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**Hancock calls meeting as seminary  
defunding protests escalate**

By Robert O'Brien & Mike Creswell

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--With protest of the defunding of the international Baptist seminary in Switzerland escalating to official levels, Bill Hancock has called a meeting Dec. 5-6 to allow leaders from Europe and the United States to air their views.

Meanwhile, Baptist leaders in Germany and Great Britain -- upset with the unexpected defunding of the seminary -- were gearing up to discuss future relationships with Southern Baptists at meetings in November.

Their discussions will come in the wake of a 35-28 vote by Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board trustees on Oct. 9 to cut \$365,000 in budget allocations for the Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

Hancock, FMB trustee chairman, who said he has received an avalanche of mail on the subject, said he called the meeting in Richmond, Va., in cooperation with FMB President R. Keith Parks. It will involve selected FMB trustee and staff leaders and leaders from European Baptists and the seminary.

Meanwhile, the FMB trustee decision has also evoked a strong protest from the seminary's international board of trustees, which met Nov. 1-2, and continuing protest from Karl-Heinz Walter, general secretary of the European Baptist Federation (EBF), a fellowship of more than 11,000 churches with more than 750,000 members throughout Western and Eastern Europe.

Walter and the seminary's missionary president, John David Hopper, are among those expected to attend the Dec. 5-6 meeting in Richmond, which precedes the FMB's regular trustee meeting Dec. 9-11.

Although protests have swept Europe, the British and German unions are the first to discuss the issues at an official meeting. The Baptist Union of Great Britain's administrative council meets Nov. 12-13 in Bristol, England. The German union's executive committee meets Nov. 6-10 in Dorfweil, Germany.

Their discussions could range from waiting to see whether FMB trustees will reconsider their action, to freezing out new Southern Baptist missionary personnel, altering partnership agreements with the FMB, or severing of relations, according to observers.

Meanwhile in Ruschlikon, the seminary's trustees said the FMB action showed "disrespect and a unilateral use of power" and violated moral, missiological and theological principles.

From a Europe-wide perspective, European Baptists will not beg Southern Baptists for funds to operate the seminary, even though the trustee vote created a financial crisis, Walter said.

More than money is involved with the EBF's response to the seminary defunding, Walter said. While he has had a good relationship with many Southern Baptists serving in Europe, he said, "now there has come an instability. The questions are, whom can we trust and how can we trust?"

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He said trustees took the defunding action unilaterally and without warning and that they failed to treat European Baptists as equals. "If they had taken us as a serious partner, then I think we could have been in conversation with them or answered their questions, but they acted all of a sudden without consultation.

"This is not the way we handle things here. That's not brother-like, you know," said Walter, a former pastor in Bremerhaven, Germany.

European Baptists would oppose any moves by the Foreign Mission Board to begin unilateral work in Europe without cooperating with the Baptists unions and the European Baptist Federation, Walter said.

"I have openly said this to the Global Strategy Group when I was there in November," he recalled. "I said in case the FMB starts to work independently and not in cooperation with Baptists in Europe, this will change the whole relationship." The Global Strategy Group is the FMB's administrative leadership team.

Walter said Southern Baptist missionaries throughout Europe have government visas to work in the countries through cooperation with the Baptist unions. The visa situation varies from country to country, FMB leaders said.

"I think for the future, even in the former Soviet Union, it will be necessary to have the approval of the Baptist unions if they want to have a visa," Walter said. For now, missionaries who work "in solidarity with the Europeans" have nothing to fear from the European side, he said.

For European Baptists, the issue at stake, he said, is whether the Foreign Mission Board keeps its promises, not a particular professor's theology. FMB trustees took the action because the seminary asked Glenn Hinson, a church history professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., to teach at Ruschlikon for four months during sabbatic leave from Southern. The trustees perceive Hinson as having "liberal" views on Scripture.

