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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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92-13

Agencies share decrease
in proposed SBC budget

By Herb Hollinger

NASHVILLE (BP)--Following a Southern Baptist Convention policy of setting a budget on a previous year's receipts, all SBC agencies and institutions will share equally a slight decrease in the proposed 1992-93 Cooperative Program allocation budget.

The program and budget subcommittee of the SBC Executive Committee needed only about two hours of deliberation Jan. 23 in Nashville to propose a \$140,200,395 1992-93 CP budget. The proposed budget, which must be approved by the Executive Committee in its Feb. 17-19 meeting and then submitted to the SBC annual meeting in Indianapolis in June, follows a policy of budgeting based on receipts of the last fiscal year of record (1990-91).

Faced with a \$509,887 shortage from the present year (1991-92) budget total of \$140,710,282, the 27-member subcommittee decided the reduction in the 1992-93 budget -- 0.362 percent -- would be shared equally by all SBC agencies and institutions.

In years past, increasing receipts had allowed SBC budgets to increase each year which often caused lengthy discussions and debates about how to allocate the increase. But this year, with the decrease, the subcommittee made its decision in what one observer said was record time and with near total consensus.

"We went as far with the budget as we could," Joe Warwick of Knoxville, Tenn., and subcommittee chairman, told Baptist Press. "We are tied by SBC policy to not go over the previous year's receipts. We feel like we have been fair. If (Southern Baptists) increase their giving then the agencies will get more," according to the budget plan that 50 percent of all Cooperative Program receipts above the basic budget be allocated to the agencies for program advance and 50 percent for approved capital needs.

According to the budget plan, 50 percent of Cooperative Program receipts above the basic budget will be allocated to the agencies for program advance and 50 percent for approved capital needs.

Although agency and institutional executives presented their appeals to the subcommittee at the two-day meeting, their appeals totaled \$10.4 million more than the 1990-91 year's receipts.

Most of the executives asked for 4 to 12 percent increases although the Stewardship Commission asked for a 79.77 percent increase, the Christian Life Commission, 31.66 percent, and Golden Gate Seminary, 25.50 percent.

David Hankins, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Lake Charles, La., and chairman of the Executive Committee, called it a "fair" budget.

"It's a budget that maintains the current percentage balances (among the agencies). If Southern Baptists do more, the agencies will get more," Hankins said.

Only minor changes were obvious from the current year's budget. By convention action last year, \$32,500 originally allocated to the now-defunct Public Affairs Committee was forwarded from the SBC operating budget to the Christian Life Commission with which it merged. In the proposed 1992-93 budget, that line item amount was placed in the budget of the Christian Life Commission.

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The only proposed new item in the budget, compared to this year, was an administration-recommended \$15,000 for the North American Baptist Fellowship, as part of the SBC operating budget. It was deleted in the final proposal.

Receiving some attention by subcommittee members was information showing how much each agency and institution received from non-Cooperative Program sources. The report indicated state conventions and alternate funding sources channeled about \$3.5 million, primarily to the two mission boards, the six seminaries and the Radio and Television Commission.

However, the "direct allocations" to the agencies did not appear to influence the subcommittee's final decision.

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Seminary extension exec
released in 'rightsizing'

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
1/24/92

NASHVILLE (BP)--An executive with Seminary Extension will be released when his position is eliminated in what has been termed a "rightsizing" of the off-campus ministry education office in Nashville.

Lee Hollaway, 49, is director of marketing and development but that position will be eliminated effective March 15, according to Doran C. McCarty, executive director.

Hollaway is a 23-year employee of the denomination and has been with Seminary Extension since 1977. He told Baptist Press he is actively looking for "something outside the denomination" and preferably in the Nashville area.

"It was not my choice to leave," Hollaway said in response to a question whether he was fired. However, Hollaway has been asked by the six SBC seminary presidents to provide them a resume for a possible opportunity at one of the seminaries. The six seminary presidents serve as the governing board of Seminary Extension.

McCarty said he considered the move a "rightsizing" of the office. A part-time, contract consultant with a marketing specialty will be hired. McCarty also said an assistant would be employed to aid the consultant in his tasks.

