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Foreign board, RTVC hope to work  
together in former Soviet Union

By Marty Groll

Baptist Press  
8/20/92

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Southern Baptists' Foreign Mission Board and Radio and Television Commission hope to forge a tie to win people to Jesus Christ in the former Soviet Union.

The partnership is growing out of FMB trustees' desire to move more quickly into the Commonwealth of Independent States than the mission board's approach has allowed, said John Jackson, board trustee chairman.

At their Aug. 17-19 meeting, FMB trustees voted unanimously to ask staff to consult with the Radio and Television Commission. The goal: to help Baptists in the former Soviet region take advantage of opportunities the commission's programs are opening.

The Radio and Television Commission says it can offer missionaries and Russian Baptists almost immediate access to millions of TV viewers around the Russian city of St. Petersburg and in other areas harder to reach. RTVC President Jack Johnson, who met with board trustees, told them his agency is working through commercial TV in the region to air family-centered programs two hours a week, with plans to expand to seven hours.

The programs include a 30-minute Baptist Hour worship excerpt called "Word of Life," a children's show, a talk show on American family life, documentaries and music.

In one survey the commission found 8.3 percent of the 115 million-member potential audience -- or more than 9 million people -- viewed "Word of Life." More than a third of the viewers who responded to the survey said the show influenced their understanding of religion. But so far the programs offer viewers no avenue to seek more information. Johnson asked mission board trustees to consider finding a way to lead those people influenced by the programs to Christ.

"We could say ... in a tag at the end of the program ... 'Now, if you want more information, please write,'" Johnson said. Such follow-up goes beyond his agency's role, he added, but he suggested the mission board could recruit Russians for such an effort.

Trustee chairman Jackson invited Johnson to tell how the commission's potential viewing public exploded from 20 million Americans to hundreds of millions on both sides of the world in only a few months. The opportunity emerged when a Russian cable TV executive spotted potential in the Southern Baptist agency's strong family programs and put Johnson in contact with a station in St. Petersburg.

"We're talking about maybe a million people being saved in a year," said Jackson in an interview. "I could blow apart just thinking about what we could do. It's a rare opportunity."

During their meetings, trustees spoke strongly about overcoming an image of undue caution in the formerly communist areas.

"People in the pew are saying trustees are dragging their feet," Jackson said. "We've done some good things (in the region) ... but we want to reach people that are reachable now. There's a window of opportunity God only opens every now and then."

Especially in plans relating to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet area, trustees have grown weary of waiting for missionaries to be trained in language and culture before launching a full-scale evangelistic effort, Jackson said.

Under its "Green Alert" plan to take advantage of new opportunities in the former Soviet Union, the board is transferring a number of experienced missionaries to key locations to prepare the way for other missionaries and volunteers.

Sam James, the mission board's new vice president for work in the region, said he plans to discuss with Radio and Television Commission vice president Mike Wright how the two agencies can join forces. Johnson suggested a small-scale test in the former Soviet area before planning a full-blown program.

"It's too premature to determine just what part we might play in this," said James, vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. He cautioned, however, that any plan should lead new believers either to form churches or join existing ones.

"We wouldn't want to build an electronic church," he said. "Our whole outreach around the world is predicated around evangelism that results in churches."

James will decide nothing until after he talks with Baptists in the region, he added. "Whatever response we make is going to be in cooperation and consultation with our Russian brothers and sisters. I don't think we'd want to work independently."

Johnson never thought Southern Baptists would have such an opportunity, he said. "I know all that glitters is not gold," he acknowledged. "But there are some paths we have to walk just because of the awesome possibilities."

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BSSB trustees set record budget,  
hear positive financial reports

By Charles Willis

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Trustees of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board approved a record operating budget for 1992-93 and heard positive financial reports for the current year during their semiannual meeting Aug. 17-19 at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

The 1992-93 budget of \$213,798,000 is for operating costs during a time of transition in which a new organizational structure will be implemented. The budget is \$8.5 million, or 4.2 percent, above the 1991-92 budget and assumes a savings of at least \$1.6 million from the reorganization, including the early retirement of some of the 191 employees eligible to choose a special retirement "window."