While inerrancy of Scripture is not an issue in Europe as among Southern Baptists in recent years, "this does not mean that we do not believe in the full inspiration of the Bible," Walter said.

"The Bible is the only guideline for our lives," he said. Throughout most of Europe, he said, "in general we are talking about the full inspiration of the Bible."

"So far," he said, "I don't know any liberal Baptist theologian in Europe who is denying Christ as being the Son of God and the risen Savior. I have not met any in Europe. This is our understanding of liberalism -- that somebody is really denying Christ is the Son of God and the risen Savior who died on the cross. I cannot see that. I don't agree with all the expressions of theology, but for us in Europe, this is a quite natural situation."

Federation leaders also are concerned about future steps the Foreign Mission Board trustees may take, such as the firing of board-supported administrators or missionaries, Walter said.

"This will be a very, very critical thing. I think the trust and confidence in the Foreign Mission Board is at stake at the moment. You know, the defunding of the operating budget of Ruschlikon is one thing. What we fear now, to be very honest, is a possible defunding of certain personnel."

Another long-term fear of European Baptists is that their relatively small unions will split into different factions, and Walter said this fear ultimately will affect the way they respond to non-cooperative work in Europe. "This is something Europeans are more concerned over than any other thing," he said, "but this is very hard for some people to understand and to believe."

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"I must be very clear. I'm not supporting any idea of begging for money," Walter said. "We will not do this, as far as I'm concerned. We have to find other ways. I still think that Ruschlikon (seminary) is an instrument of God and this gives us faith and we feel pretty relaxed at this point."

European Baptists currently provide 17 percent of the seminary's \$1.58 million annual budget. The Foreign Mission Board had provided 37.7 percent and 10.9 percent comes from direct donations from individuals or churches in the United States. Fees, food sales and other seminary-generated income provide another 34.4 percent. The seminary administration has been at work on a new fund-raising plan for months.

Walter said European Baptists cannot easily increase their support for the seminary or other federation causes, since two-thirds of European Baptists live in Eastern Europe. Baptists in Eastern countries endure bad economic situations and use currencies worthless in the West, since they are non-convertible. Percentage-wise, Baptists in Western Europe already give at a high level to support international ministries like the seminary, he said.

New plans recently approved for the seminary call for the school to be more integrated with national Baptist seminaries, with Ruschlikon maintaining an emphasis on post-graduate studies. The school also will serve as a training center for overseas missionaries sent out by European Baptists, he said. No other school in Europe can come close to filling the unique role played by the seminary at Ruschlikon in Baptist life, he said.

"We will not stop Ruschlikon," Walter said. "Maybe we'll have to take some radical plans into consideration and maybe we will have to cooperate with other institutions. But the students have the promise they will finish their studies, and we will not be without solidarity to the faculty. We are responsible to them and ... we will somehow find a way to go on."

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'Prof' Johnson  
dies at age 96

Baptist Press  
11/5/91

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--R. Inman "Prof" Johnson, retired Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor, died in Richmond, Va., Nov. 2 at age 96. His death ended 75 years of close association with the Louisville, Ky., seminary.

Johnson was named music and elocution instructor at Southern shortly after his graduation from the seminary in 1920. He spent the next 45 years in Southern's classrooms helping ministers improve their vocal quality and public speaking techniques. His service spanned the administrations of four seminary presidents -- E.Y. Mullins, John R. Sampey, Ellis A. Fuller and Duke K. McCall.

In 1959, Johnson, whose quick wit was legendary among his former students, wrote "Of Parsons and Profs," a book filled with anecdotes about Southern students and professors he had known. Johnson was the seminary's alumni secretary for many years.

"Prof Johnson's death marked the loss of a loyal alumnus, a personal friend, a devoted supporter of Southern Seminary, and a churchman whose life reflected the best in Baptist heritage," said Southern Seminary President Roy L. Honeycutt, who visited Johnson only weeks before his death.