William O. Crews, chairman of the seminary presidents' group, told Baptist Press the seminary presidents approved of the change and affirmed McCarty's leadership at Seminary Extension. Crews is president of Golden Gate Baptist Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif.

Both Hollaway and McCarty indicated there was a desire to employ someone with more marketing skills. Although Hollaway's position changed from director of communications to director of marketing in 1990, McCarty said he felt Hollaway's strength was in writing.

"We don't need a complex organization," McCarty said. "We do need to know how to do the marketing of the group."

Baptist Press also learned another Seminary Extension executive, Jack R. Cunningham, associate executive director and director of undergraduate studies, is actively seeking employment elsewhere.

Cunningham, 53, said he was in negotiations with Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., for a faculty position.

Asked if the elimination of Hollaway's position was related to his seeking other employment, Cunningham talked of some of the achievements of Seminary Extension in his five years there.

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However, he said, after five years at Seminary Extension "my usefulness has probably come to an end, or at least has been minimized. With that in mind, I have sought other employment."

McCarty acknowledged Cunningham's probable departure and said he was a valued employee and had made a "great contribution in many ways."

Previously, Cunningham was associate director of continuing education at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Hollaway said he has joined a support group in Nashville of executives over 45 years old who share his experience. He was at the SBC Brotherhood Commission for nine years prior his employment with Seminary Extension.

Seminary Extension, directly related to the six seminaries, has been in operation since 1951. It has 13 full-time employees at the Nashville office.

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Nevada committee recommends
Meacham as executive director

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LAS VEGAS, Nev. (BP)--David Meacham, director of missions for the Las Vegas area Southern Nevada Baptist Association, has been recommended as executive director of the Nevada Baptist Convention.

The convention's executive director search committee unanimously selected Meacham, 46, in a Jan. 14 meeting as its nominee to succeed Ernest B. Myers, Nevada's current executive director who has announced his retirement March 15.

"The (search) committee believes he (Meacham) is God's man for leading Nevada Baptists in the years to come," said Michael Rochelle, Nevada Baptist Convention president and search committee chairman. Rochelle also is pastor of West Oakey Baptist Church in Las Vegas.

Rochelle has called a special meeting of the convention's 18-member executive board Feb. 6 at First Southern Baptist Church in Reno to discuss and vote on the search committee's recommendation. The meeting will replace the board's regular winter meeting scheduled March 9-10. Rochelle said the search committee interviewed only one other candidate for the position.

If Meacham is elected by the convention's executive board, Rochelle said he hopes the new executive director will assume his post as soon after Myers' retirement as possible.

"David has demonstrated his ability to relate to all of Nevada," Rochelle said in an interview with Michael McCullough, editor of The Nevada Baptist. "He can put on jeans and cowboy boots and relate to the rural churches. David also can put on a gray business suit and understand and work with the people of our largest urban churches. He will be able to relate fairly and in proper balance to all of Nevada Baptists.

"As director of missions for the Southern Nevada Baptist Association, he has ministered to the major metropolitan areas of Las Vegas, North Las Vegas and Henderson," Rochelle continued. "But he also has effectively ministered to churches and pastors in communities like Pioche, Laughlin, Indian Springs and Pahrump."

Rochelle also cited Meacham's dedication to Southern Baptist work in the West and Nevada in particular; his "strong track record" in the Southern Nevada Baptist Association; a personal knowledge and cooperative relationship with the Home Mission Board; a willingness to be a team leader; an ability to plan and strategize; and a heart to win Nevada for Christ.

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The most important task facing Meacham as executive director, Rochelle said, is shaping a vision. "He will have to determine where we are going," Rochelle said. "He must capture and cast forth a vision for Nevada Baptists and their mission. He will need some time to accomplish this. Developing a vision and direction for Nevada will include building his own team from existing staff members and by filling vacancies," including the post of state missions director, which has been vacant since December 1990.

Meacham has led the Southern Nevada Baptist Association more than 10 years. Previously, as a pastoral missionary with the Home Mission Board's church extension department, he was pastor of Big Bear Baptist Chapel in Big Bear, Calif. He also has been a pastor in Sunnymead, Calif., and youth director in California and Mississippi.

A graduate of San Diego State University, he holds master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

He and his wife, Sue, have three daughters.

