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-- BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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November 18, 1992

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Baptists in former Soviet Union
making plans to stay together

By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press
11/18/92

MOSCOW (BP)--The council of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (UECB) of the former Soviet Union, wanting to maintain their unity while accepting their new political realities, unanimously voted to initiate plans to reorganize into a new Federation of Baptist Unions during their UECB Congress here, Nov. 9-14.

The council, made up of leaders and senior pastors of Baptist Unions in the republics and Baltic states, also voted to keep the current UECB officers, headed by President Gregori Kommendant, in place to pilot the transition from a union to a federation of unions.

While no exact date for the completion of the transition was set, it is expected that the proposal will be ratified at the next congress meeting in early 1994.

"Your federation can become a model for what your people can become in Jesus Christ," said Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance who praised the council for its decision.

While no details were settled, it was proposed that the federation be composed of the autonomous Baptist unions of the now 15 independent republics that wish to belong. The federation would be legally recognized by the governments as the legal successor to UECB.

The federation's executive committee would be composed of the presidents of the Baptist Unions. The federation president would be elected by a two-thirds majority of the executive committee.

It was also proposed, among other things, that the federation would coordinate Baptist efforts in theological education, publishing of Christian literature, communications, missionary work, social ministries and women's work.

The federation would be financed by free-will offerings of its member bodies.

This year's congress, the second for the UECB since freedom came to the former Soviet Union in 1990, had no legal authority to approve the changes. However, there was rejoicing when the proposed federation was announced.

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In the council's first March 1990 meeting, Baptist pastors and leaders took full advantage of the new openness and freedom to elect new leaders and change the name of their union from the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB) to the Evangelical Christian Baptist Union of the USSR (ECBU), which later was changed to the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

But the breakup of the former Soviet Union into states and republics quickly threw the newly organized union into confusion about its identity and future and virtually paralyzed the UECB leadership.

"I am president, but president of what?" asked Kommandant who, perhaps more than anyone else, had suffered from a paralyzed union. "How can we go on like this?"

Therefore the future of the UECB and by extension, the unity of Baptists in the former Soviet Union, made this second congress even more pivotal than the first.

But, remembering how they had suffered together in the past and recognizing how much they still needed each other, leader after leader from the republics and states called for unity and supported the idea of a federation.

"We have no union yet," said one pastor from Azerbaijan, "but now we have to have one. We need your help. Please do not follow the politicians, follow Christ."

"Jesus Christ binds us together in the strongest of bonds," said one German Mennonite pastor.

These binding Baptist ties were emphasized by Lotz when the council asked him to speak about their proposed federation.

"You have too much of a common history to lose it all, you have suffered too much together to dissolve," Lotz said.

Saying this is a "historic time," Lotz noted that "while the whole world is falling apart" with ethnic and national tensions, "I am pleased to see your desire for unity.

"What God has put together, let no man put asunder," Lotz quoted.

Lotz told the UECB Council that its uncertain status was not unique in Baptist life around the world.

"Today you have said you want to stay together," Lotz said, "but you don't know in what form. All over the world that is happening to Baptists."

However, Lotz told them that Baptists around the world were praying for and supporting them.

Lotz noted that already eight of their unions were members of the BWA and assured them that each of the unions would relate directly to the BWA. However, as long as there are unions in the UECB that are not BWA members, he said the union would remain a BWA member.

"You are the BWA," Lotz told them. "We belong together.

"While the BWA cannot tell you what to do, we want to work with you during this time of transition," Lotz said.

Lotz urged them to "come to each other in humility" and "to seek God's will in prayer" that God would lead in the right direction about their future work together.

"We can rejoice, this is a period of growth and new direction," Lotz said.

Parents give suggestions for
teaching meaning of Christmas

By Chip Alford

NASHVILLE (BP)--It's that time of year again. Time for starry-eyed children to dream dreams of Barbie dolls, action-packed Nintendo games and stockings full of candy and surprises.

Christmas is just around the corner and, once again, many parents are struggling with how to communicate the real "reason for the season" to children preoccupied with toys, Christmas trees and that white-bearded gentleman in a red suit.

"The key is to intentionally look for ways to bring up the birth of Christ during the year, to make it a part of your normal, everyday routine," said Morlee Maynard, manager of the preschool program section in the church growth-Sunday school division at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Maynard said she takes time to talk about God with her 5-year-old son, Jonathan, during his bedtime prayers.

"This is something we do year-round. That way (when Christmas arrives) Jesus is not somebody new. He's somebody we've been talking about all year."

Rusty Gilbert, pastor of Rocky Springs Baptist Church in Lisbon, La., said another key is to tie Jesus' birth to concrete holiday traditions children already know and understand, such as the giving and receiving of presents.