Honeycutt noted Johnson's association with Southern dated back to the turn of the century when Johnson's father began studies at the seminary. Thus Johnson "personally experienced the events and personalities for approximately 90 years," he added.

"Numerous alumni join me in our sorrow mingled with gratitude for the life of a man whose consuming interest was Southern Seminary," Honeycutt said.

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After his retirement from Southern, Johnson moved to King and Queens County, Va., where he was a member of the school board for 12 years. He also was "interim" pastor of Ephesus Baptist Church near Tappahannock, Va., for 14 years.

Johnson was awarded the E.Y. Mullins Denominational Service Award, Southern Seminary's highest honor, in 1984. He delivered his final chapel address at Southern last year near the occasion of his 95th birthday.

A native of Trenton, Tenn., Johnson received his undergraduate education at the University of Richmond. He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth, and several nieces and nephews.

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Baptist students, leaders to attend  
dedication of Russian church

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press  
11/5/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--A group of 30 Southern Baptist students and student leaders will travel to Russia Dec. 31 to attend the dedication of the Temple of the Gospel Church in St. Petersburg.

In the last two years, 145 students and student leader volunteers representing 60 college campuses and 12 state conventions helped restore the historic church building in St. Petersburg, now home to a Russian Baptist congregation. Built about 100 years ago, the building was first home for a Russian Orthodox church before the Communist government took control of the property and turned it into a metal factory and then a warehouse. The building was turned over to Temple of the Gospel in 1989.

According to Brad Gray, consultant for evangelism and world student ministries in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's student ministry department, the student teams that participated in the restoration represented the first Southern Baptist mission volunteers in the Soviet Union in 72 years.

Gray said Temple of the Gospel officials invited to the dedication a representative from each of the student teams and other interested Southern Baptist student workers. The three-day dedication event is to take place during the first week of January.

"It is a long way to go to the Soviet Union for the dedication of a church, but this dedication symbolizes something far greater than the distance between the two countries. It is the dedication of a new era, a new ideology and a new spirit of cooperation between Russians and Americans.

"Because the students were a consistent part of the refurbishing of the church, they endeared themselves to the church and became a part of its family, history and vision," he said.

Janet Watson, a member of the student team that worked at the Russian church in July, plans to attend the dedication.

"I can't wait to see the people again," Watson, a student at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, said. "I didn't want to come back when we left before."

Watson said members of the Russian congregation "became like a family to us while we were there. They were so faithful and they showed us so many things. They are really a warm, generous people who want to give everything they can."

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In addition to representatives from the earlier student mission teams, Gray said student workers from several state conventions will make the trip. And besides attending the dedication services, the group will visit Baptist churches and meet with Russian Baptist leaders in St. Petersburg and other Russian cities to explore future possibilities for missions involvement, he said.

Gray said the following state conventions will be represented on the trip: Alabama, Colorado, Georgia, Louisiana, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

"The refurbishing of Temple of the Gospel may be over, but this is just the beginning of the impact Southern Baptists will have in Russia in the years ahead," he said.

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'Old Plan A' reaches  
milestone in benefits

By Thomas E. Miller Jr.

Baptist Press  
11/5/91

DALLAS (BP)--Beginning Jan. 1, 1992, participants in a retirement plan known as "Plan A" will receive a permanent 10 percent increase in benefits. That increase will mean each beneficiary receives more than 210 percent of the original formula benefit. Though admittedly inadequate in today's economy, the remarkable aspect of Plan A is how much it pays in comparison to what members contributed.

A defined benefit plan created in 1938, Plan A was designed to provide a benefit based on a member's salary for the last 25 years of service before retirement. The maximum salary for calculation was \$4,000, and credit was given for service before creation of the plan.

Over the years the formula was changed, prior service credits were dropped, widow's benefits were added, state convention contributions rose, but the \$4,000 maximum salary remained in the formula. The plan called for the member, church and state convention to each pay dues of 5 percent of salary, up to \$200, based on the maximum of \$4,000.