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Carnegie or Rushdie? Shorrosh
challenges Muslims via debates

By Stan Guthrie

Baptist Press
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WHEATON, Ill. (BP)--Dale Carnegie, late author of "How to Win Friends and Influence People," might disapprove of Anis Shorrosh.

Shorrosh, a stocky, dark-haired grandfather who usually wears a broad smile, won few friends in South Africa among the Muslims he was trying to reach for Christ two summers ago. In Cape Town, one kicked him in the ribs. Another came at him with a knife but instead stabbed a shielding friend (who was not seriously injured), dousing the evangelist's Arabian clothing with blood. While Shorrosh was making a hasty exit by automobile, someone else smashed one of the windows with a rock.

A few days later, after hearing a sniper was waiting for him at Durban's city hall, Shorrosh decided discretion was the better part of valor and canceled the engagement, allowing himself to be smuggled out of the country.

Discussing the Cape Town attack later, a Muslim leader said Shorrosh, a member of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., had "asked for it."

On the contrary, Shorrosh says, the Muslims, and in particular one Sheikh Ahmed Deedat of Durban, have been asking for a challenge for decades. Deedat, born in India but a resident of Durban, is a self-proclaimed Muslim scholar who has traveled all over the world lecturing against the intellectual foundations of Christianity for more than 40 years.

Shorrosh, born to Christian parents in Nazareth 58 years ago, has been a globe-trotting evangelist since he left a Jerusalem pastorate in 1967. A graduate of Mississippi College in Clinton, Shorrosh holds a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, a doctor of ministry degree from Luther Rice Theological Seminary in Jacksonville, Fla., and a doctor of philosophy from the American Institute of Ministry's Oxford Graduate School in Dayton, Tenn.

One Sunday in 1985, the paths of both men crossed in Birmingham, England, where Shorrosh challenged Deedat, who claimed he had never been defeated, to a debate. Since then, they have had two face-to-face encounters (on the subjects "Is Jesus God?" and "The Bible or the Koran: Which Is God's Word?") which have been taped and replayed throughout the Muslim world.

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Shorrosh has debated Muslims on other occasions, the most recent being June 14 in Orlando when he and Gleason Archer, Old Testament professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Ill., appeared with two Muslim scholars for the evangelical "John Ankerberg Show."

While Shorrosh, who has been called another Salman Rushdie, concedes he has won few Muslim friends through the debates, he contends they have been influencing people.

"I felt two things could be done," Shorrosh said. "First, it is an outreach of evangelism to Muslims who will not come to a revival. They will not come to a church but they will come to a debate. If you get the tapes, you will notice that I present the gospel clearly. Second, it is an effort on my part to stop the spread of Islam, which has used debate to defeat the Christians -- by not telling the whole truth and by attacking us and by keeping us on the defensive all the time. This is why they got upset, for this is the first time they were put on the defensive."

Some other Christians knowledgeable about Islam, however, say putting Muslims on the defensive is not the best way to win them to Christ.

"There is potential for fruit but for the most part it's been a negative experience," said one, who is involved in outreach to Muslims in the United States. "Muslims usually rally other Muslims to the events, where they usually outnumber Christians by far, and it is established as a boxing match, and the objective is who's going to 'win.' The results of some of the debates have been that Muslims videotape the debate and edit the tape to their favor, and then circulate that around the world in Muslim circles as a tool of motivation for their efforts at propagating Islam."

Robert Douglas, director of the Zwemer Institute of Muslim Studies in Altadena, Calif., expressed similar reservations, although he said debates could work "in the right context."

"I guess my feeling is that probably Anis's approach is a much more confrontational approach than most of us at Zwemer would feel comfortable with," Douglas said. "One needs to strongly stress the positives of Christianity without attacking the 'sacred cows' of Islam, where I don't think you gain anything."

The Christian involved in ministry to Muslims in the United States, however, conceded that one gain from the debates was Shorrosh's dispatching of Deedat. "Shorrosh did a wonderful job in silencing him," he said. "Now to carry this on as a ministry and call it ministry -- I have a hard time with that."

He said holding less confrontational dialogues with Muslims would be better, citing an approach known as "meeting for mutual understanding" pioneered by the Philadelphia ministry Church Without Walls in which groups of Christians visit Muslim communities and establish relationships before discussing religious differences.