"They need to understand the Christmas event we are celebrating is God's gift to us of his only Son, and that he loves us because of who we are, not because of what have done or haven't done (during the year)," he said.

Involving children in special projects or ministries during the holidays also can communicate to them the true holiday spirit, said Gilbert, father of three children, ages 5, 7 and 9.

"Every Christmas morning I go out and visit shut-ins, the homebound and anyone who has had a significant loss in their family in the last year. I take my family with me and we spend time with these people. We've prayed with them and we've cried with them. I think it is important for families to touch the life of somebody that you don't have to touch (during the holidays)," he said.

Gayle Haywood, minister of preschool and children at Brentwood (Tenn.) Baptist Church and mother of three young girls, suggests involving children in holiday traditions at an early age.

"Establish some family traditions and help your children understand these are special activities you do only at Christmas because it is a time to celebrate the Lord's birth," she said.

"For example, we take one whole night each year for Christmas decorating. We've done it so often the girls have learned where everything goes.

"We put the nativity scene in the focal point of our room, low enough so the girls can play with it. And as we unwrap the pieces of the nativity scene, we talk about each character. They've broken some of the pieces, but I think it's important for it to be a hands-on thing for them, something they can play with. That helps them to learn about the Christmas story."

Some of the best ideas for teaching children about why we celebrate Christmas come from parents' own creativity and imagination, Haywood said. But parents looking for a little help might try one of the following suggestions made by several Southern Baptist parents:

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- Bake a birthday cake and have your children sing "Happy Birthday to Jesus."
- Place an Advent wreath of candles in your home and have children light each of the four candles as Christmas approaches. Explain that Advent is a time on the Christian calendar to give thanks for God's gift of Christ. This is a concrete way to keep children's attention focused on the approaching celebration of Christ's birth on Christmas Day.
- Let children participate in selecting, purchasing and distributing gifts to the underprivileged. Use this as a chance to remind children God gave us Jesus, and Jesus was always giving to others.
- Let children design their own Christmas card based on the Christmas story.
- During the month of December, include your children in family devotions that focus on the Christmas story and the spirit of giving. Some churches publish Christmas devotional guides for families that include art drawn by children.
- Let children participate in planning your family's Christmas budget. This helps them to understand responsible spending and the idea that the value of a gift does not lie in its cost. Children could also be encouraged to make their own gifts, using crafts/art work.
- Let children give a "Christmas gift to missions" through the Lottie Moon Christmas offering.
- Let children help with the Christmas baking and deliver cakes/cookies/breads to family, friends, shut-ins, etc.
- Sing Christmas carols together.
- Make a Christmas chain with links for each day in the month of December made of strips of paper. On each link, write a prayer request and a note about a special event that will happen on that day or during the Christmas season. Take off one link every day. This keeps children focused on Christ during the holidays and offers a concrete reminder of the days before the holiday's arrival.
- Visit a living nativity scene.
- Attend church Christmas cantatas, pageants, dramas. Involve children in these productions when possible.
- During family celebrations, let older children help read the Christmas story and younger children act out the event in a drama.
- Have an open house for your children's Sunday school and elementary school teachers. Under your guidance, let children plan the menu, prepare and serve the refreshments.
- Decorate a "Christmas book bag" to hold books about the Christmas story. Have books children can read on their own and books you can read to them.

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

Christmas pageant lights up
Mississippi cotton patch

By Robert J. Hastings

Baptist Press
11/18/92

HICKORY FLAT, Miss. (BP)--Recent years have seen a surge in the number and size of Christmas pageants and musicals in Southern Baptist churches.

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Some congregations spend thousands and thousands of dollars on stage settings, professional lighting, choirs, and sound. The larger pageants often run several nights, drawing huge crowds. A few churches even sell tickets. Others issue free tickets so visitors will be assured of seating.

One of the most unusual programs in America is staged in an open, 20-acre cotton field, nine miles from the nearest town. It dates back to the early 1950s and is produced and financed by two families, one Baptist, the other Methodist.

Called "Christmas in the Cotton Patch," it has attracted viewers from all 50 states. Yet there is no paid advertising, no tickets, no expensive settings.

"Cotton Patch" began with a single, five-foot star made out of scrap lumber, decorated with colored lights and put together by country storekeeper Fred McGaughy, a Methodist layman. Fred hoisted the star over the branches of a big beech tree near his store.

About 1958, on a shopping trip to nearby Memphis, Tenn., Fred's daughter, Jan, age 7, was mesmerized by the lights in the big stores. "Can't you do better than one star?" she asked her daddy.