By the 1960's, it was clear a formula based on \$4,000 annual salary could not provide adequate retirement benefits. In 1968, churches and state conventions were encouraged to pay dues based on total salary.

Many state conventions, however, responded that \$200 per member was all they could contribute. Churches then were encouraged to pay 10 percent of total salary while state conventions paid 5 percent of \$4,000.

A new plan, the Southern Baptist Protection Program, was designed to meet the needs of church employees. The new protection plan included these plans:

-- Plan A was the basic defined benefit plan to which the church contributed 10 percent of a member's salary (maximum \$4,000) and the convention contributed 5 percent of a member's salary (maximum \$4,000). Plans B and C were new defined contribution plans to which the church would pay an amount equal to 10 percent of a member's salary in excess of \$4,000.

The Southern Baptist Protection Program also added family protection benefits to Plan A (e.g., dependent child, education, and dependent parent benefits; and temporary income benefits were added in 1973). The total program then included retirement benefits and supplemental disability, death and dependent benefits.

Baptist habits are hard to break. Though the recommended contribution was based on total salary, thousands of churches continued to pay \$33.34 a month. Thousands of pastors retired with only the formula benefit. Under the original formula benefit, the most a pastor could receive after 40 years service would be \$2,400 a year (60 percent of \$4,000 maximum salary).

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Indeed, in 1991, half the monthly benefit checks mailed by the Annuity Board are \$200 or less.

The Annuity Board invested the assets of the defined benefit fund in ways that enhanced earnings until they exceeded the actuarial base required to meet obligations.

Beginning in 1967, as annual valuations of the defined benefit fund revealed surplus, the Annuity Board issued a 13th check to annuitants.

Often referred to as a "dividend," the extra check was issued each year except 1977. In that year, an 8.33 percent permanent increase was made for most annuitants. When 13th checks were declared, they were never less than 8.33 percent of an annuitant's annual benefit and were, for three years, almost 17 percent.

In 1980 the Annuity Board changed its funding rate to a less conservative mark and eliminated the 13th check for persons who retired in that year and following. These retirees got more each month. Those who retired before 1980 continued to receive a 10 percent 13th check through 1986.

In 1987, anticipating the expanded features of the church annuity plan on Jan. 1, 1988, Plan A closed to further contributions and a permanent 16.67 percent increase was granted to Plan A participants who retired before Jan. 1, 1980. A 6.67 percent permanent increase was granted for those who retired on or after Jan. 1, 1980. The "dividend" was henceforth spread across monthly benefit checks.

Participants in Plan A who have not retired also will reap the formula increases upon retirement. Each time annuitants receive an increase, an actuarial equivalent is set aside for those still working. Presently there are almost 25,000 members in the latter category.

The permanent increase in 1987, though it eliminated the popular 13th check, was especially helpful to annuitants on public assistance. These people often lost their government checks in the month they received a 13th check because it raised their incomes above the limit for public assistance.

In 1988, the Annuity Board announced a 25 percent permanent increase for Plan A, and a 10 percent increase was granted in 1990.

Now, investment results permit another 10 percent increase Jan. 1, 1992.

Annuity Board President Paul Powell celebrated the latest increase with trustees. "This is what we are all about," he said. "Though the Annuity Board never had any legal obligation to pay more than the original formula, the board never had any desire other than to make the benefit as large as possible."

"The fact that our experience has been good enough to more than double the promised amount is a joy to us and a blessing to our members," said Powell.

All member and church contributions and a portion of state convention contributions to the church annuity plan now go into individual retirement income accounts of members. Each member chooses one or more of four investment funds in which to place his contributions. At retirement, benefits are based on total accumulations, the member's age, and any contingent beneficiary, retirement option selected, and the funding rate in the month of retirement.

State convention matching funds under the expanded features of the Church Annuity Plan have the potential of adding more to a member's retirement benefit than old Plan A's total benefit.