Financial reports for the first nine months of the board's fiscal year (Oct. 1, 1991-June 30, 1992) showed increased sales in significant areas, resulting in total revenue of \$144,105,000 or 2.7 percent above the same period last year.

Church literature sales were 1.8 percent above budget and 6.8 percent above last year. Convention Press sales were 10.7 percent above budget, including sales of The Baptist Hymnal for the nine-month period of \$780,000. Genevox Music sales were 12.8 percent above budget and CIS sales were 13 percent above the revised plan approved at the February 1992 meeting. Down in sales were Holman at 1.7 percent below budget and conference centers at 5.4 percent below budget.

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Among products cited for outstanding performance were Lifeway's First Place and Making Peace with Your Past, with sales of \$270,000 in the first six weeks of release; the Holman Bible Dictionary, with sales exceeding a half million copies; and The Baptist Hymnal, with total unit sales at two million. Holman's Family Worship Bible (NIV) was cited by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association for the best Bible published in 1991.

In other matters, trustees approved a church literature periodical price increase, which will average 5 percent effective with the April 1993 issues. Escalating paper and production charges were among factors leading to the final approval. Trustees gave initial approval in February 1992 for the 5 percent average increase for budget planning purposes.

An increase in conference center rates of approximately 5 percent will be effective beginning with the 1993 summer conference schedule. The increase is designed to offset increased operating costs, facility maintenance and improvements.

Trustees reduced the board's early retirement provision known as the "rule of 92" to the "rule of 85." The retirement option provides that any employee who is at least age 55 and the sum of whose age and years of service is at least 85 may receive early retirement benefits without a monetary penalty. Under the previous plan, the sum of 92 points for age and years of service was required. The revised plan will allow an employee with 30 years of service, for example, to retire at age 55 without a reduction in benefits.

An ad hoc increase for current retirees was approved, providing a 1.5 percent increase in benefits for each year of retirement up to five years. The last benefits increase for retirees was in 1988.

Periodicals deleted effective October 1993 include Glory Songs Music Recording, Youth Alive and Youth Alive Leaders Packet. Points for Emphasis Cassette Tape will be deleted effective April 1993. Limited sales and optional board-produced product offerings were cited as motivating the changes.

Trustees added four new products:

- Bible Express, a daily devotional guide for older boys and girls to include Scripture, biblical application and prayer suggestions, to begin publication October 1993.
- Adult Life and Work Study Guide, an inductive Bible study approach for adult Sunday school classes using the Life and Work Series, to begin publication October 1994.
- secretary: FYI, a quarterly informational newsletter for use by church and denominational secretaries, to begin publication October 1993.
- Care: A Resource for Christian Caregivers, a quarterly for pastors, church staff, counselors and chaplains to begin publication October 1993.

Trustees approved a recommendation for an ad hoc committee to study the current practice of conducting summer trustee meetings at Glorieta (N.M.) or Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist conference centers on an alternating schedule with meetings at the Sunday School Board headquarters in Nashville. The increased cost of transporting Nashville staff members to the conference centers was cited in the trustee request for the study.

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Thousands attending Expo 92  
find the 'best discovery'

By Mike Creswell & Linda Fisher

Baptist Press  
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SEVILLE, Spain (BP)--Baptist volunteers from the United States and other countries are spreading the gospel among many of the millions of visitors attending Expo 92 in Spain.

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Expo is one of two world-class events in Spain this year; the other was the Summer Olympics in Barcelona. Expo may not have received as much media attention, but between 18 million and 40 million visitors will have attended by the end of its April-October run, officials say.

The mammoth world's fair covers more than 500 acres and features exhibits from some 150 countries, corporations and organizations.

"The Age of Discovery" is Expo's theme, commemorating the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus 500 years ago. Spanish Baptists have adapted the theme. "The Best Discovery," their motto for the year, refers to the discovery of Jesus Christ.

Baptist efforts have reached both inside and outside Expo.

The only Christian exhibit at Expo is the \$4 million "Pavilion of Promise," a high-tech presentation of the Bible's account of creation and the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Mirrored theaters, laser lights and state-of-the-art projectors present the message to visitors.

In a closing presentation, evangelical pastors from Seville summarize the message and tell visitors they need to respond to the gospel. Visitors are offered free New Testaments and the opportunity to sign up for a Bible correspondence course. A Christian bookstore offers literature in several languages.