As soon as Fred got home, he built a simple nativity scene of a plywood camel and three Wise Men made from rough 2x4s and coat hangers. He set it up in a cotton field across from his store and illuminated it at night.

Word spread by word of mouth, and Fred could tell by the number of cars suddenly braking to a stop when they saw a nativity scene in a cotton patch that he had struck on a unique method to tell the Christmas story.

In 1959 he added still more biblical sets, again using props and costumes made from the simplest materials.

It was then he asked his neighbors, Ewart Autry, now deceased, and his wife, Lola, if they would write, narrate and record a program which, using an outdoor sound system, could be heard for miles around.

The Autrys, who moved to the area in 1941 to serve seven, scattered, struggling Southern Baptist churches, loved the gently rolling terrain of northern Mississippi. At the time, none of their seven churches were on paved roads. The Autrys also enjoyed the nearby Holly Springs National Forest.

Seeing this as a unique Christian witness for a rural setting, they wrote and recorded a 30-minute program, complete with background music.

And so it has continued each year since. Now, three generations of the Autry and McGaughy families, including children, grandchildren, and their spouses, donate their time to stage the pageant.

Although Ewart is now deceased, his widow, Lola, and her extended family continue to write and narrate the drama. And Fred keeps adding new sets, so that now the panorama includes about 20 scenes tracing the life of Jesus from his birth to his ascension.

There are no actors -- only sound and illuminated sets. But when seen from a distance, lighted by giant flood lights made from 50-pound lard stands, it reminds you of how the Judean hills might have looked on the First Christmas.

"Christmas in the Cotton Patch" is on state road 5, about nine miles north of Hickory Flat, Miss. The 30-minute program begins at 8 p.m. nightly, Dec. 16-27.

Linda Singleton approaches Christmas
with gratitude for friends, family By Linda Lawson

NASHVILLE (BP)--At 7:30 on Christmas morning 1991, Dudley Singleton, Linda Singleton's husband of 28 years, died at home after a 10-month battle with a brain tumor.

Linda Singleton approaches the first anniversary of Dudley's death with the faith and characteristic realism that sustained her through his illness and death. She does not dread Christmas 1992.

"People have said to me, 'Oh, how horrible that he died on Christmas day,'" Singleton, music consultant for the Tennessee Department of Education and a member of Griewood Baptist Church in Nashville, reflected in a recent interview.

On the contrary, Singleton said she finds comfort in knowing, because the anniversary of her husband's death is also Christmas day, she will always be surrounded by family and friends.

Singleton believes she has gained strength not only from her faith in Christ but also from the way Dudley faced death while never giving up hope for life.

A veterinarian, he understood immediately upon receiving the diagnosis the gravity of his situation. He underwent surgery, experienced a "marvelous recovery," took radiation, chemotherapy and then an experimental form of chemo.

Eight months after his February 1991 diagnosis, Dudley planned his own wake, invited friends and "held it early in order to actively participate -- rather than just be present!" Linda Singleton recalled. He also planned his memorial service, carefully selecting Scripture and music to make it a special time of worship.

As Christmas 1991 approached and Dudley was becoming progressively weaker, he told Linda he still had some goals. While he did not tell her what the goals were, Linda believes one may have been to live until Christmas.

During December, he enjoyed the decorations and music of the holiday. The Singletons' daughter, Melanie, had quit her job and moved home to help care for her father and to brighten his days. Son Brett received a "humanitarian transfer" from the U.S. Navy to be with his father. Dudley's parents travelled regularly from their Huntsville, Ala., home to support their son and assist in his care.

"Strangely enough, we had a good year," Singleton told participants in the July 1992 Church Music Leadership Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center. "There was a clarity about life. Dudley was dying. God was ever present.

"We shared this realism with gratitude for the good life we had experienced together. We were surrounded by God's love manifested primarily through the remarkable people who were willing to enter into our sorrow," she continued.

To Christians who may feel uncertain about how to minister to people experiencing grief during the holiday season, Singleton urges sending cards, visiting and calling, not necessarily to talk about the pain but just to make the person aware that someone is there who cares.

"We should never underestimate the positive impact of cards and visits and food," she said. "For weeks after Dudley died, I could hardly wait to get home and check the mail to see who I might have heard from."

As the holidays approach, she is reminded of how ill Dudley was at this time last year. She also anticipates "hearing from lots of my friends."

Despite the pain and the grief, Singleton said at Glorieta: "I feel privileged to have been present and shared this intimate experience with my best friend of 33 years. I miss him greatly, and I miss his love for life that encouraged me for these many years.