But some of the more than 40,000 Plan A members in pay status or still working, will enjoy payments from Plan A far into the next century.

Powell promised, "The better the defined benefit plan performs, the more we'll pay."

Conference participants  
taste marketplace ministries

By Sarah Zimmerman

GARDEN GROVE, Calif. (BP)--From block parties to buffet dinners, 400 Southern Baptists got a taste of marketplace evangelism in Garden Grove, Calif.

The group attending the National Marketplace Evangelism Conference included 200 college students involved in separate meetings. Both groups were challenged with new ways to create witnessing opportunities. Nine professions of faith were reported from one afternoon of outreach during the conference.

Three churches in the Los Angeles area held block parties during the conference. Each church used its parking lot as the setting to offer a free meal and clothing, entertainment and the gospel presentation.

More than 200 people attended the block party at Brister Memorial Baptist Church in Compton, Calif. Thirty minutes after the party started, two people had made professions of faith.

Another predominantly black church used the block party to reach Spanish-speaking people in its community.

The third church, Central Baptist in Inglewood, Calif., held the block party as one of its many community outreach tools. Two people became Christians before all the barbecue chicken was eaten.

Monty McWhorter, evangelism consultant for the Los Angeles area, said block parties are an excellent way for churches to discover prospects as well as demonstrate compassion for their neighbors. Each person who attends is asked to register, and churches use the information for follow-up.

Another marketplace encounter took conference participants to the beach. A sand sculpture of Jesus and a cross was used to attract attention. Two people made professions of faith during the "beach reach."

Conference participants also went to Mile Square Park in Los Angeles to witness. Groups used drama and preaching to share the gospel. At least three people made professions of faith.

In a conference workshop, Granville Watson, associate director of the institute of evangelism at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo., said special events can also be an evangelistic outreach for business leaders.

Watson cited a group of businessmen meeting in the home of a Los Angeles layman as an example. Forty people, including 20 non-Christians, attended the group's November meeting. The group has a buffet meal before dividing into small groups to study the gospel of John.

The format that has worked in southern California may not be effective in other areas, Watson said, but the principle of gathering professionals in small groups to discuss the Bible is a proven evangelistic tool.

In addition to seeing models of marketplace ministries, conference participants were reminded of the New Testament command to share their faith.

"The command to go is the only agenda item Christ gave us. There's no command to come. If we operate to maintain, we've missed the call," said Ken Smith of Ken Smith Ministries in Margate, Fla.

Regardless of the place where Christians minister, E.W. McCall said, "We must show evidence that we are who we say we are."

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McCall, pastor of St. Stephen Baptist Church in La Puente, Calif., said Christians' conversation must be consistent with their Christian convictions. "We must not wait until we get to heaven to act like we want to go there."

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Christians called to serve  
as 'guides on the side'

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press  
11/5/91

GARDEN GROVE, Calif. (BP)--Effective marketplace evangelism in the 1990s will require Christians to be "guides on the side" rather than "sages on stage," Bill O'Brien said.

This decade will record some of history's most traumatic transitions, predicted O'Brien, director of the global strategy center of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala. Christians must develop caring, Christ-like relationships with non-Christians to be effective witnesses in the midst of such turmoil, he said.

Changes such as those taking place in the Soviet Union, the Middle East, Taiwan, China and North and South Korea will give the world new borders and new identities, O'Brien said during the National Marketplace Evangelism Conference in Garden Grove, Calif.

O'Brien also predicted functional rather than geographic borders. For example, countries may be defined by their capacity to participate in a worldwide stock market rather than rivers and mountains.

The church is in danger of becoming stale in the midst of so much change, O'Brien warned. Signs of the church's decline include the gap between stated belief and behavior, increase in baptisms but little increase in Sunday school attendance, lack of commitment of time and finances and a shortage of trained clergy.

Reversing such a decline requires Christians to become "the guide on the side" rather than depending on a church leader to be the "sage on the stage," O'Brien said.