By Aug. 1 more than 103,000 visitors had walked through the pavilion. Almost 13,000 had registered personal decisions of commitment to Christ. Pavilion workers had handed out more than 30,000 New Testaments.

The "Pavilion of Promise" has been used in two previous world's fairs with similar results. Baptists joined other evangelical church groups of Seville in supporting the pavilion; Baptist volunteers from the United States and several other countries helped staff it.

Many visitors leaving the pavilion are visibly moved. Southern Baptist Patrick Key, 22, recalled one woman to whom he gave a New Testament and evangelistic tracts.

"You could see on her face how much she was searching for something. You could see the emptiness in her eyes," he said.

Key, a senior at the University of North Alabama, was part of an 11-member Baptist Student Union team from Texas and Alabama sent to work eight weeks in Seville.

The students have provided a longer-term corps of workers for the effort, while more than a dozen teams of shorter-term volunteers from the United States, Brazil, Spain and the United Kingdom already have served this summer.

The BSUs also staff a Baptist coffeehouse set up in the university section of Seville by Southern Baptist missionaries. The BSU workers have poured soft drinks and dished out plates of chips, pizza and "jamon serrano," a pungent salt-cured ham that's a local favorite.

Through music, drama presentations and one-on-one conversations, the students have shared their faith with young Spaniards who visit.

If funds permit, the coffeehouse will remain open as an ongoing ministry, said missionary Tom Hilyer, a student worker in Seville.

In a small park between the high-rise apartment buildings of Seville, one student team set up a portable puppet stage and used taped Spanish-language dialogue to accompany their puppet play. As amplified music reverberated across the plaza and the colorful puppets began to move, children and adults alike gathered to watch.

Brazilian volunteer Walter de Paula Silva, 25, played a guitar and taught a Christian chorus. De Paula's parents used money saved to renovate their family's law firm office to send him and his sister to Spain for two weeks.

As team members worked with the puppets, others handed out Christian tracts and New Testaments marked with the plan of salvation.

The volunteers also have worked to extend the outreach of the Evangelical Baptist Church. The 140-member congregation is the only Baptist church in Seville, a city of about 1 million people.

Mission statistics often present Spain as an "evangelized" nation, but most of Spain's 40 million people are "Catholics in name only" who have no personal relationship with Christ. Baptists in Spain number only about 7,500 and there are only about 70,000 evangelicals of all kinds in the country.

Roman Catholic studies show only 17 percent of Spain's people are practicing Catholics, said Roberto Velert Chesbert, a Baptist pastor in Barcelona who is president of the Evangelical Baptist Union of Spain. The rest live with religious influences from popular folklore. Many practice a secular lifestyle with no religious influence.

Spaniards often have contact with the Catholic Church only for baptisms, weddings and funerals, Velert said. Even the Catholic Church is recognizing the need to bring people into the church, said Ruben Gomez, pastor of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Seville. "They are realizing they have gone wrong somewhere," he added.

Southern Baptist volunteers in Seville confirmed the religious hunger and curiosity among Spaniards they encountered on the streets.

"Evangelism is greatly needed in Spain. Spaniards are really thirsting for something," said Jason Quimby, 18, a student at Auburn University in Montgomery, Ala. Quimby's parents are former Southern Baptist missionaries to Spain. He grew up there and speaks Spanish fluently.

Volunteers have worked on the street many days when temperatures topped 100 degrees. "Home" is a bunk bed-equipped apartment without air conditioning. Many have slept on the roof of the apartment building in search of cooler temperatures.

Up to 40 volunteers at a time have shared the apartment and cooking and cleaning duties. Shopping trips for such a crew have required up to \$1,000 at a time for food. A missionary prepared menus of inexpensive meals that could be prepared on a stove top -- the apartment has no oven.

Some overseas Baptists have had trouble adapting to American-style foods. But American volunteers have had to adjust to such Spanish cultural norms as afternoon siestas and an evening schedule that routinely includes activities running until midnight.

The hours seemed odd at first, but Texan Kristy Mays soon agreed they are logical. "Given the heat, it makes sense," she said. Mays, 22, is a senior at Texas A & M University in College Station. She came to Spain through the partnership missions office of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Students are used to roughing it, but 73-year-old volunteer Zeta Hall proved she had the "right stuff" too.