"The gentleman who leads that, Anes Zaka, has probably experienced the most fruit among Muslims in North America -- fruit meaning converts to Christ," he said. "They're not setting up the video cameras and making it a talent show, so to speak, and as a result of that, the truth is being proclaimed -- through a person, through a personality, through a life that's been changed through the gospel."

Shorrosh, however, says the truth is being proclaimed in the debates, even when the tapes have been tampered with.

To prove his point, he pulls out a letter from a university student in Nigeria who says 30 students and four professors -- all Muslims -- were converted recently through a tape of the second Deedat debate, as well as Shorrosh's book, "Islam Revealed," published by Thomas Nelson Publishers in 1988. Shorrosh says he also has received letters from Christians in Saudi Arabia and South Africa who were encouraged greatly by the fact that someone finally answered the Muslims.

Dale Carnegie might not approve, but Shorrosh says he is taking his cues from a more authoritative source -- the Bible.

"We have tried the dialogue system for so long," Shorrosh said. "We've tried friendship evangelism and talking with them sweetly, and one comes here, one comes there. We have not used the confrontational system. But Paul, you see, dealt with debates. He confronted the cults and religions of the ancient world. At Athens, he tried to explain things. Jesus used that system, and so did Stephen and others."

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(This article first appeared in Pulse, semi-monthly newsletter published by Evangelical Mission Information Service, Wheaton, Ill.)

International students relish
holidays with Baptist families

By Chip Alford

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NASHVILLE (BP)--For 17 years young people from around the world have come to spend Christmas with Michael Brown and his family, and 1991 was no exception.

"We had students from four different countries at our house this year," the pastor of First Baptist Church of Winthrop Harbor, Ill., said. "Having international students in our home during the holidays is just a normal part of our celebration. Our kids expect it."

The Browns were one of almost 400 families hosting international students participating in the 1991 Southern Baptist Friendship International House.

According to program coordinator Jeff Lewis of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's student ministry department, 414 international students representing 38 foreign countries participated in last year's event. Eighty-six percent came from east Asian nations such as Japan, China, Taiwan, Korea and Hong Kong, and 14 percent came from non-Asian countries such as Germany, Russia, Nicaragua and Nigeria, he said.

Initiated in 1973, Friendship International House is designed to minister to international students studying at American university campuses. The program, coordinated by the board's student ministry department, involves Baptist churches, associations, Baptist Student Unions and other organizations hosting international students in homes for 10 days to two weeks during the Christmas holidays.

"It is really a mini-exchange program," Lewis said of FIH. "Most international students never get the opportunity to visit an American home. Students participating in FIH live with American families, which is a 'life-changing' experience for both the international student and the host family. The program broadens the participating family's and church's perspectives of God's love and mission for the world."

As part of the program, the sponsoring organization(s) takes FIH students to visit museums, historical areas and other tourist spots in their city or town. Time for entertainment and fellowship between participating students also is scheduled.

Brown started hosting Friendship International House 17 years ago when he was director of missions in Milwaukee, Wis. He has continued the practice every year since, including the last three while serving as pastor in Winthrop Harbor.

"Our whole church gets involved," Brown said of the program. "We give Christmas stockings to the students and our WMU puts together a cookbook for them. The students attend church services with their host families and then we have an international banquet where all the students cook a meal served in their own country. It's a ministry both to the church and the students."

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FIH students are never pressured to accept Christ during their stay with their American hosts, Brown said, but many ask questions about the Christian faith. And the Christmas season provides an excellent starting point for discussion, he said.

"We've had several students become Christians through this program through the years. We still keep in touch with some of them. Because of this program, we have friends all over the world," Brown said.

For some students, FIH provides their first opportunity to attend a Christian church service. Responding to a question about the experience on an FIH evaluation form, a student who traveled to Winthrop Harbor said: "It was absolutely great! I never felt so happy to know such nice people."

Another student commented: "I was surprised at the way of thinking at the church. They think Jesus really exists!"

Similar responses were given by students who attended the FIH sponsored by the Hamilton County Baptist Association in Chattanooga, Tenn. One Japanese student wrote, "My church visit on two Sundays cleansed my heart, and I feel like going to church services on Sundays in the future."