Being a guide on the side requires a clear understanding of the call to be a follower of Jesus Christ, O'Brien said. "Every one of you is called. The roles may change, but not the calling."

Another trademark of guides is Christlike character. O'Brien urged Christians to adopt godly values and choose a lifestyle that reflects Christian commitments.

Individual ministry also requires creative caring. "Don't try to convert people before you get to know them," O'Brien said. "Care without any agenda other than deep compassion."

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Kentucky duo creates  
kinder, gentler music videos

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press  
11/5/91

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--In an age when music videos usually are associated with the hype of MTV, two Kentucky Baptists have given a new voice to the art form.

Through New Voices Productions, Darrell Adams and Chris Hammon have produced the first of a series of videos designed to relieve stress and serve as a tool in counseling and grieving.

Adams, a New Mexico native, is a singer-songwriter who has appeared on the television program "Hee Haw" and Garrison Keillor's radio program "A Prairie Home Companion." Hammon is a video producer with more than 150 programs to his credit, including documentaries, educational programs and commercials.

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Both men are members of Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville. They operate out of a small studio in the basement of Hammon's house.

The two embarked on this project three years ago after a chaplain at Bowman-Gray Medical Center in North Carolina approached Adams with the idea. Their first two tapes are "The Waters of Mount Desert Island" and "Winter into Spring," the first in a four-part series called "Seasons of Healing."

Both videos consist of a continuous string of nature scenes accompanied by gentle music. "Winter into Spring" features vocal renditions of hymns performed by Adams and others with simple accompaniment. "Waters" features 45 minutes of solo piano performed by Christian musician Ken Medema.

For this tape, Hammon filmed scenes along the coast of Maine in Acadia National Park. Then Medema, who is blind, listened to the natural soundtrack of the coastal waves while improvising a continuous piano solo.

"Our objective was to create a program that's very relaxing, that a person watching the tape could feel the weight of the world fall off their shoulders," Hammon explained.

Finding mental rest through television is almost a contradiction in terms, Adams said. "The TV generally is a distraction," he noted. "Video just exhales. It doesn't let you respond. That becomes stress-inducing itself."

But the videos of New Voices are different, he said. "One reason I think this works is the tape has no message -- subliminal or otherwise. It's not trying to sell you anything or to move you from point A to point B."

The mellow, non-threatening format helps people break free of their worldly problems and focus on the emotions inside, Adams and Hammon said.

The tapes are marketed primarily to hospitals and other health-care institutions where they are used in counseling. Other uses have been found in churches, substance abuse centers, businesses, military units and by individuals seeking release from stress or grief.

For people with terminal illnesses the videos build hope, Adams noted. "A person can't live if they feel hopeless, but with hope they can tolerate incurability."

Adams and Hammon admit some Christians will dismiss their products as akin to the New Age movement. But Adams believes the New Age label for products has been promoted as a marketing concept more than a theological concept.

That the "Waters" video features peaceful scenes with wordless music does not make it non-Christian, he said. "If we used just hymn tunes, people would think that is spiritual. But that's ludicrous. Music can't be Christian," Adams said.

When people say music is "Christian," it is because they associate the music with their faith, he said.

Hammon added: "Look at how people have experienced the tape themselves. People who are coming to this to find a worshipful type experience are finding that."

Already the tapes have made their way into hospitals, churches, nursing homes and other health care facilities in all 50 states and five other countries.

"Not a bad spread for a basement office," Hammon quipped.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: A list of hospitals and churches nationwide using the "Seasons of Healing" video is available upon request from the Western Recorder.

Arab-Jewish dialogue common  
at Baptist Village, missionaries say

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--The sight of Arabs and Jews sitting together at last week's Middle East peace conference might have appeared unprecedented to most of the world, but a Southern Baptist missionary couple said the same thing happens routinely at Baptist Village in Israel.

