. The problem is the families are strong only as long as everyone in the family is in the Jehovah's Witnesses.

"If there's any dissension or anybody leaves the group, then that breaks up the family. It doesn't strengthen the family at all."

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Communicate is key to help  
family members out of cults

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Maintaining communication is the key to helping family members or friends lured into cults, Tal Davis and Paul Blizzard say.

Davis is associate director of interfaith witness with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta. Blizzard is pastor of First Baptist Church in Fairdale, Ky., and a former Jehovah's Witness.

"The most important element in a family's response is to maintain the level of communication with the person," Davis says. "Don't do or say something that would totally alienate the person from the family.

"Maintain communication so that at some point if the person becomes disillusioned or wants to get out, they're going to have a way."

Getting accurate information is another key step, Blizzard adds. "Get accurate information from an objective source to the individual. The literature they're going to be bombarded with is biased.

"Expose the true nature of the group before they get penetrated. If you have a friend or family member who is dabbling, they need information right away."

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Well-meaning family members must be careful not to reinforce what Blizzard calls "the martyr complex." Most cults teach that their members must band together because they are being persecuted by the rest of society.

"Reinforcing the idea that they're being persecuted can further entrench them in the group," he says.

In the end, prayer is the best weapon against cults, both men believe. "I can teach techniques and counsel, but ultimately it has to be the guidance of the Holy Spirit to pull them out," Blizzard says.

Other tips:

-- Look for opportunities for the person to come home; try to get him or her out of the cult environment as much as possible.

-- Talk calmly about the theological issues, but don't make this the only topic of conversation.

-- Be respectful and courteous and always let the person feel like a part of the family.