"Sometimes I feel less whole because he was such an important part of me for so long and because he had many strengths I do not possess. He trusted everyone and was comfortable with redneck farmers or Chinese dignitaries. He could fix anything, and no matter how bad a circumstance appeared, he would expect and seek a positive outcome," she said.

She described the time since her husband's diagnosis as "difficult, painful, lonely and sometimes tiring. But, we have felt free to grieve precisely because of God's presence in our lives. Scripture, Christian tradition and my own personal experience have assured me that I will not be abandoned and I am not alone.

"God's presence offers hope and joy even through painful loss."

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

Northwest Baptists approve
new building in Washington

By Donald J. Sorensen

Baptist Press
11/18/92

EUGENE, Ore. (BP)--In a show of near-unanimity, messengers to the 44th Northwest Baptist Convention voted to move ahead with plans to relocate convention facilities from downtown Portland to a recently purchased site across the Columbia River in Vancouver, Wash.

The facilities also will house the Northwest Campus of Golden Gate Seminary as well as offices for the Northwest Baptist Foundation.

Only two negative votes on the recommendations were detected among the record attendance for an afternoon business session, as nearly 600 messengers demonstrated their support for the move.

Approval of the \$2 million move was the high point of the Nov. 9-12 meeting in Eugene, Ore., which also included the precedent-setting election of Roy Belcher, pastor of Grant Avenue Baptist Church in Corvallis, Ore., as the new president. He becomes the first president to serve in nonconsecutive years. Belcher previously was president in 1979 and 1980. Since then he moved to Colorado and has returned to the Northwest to serve at Corvallis. Belcher won in a ballot with one other nominee.

The convention also voted to increase Cooperative Program giving to 31 percent, up .25 percent, to Southern Baptist international and national ministries. In a record-setting \$3.6 million budget, 4.2 percent over 1992, Cooperative Program giving for 1993 is expected to exceed \$2 million from Northwest churches and missions.

Inspired by the "Find Us Faithful" slogan, messengers received a boost the night before the vote in the announcement that Golden Gate had pledged to give \$50,000 a year for 10 years to the relocation project.

Golden Gate President William O. Crews disclosed the news via video, and the promise of \$500,000 was greeted by applause and served as a catalyst for the overwhelming endorsement of the project the following day. The seminary's Northwest Campus of the will be a major part of the new building to be constructed in 1994.

Enthusiasm for the project prevailed throughout the convention. Fred Chapman, a retired fund-raiser for the Stewardship Commission who is serving as consultant on the project, said in an interview, "I have never seen a Baptist project on a convention-wide basis that was better received and with such broad support."

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Speaking to the convention, he added: "I have not seen so much enthusiasm and so much commitment" in a Baptist campaign of this kind.

Earlier, Belcher, as chairman of the relocation committee, reported, "I feel confident that the project can be completed" and "at a cost of no more than \$2 million."

With the approval of the convention the way is clear to proceed. A conditional use permit must be granted, the current Baptist Building must be sold and plans made for raising funds and organizing volunteer labor.

Other new officers are Hezle M. Stewart, pastor of First Baptist Church in Longview, Wash., first vice president, and Mitch Martin, pastor of Quinault Baptist Church in Kennewick, Wash., second vice president. Each won ballots with one other nominee.

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Sorenson, a retired newspaper reporter, is volunteer news editor of the Northwest Baptist Witness.

Indiana Baptists celebrate growth
in baptisms, new congregations

By Tammi Ledbetter

Baptist Press
11/18/92

MUNCIE, Ind. (BP)--Dispensing with formal business in a matter of minutes, messengers to the 34th annual meeting of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana spent most of their time rejoicing over growth in the spiritual benchmarks of baptisms, missions and giving.

Guest speakers encouraged the 260 messengers and 109 guests to depend upon Scripture for guidance in witnessing, church growth and spiritual development.

A \$1,768,086 Cooperative Program budget was approved unanimously without discussion. Churches reported a 4.53 percent increase in the number of baptisms in the past year and surpassed a goal of starting 52 new works across the state. Messengers heard a report of plans for a "53 in '93" emphasis whereby the rapid development of Southern Baptist work in the state will continue in the next year.

Gifts to all Southern Baptist mission causes were reported to have increased over previous levels. In addition to committing 32.25 percent of receipts to be channeled through the SBC Executive Committee, the same percentage as 1992, messengers also approved a challenge to send 40 percent of the receipts beyond the basic budget to the Cooperative Program.

Messengers unanimously re-elected by acclamation their president, Clarence Brock, pastor of the host church, Old Town Hill Baptist in Muncie. First Vice President James Bullock, pastor of Colgate Baptist Church in Clarksville, was re-elected. Sid West, pastor of Waynedale Baptist Church in Fort Wayne, was elected first vice-president by unanimous voice vote.