"We don't pressure our students (about accepting Christ) in any way," Chattanooga program coordinator Diane Barnes said. "We really see the program more as a chance to plant a seed."

An FIH sponsor for nine straight years, Hamilton County Association hosted 14 international students in 1991, three of whom stayed in Barnes' home.

"I had three Japanese students including a 60-year-old college teacher who was studying in the United States to update her (knowledge of) American culture, a 31-year-old student and a 22-year-old student. It was fantastic. I got three different views on Japanese culture from three different generations. There is no limit to what you can learn through this program."

Barnes said FIH benefits all the participating host families because "it really enlarges your world view and helps you understand that you can play an important part in that world -- you can contribute."

While FIH is a popular student ministry program, Lewis said there are always more student applications than volunteers willing to serve as host families. Last year alone 112 international students were turned down for the program because of a lack of host families, he said.

Applications are currently being accepted for sponsors for the 1992 FIH. They must be received by no later than July 1.

For more information, interested churches, associations or BSUs should write to the Sunday School Board's student ministry department, 127 Ninth Ave. N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234.

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Warming cold hearts in
New Orleans housing project

By Debbie Moore & Kevin Devine

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Ten-year-old Deon'te Brown sat holding the weight of his head in his hand. A resident of New Orleans' Florida Avenue public housing community, Deon'te sheltered himself on the stoop of a partially abandoned apartment building.

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Dressed in too-short jeans and worn sneakers, he squirmed as a brisk winter wind bit at his bare ankles. His sullen countenance matched that of the overcast morning, giving no hint that joy in this life was possible.

To transform that somber mood into one of cheer and hope is the chosen task of several alumni and students from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Marshall Truehill, who completed master's and doctoral work at NOBTS, is president of the Faith in Action ministry to New Orleans' public housing communities. He believes Christians who work in the projects "can make an impact on the whole city of New Orleans because the housing projects are the seed bed of most of the society illnesses of New Orleans."

Working through Faith in Action and First Baptist Church in New Orleans, some NOBTS alumni and students have established an ongoing weekly ministry to the Florida Avenue public housing community.

"About a year ago the tremendous needs of the children in the Florida community began to play upon our hearts," said David Walley, minister to single adults at First Baptist and doctoral student at NOBTS. "Our singles felt so strongly about sharing the gospel message with those children they pledged to give a percentage of their budget to start and support the ministry."

At the conclusion of more than nine months' planning and preparing, a weekly ministry of Bible study, organized recreation and a brown-bag meal was initiated. "Our original projections looked for 50-60 children each Saturday," Walley said. Within a month of start-up, however, the ministry was and still is averaging more than 400 children every week. "We underestimated the response," Walley said with a laugh, "but it is a great problem to have."

During this past Christmas season, NOBTS graduate Regina Wright, Florida Housing Community coordinator for First Baptist Church, organized an effort to bring the joy of the holiday season to the children. The United States Marines, who annually collect "Toys for Tots," heard of her "Adopt-an-Angel" project and volunteered their help. Once Wright was contacted by the Marines, her apartment soon resembled a Toys-R-Us after she offered to store 1,500-plus donated toys, the combined efforts of the Marines and First Baptist.

Pam West has been active with the ministry from its inception and has seen firsthand what life in "the project" can do to a young spirit. One of the many New Orleans Seminary students involved in the ministry, she also has seen what changes love and care can bring about.

"Many of these kids don't have much day to day," West said. "It's a way of life for them, so even the holiday time of the year doesn't offer much. That's why I've felt so drawn to this ministry. There are so many opportunities to make a difference in these children's lives, to try and add something extra that might not ordinarily be within their reach."

"The Florida ministry is more than just fun and games," added Dee'Drya Foster, another NOBTS student. "It is an outreach of the gospel to the children of this project." While the children start out coming to the classes just to get snacks and prizes, Foster said, "they end up realizing that Jesus is really what they need and want."

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(BP) photos available upon request from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

NOTE TO EDITORS: With the breakup of the Soviet Union, the once-ignored republics of Central Asia are receiving more attention from the international community -- and from Christians. The following stories report on some of the ministry opportunities Southern Baptists have found in the region, particularly in the republic of Kazakhstan, largest of the Central Asian republics.