The only difference is that at the Baptist campground and conference center, Arabs and Jews don't argue about their decades-old disputes. Instead, they worship together, eat together and pray together.

Norman and Martha Lytle, who direct the Baptist Village complex, currently are on furlough in Louisville, Ky. Both have deep connections to Kentucky Baptists and both are graduates of Georgetown College, a Kentucky Baptist school.

In fact, it was the influence of former Georgetown College President Leo Eddleman that first prompted them to consider going to Israel. After graduation from Georgetown, they got hooked on foreign missions, returned to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville and then were appointed as career missionaries.

The Lytles have worked in Israel continuously since their appointment in 1964.

Baptist Village has become the central point of fellowship for believers in Israel, Mrs. Lytle explained. "It has been a place where both Arab and Jew come together."

In that capacity, the village offers a ministry of dialogue and reconciliation, she said.

The village is located in the center of the country but only two miles from the pre-1967 border of Jordan. Consequently, many small Jordanian villages still exist nearby the complex, even though it is in a predominantly Jewish area.

Arab and Jewish Christians in Israel work hard to maintain fellowship, the Lytles said.

For example, after the West Bank uprisings began in 1988, leaders of the Arab and Jewish congregations looked for a way to make a positive statement. They scheduled an all-day prayer and fellowship conference at Baptist Village, which 200 people attended on a Saturday.

Saturday also is the day the Jewish congregation meets for worship. So when an Israeli woman came to visit the worship that day, she was fascinated by the Arab-Jewish conference going on.

"She was so impressed with the sight that within the next couple of months she came to accept Jesus as her messiah," Lytle said.

The miraculous harmony between Arabs and Jews at the village "is the kind of thing you can't really publicize," Lytle explained. "But it reminds us that the Lord still has the situation in his hands."

On another occasion, the Arab congregation scheduled a conference at Baptist Village during a time when there was not sufficient staff to feed everyone and clean all the rooms. Leaders of the Jewish congregation heard about the situation and volunteered to cook and clean for their Arab friends.

"That said more than most peace conferences," Mrs. Lytle said.

This harmony is possible because both groups share a common goal of striving to follow Jesus Christ, she explained.

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But still, these relationships take work. "It's hard," she said. "It's extremely hard."

"I am a strong believer in intercessory prayer," she added. "There's an awful lot of prayer that goes into these meetings."

As a result, Mrs. Lytle said, visitors to Baptist Village -- both believers and non-believers -- routinely make the same comment: "This is a place of peace."

Lytle twice has been asked in recent years if he teaches people to smile at the village.

"We don't teach people to smile," he said. "I guess it comes from the fact that our people are believers in Jesus. I don't think it's something you could teach."

The peace found at Baptist Village draws all kinds of inquirers, the Kentucky couple said. And recently, with immigration of Russian Jews to Israel, they have discovered Russian Baptists arriving in their country.

One Russian woman heard of Baptist Village and rode a bus to visit the complex unannounced. She walked up to the Lytles' house and found Mrs. Lytle cleaning out her kitchen cabinets.

The woman spoke no English and Mrs. Lytle spoke no Russian. So the visitor pointed at Mrs. Lytle and asked, "Baptist?"

Mrs. Lytle said, "Yes."

Then the Russian woman ran to embrace her and cried with great joy, "Mine sister, mine sister."

And then, as though in disbelief, the woman backed up and repeated the question and embraced Mrs. Lytle again at the second affirmative answer.

The Lytles said they have learned of several hundred Christians who have immigrated to Israel from Russia.

While on furlough in Kentucky, the Lytles are asking American Christians to pray for their work in Israel. Evangelical Christians especially need to look beyond Israel as a place of theological and historical significance to see the needs of its people, Lytle said.

"We need people to realize that the people of Israel -- both Jews and Arabs -- need Jesus the messiah," Mrs. Lytle said.

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(BP) photo available upon request from the Western Recorder