In other business, messengers approved a partnership mission for Indiana Baptists with the Baptist Mission in Zambia from July 1, 1993, through June 30, 1996. A motion also passed for Indiana Baptists to commit to prayer for President-elect Bill Clinton.

Next year's meeting will be Nov. 9-10 at Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Vincennes.

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Baptist pastor, family
escape from Sarajevo

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press
11/18/92

BELGRADE, Serbia (BP)--A Baptist pastor and his family have escaped from Sarajevo after hiding out for months from the fierce fighting that has devastated the Bosnian capital.

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Boris Karceravic and his wife, Senka, crossed the Bosnian border into Croatia with help from Croatian Baptist pastor Stevo Dereta, reported Southern Baptist missionary Bill Steele in Belgrade. The Karceravics arrived Nov. 16 with their four children, newborn to age 8, in Vodica on the Croatian coast.

Baptists in many parts of the world have been praying for the family's safety. Croatian Baptists earlier reported Mrs. Karceravic had been able to leave Sarajevo, but that report was found to be incorrect. Communication between the war zone and outside is difficult.

Mrs. Karceravic gave birth to her fourth child in Sarajevo while the city was ripped by heavy shelling and frequent fighting. Despite some complications with the birth, Mrs. Karceravic and her new son are doing well.

The Karceravics went to Sarajevo for outreach to Muslims. They worked in a ministry center partly financed by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board through a \$150,000 grant. The grant was made before war broke out in crumbling Yugoslavia.

One reason the Karceravics stayed on in Sarajevo after fighting began was to try to protect the ministry center building, which has sustained slight damage from the fighting. Before leaving, Karceravic appealed to United Nations troops to protect the structure.

Karceravic lost a lot of weight and was said to be exhausted from the ordeal. After a rest the couple expects to begin working with a Baptist ministry team in Rijeca.

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'Pew-packing mamas'
beat S. African robber

By Kathy Dewbre

Baptist Press
11/18/92

UMTATA, South Africa (BP)--A South African robber got more than he bargained for when he preyed on a recent tent revival service: church members, including women brandishing pews, beat him before hauling him to the police station.

Many in the large crowd attracted by the excitement got more than they bargained for, too, when they stayed for the evangelistic service under the large tent and wound up becoming Christians.

The original crowd was sparse for the service in Ngongalizwe, a heavily populated inner-city neighborhood of Umtata in the South African "homeland" of Transkei. Baptists began the meeting by singing choruses. But a mood of weariness hung over them as they contemplated the setbacks they had faced in trying to preach in the high-crime area. Every night local gang members had harassed them -- disrupting, stealing and destroying.

The week before the power generator had been stolen. A trailer was damaged in a break-in, and now several strings of lights for the tent were missing.

Just as the guest speaker stood to preach this night, someone on the fringe of the crowd heard a scraping noise and saw a knife ripping through the side of the tent. Several church members rushed outside to investigate.

Using a brick, benches and chairs, they subdued the knife-wielding man after a struggle. Cries of "We must not kill him!" mixed with the blows -- a bit of Christian compassion in a country where suspected thieves usually are beaten to death before police are called.

So the bruised but still breathing young man was marched to jail by several church leaders. When they returned, they found the tent overflowing with people attracted by the excitement who had stayed for the service. At the close, according to pastor Charles Mngonyama, many made public decisions to become Christians.

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On subsequent nights, so did several gang members.

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Kathy Dewbre is a Southern Baptist missionary in Umtata.

Language WMU specialist
dies after long illness

Baptist Press
11/18/92

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Doris Diaz, 60, died Tuesday, Nov. 17, in a Birmingham hospital after an extended illness. Diaz was language WMU specialist and was jointly employed by Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union and Home Mission Board.

A memorial service will be at 3 p.m. Nov. 19 at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Birmingham. The body will be flown to Guatemala City, Guatemala, for burial Nov. 22 in Camposanto los Cipreses Cemetery.

Diaz was born and raised in Guatemala City.

Diaz retired at the end of July after working 24 years in language WMU work. During her tenure, Diaz led WMU to expand language work in Spanish to also include Arabic, French, Laotian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Romanian and basic English.

Survivors include her mother, Chusita de Diaz of Guatemala City; a brother, Moiss Diaz Lopez of Guatemala City; and a sister, Alice D. Davidson, of Sulphur Springs, Texas.

The family has asked that memorials be given to the WMU Second Century Fund. Gifts given in memorial of Diaz will be designated for ethnic work.

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