"I knew it would be crowded, but that's a very minor thing," Hall, of Kansas City, Mo., said. "We're in the (apartment) a very short time."

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

Clinton voices misgivings  
on court's prayer ruling

By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton has expressed misgivings about the Supreme Court's June decision prohibiting prayer at a public school graduation. Clinton's comments came in an interview telecast on a delayed basis by the ACTS network.

"I'm not sure I agree with that decision," said Clinton, a member of a Southern Baptist church in Little Rock, Ark.

President George Bush registered disagreement with the decision the day it was issued by the Supreme Court, June 24, saying the justices had "unnecessarily cast away the venerable and proper American tradition of nonsectarian prayer at public celebrations."

According to Clinton's comments on ACTS, Southern Baptists have "always been very firmly for the separation of church and state, and I adhere to that, but I'm not sure that public expressions of faith that are plainly open for people not to participate constitute a violation of the First Amendment."

Clinton said he has agreed in general with the Supreme Court's decisions on school prayer. He also said he had not read the June opinion.

Nothing government does should be "construed as coercion in any way, shape or form to adhere to a particular religious belief," Clinton said. "I had always felt that nonsectarian prayers to open football games, for example, ... or at a graduation ceremony were no more oppressive than having the chaplain of the Senate or the House of Representatives open the Congress with a prayer."

Clinton said he was the "designated Bible reader" in his junior high public school in Hot Springs, Ark. Each day students he had asked read the Bible or he read it, Clinton said.

Clinton's comments came during a July 19 religious town hall meeting telecast on and produced by the Vision Interfaith Satellite Network. It was shown July 20 on ACTS, the Southern Baptist Convention's television network. A video tape of the show was obtained recently by Baptist Press.

ACTS recently reached an agreement with VISN to share a single channel beginning Oct. 1.

When the Supreme Court announced its opinion in *Lee v. Weisman* June 24, President George Bush said in a written statement: "While we must remain neutral toward particular religions and protect freedom of conscience, we should not remain neutral toward religion itself. In this case, I believe that the Court has unnecessarily cast away the venerable and proper American tradition of nonsectarian prayer at public celebrations."

In its opinion, the Supreme Court ruled a Rhode Island school board coerced student participation in religion and thereby violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment when it enlisted a Jewish rabbi to offer an invocation and benediction at a junior high commencement.

The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission had filed a brief asking the Court to not only uphold graduation prayer but revise its two-decade-old Establishment Clause standard, known as the Lemon test. The Baptist Joint Committee had joined a brief asking the justices to rule the prayers in the case unconstitutional and to maintain its current test.

Stroope elected area director of  
Cooperative Services International

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Michael Stroope was elected area director of Cooperative Services International Aug. 19 by trustees of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

Stroope, 40, a Texas native, will direct field personnel and administration for the Southern Baptist aid organization from a base in London, where he has worked since 1990 as its western region coordinator.

Lewis Myers, CSI's founding director and now the board's regional vice president for CSI, will continue in that role and as a member of the board's Global Strategy Group. Stroope's election frees Myers from day-to-day administration to concentrate on strategy planning.

Cooperative Services International was formed in 1985 as an arm of the Foreign Mission Board designed to reach into nations and regions where traditional missionaries do not or cannot work. The organization began its work in China -- still a major focus -- but has since begun projects in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, some of the former Soviet republics, the Middle East and North Africa.

CSI sponsors teachers, medical workers, business and technical professionals and other specialists who offer their expertise in needy areas and also spread their Christian faith. It focuses on what many mission planners now call "World A" -- the 1.2 billion people across the world who have never had opportunity to hear the gospel clearly, much less accept or reject it.

Stroope, formerly a Southern Baptist missionary to Sri Lanka and Malaysia, joined the mission board staff in Richmond in 1986 as a consultant in missionary enlistment. He became associate director of career missionary orientation in 1987. In 1988 he joined Cooperative Services International and worked in Munich, Germany, before moving to London in 1990.

A native of Odessa, Texas, Stroope received the bachelor of arts degree from Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, and the master of divinity and doctor of philosophy in mission degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He is married to the former Kay George of Baird, Texas. They have three children.

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