Shampoo lets Kazakhstan
elderly know 'someone cares'

By Beth Sammons

Baptist Press
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ALMA-ATA, Kazakhstan (BP)--The white-haired man, dressed in a graying officer's uniform proudly displaying Soviet medals, shuffled into the hallway.

Southern Baptist volunteer Ed Mason handed him a bottle of shampoo. Through an interpreter, Mason explained the gift was from "Christians in America."

The tarnished Russian soldier began to weep. The hallway in the Home for the Aged grew silent as Southern Baptist workers, hospital personnel and translators watched tears stream down the old man's face.

Later, when the last of patients on the hall had received their gifts, the volunteers met the soldier again. This time his tears were overtaken by bursts of excitement.

"Americanskis! Hurrah!" he shouted. "Americans and Russians are friends! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

The volunteers had wondered what to do with the remainder of their medical shipment. Fifteen hospitals around the Central Asian republic of Kazakhstan, in desperate need of supplies, had gratefully received the medicines, disinfectants and personal care products sent by Southern Baptists. But several boxes of medicated shampoo, bleach, room freshener and skin lotion were left over.

Then someone suggested the Home for the Aged.

"Experiences like this one make your heart just puff up. This is what it's all about," Mason said. "These people have been forgotten by society. All they need is someone to show them they care."

Such experiences are common for Mason and his wife, Vi, who moved from Tallahassee, Fla., to Kazakhstan last year to help direct Southern Baptist humanitarian aid efforts. Since coming to the republic they have helped distribute 40,000 pounds of food as well as medical supplies valued locally at \$5 million.

"The purpose of our work is to help alleviate suffering but it also opens up the opportunity to share Christ's love with people who for more than 70 years have been told there is no God and that religion is just an opiate," Mason said.

The recent shipment of medical supplies was distributed to hospitals in several regions of the sprawling republic, including the cities of Semipalatinsk, Kyzyl Orda, Corrigenda, Pavlodar, Zaisan, Aralsk and Alma-Ata, the capital.

According to Mason, the humanitarian aid has opened doors for Christians in areas formerly closed to the gospel. During a recent visit to Semipalatinsk, an area devastated by years of nuclear testing, the volunteers learned that Cooperative Services International, the Southern Baptist aid organization, was the first international organization to render aid.

The volunteers try to share a "lifestyle witness," Mason said, offering Christian literature to those they are helping, but not forcing it on them.

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"All literature has been made available on the basis of, 'Here it is -- take it if you cho se.' We've purposely avoided any indication or suggestion we're swapping the gospel of Christ for food or medicine," he said.

Copies of the Kazakh translation of Matthew and Mark, along with Bibles, Gospels of John and "How to be Saved" tracts in Russian have been offered. Volunteers from the Russian Baptist churches in Alma-Ata and Chimkent have talked with recipients about the meaning of the literature.

The humanitarian needs team in Kazakhstan, which includes the Masons and Kitty Byrd, a medical volunteer from Asheville, N.C., recently concluded seven months of food distribution in the area of the dying Aral Sea. In the spring they will continue the project.

"We've not experienced any attempt at confiscation or pressures to appropriate these aid shipments for any purpose other than what the donor intended," Mason said. "We want to assure those individuals at home who have contributed and made possible this relief effort by their gifts to the Cooperative Program that their donations have been put to good use."

One incident stands out in Mason's mind: a doctor came to the location where the medicine was stored. He pointed to a particular medicine and said, "May I have some of that? I have an 11-year-old patient, a little boy, and if I could have some of that medicine I could save his life."

"This story could be repeated time and time again. We're thankful to be a part of it," Mason said.

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Beth Sammons, a Southern Baptist, works with the Central Asia Foundation in Kazakhstan. (BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

Kazakh-American friendship
center opens; school to follow

By Beth Sammons

Baptist Press
1/24/92

ZAISAN, Kazakhstan (BP)--Few seemed to notice the biting cold wind as Kazakhs and Americans stood side by side in ankle-deep snow.

They watched the Kazakh and American flags being raised together over the first-ever Kazakh-American Friendship Center, built in the Kazakh city of Zaisan, a city of of 39,000 people.

"Do you realize a few years ago how impossible a dream this would have been?" asked Southern Baptist worker Ed Mason, a volunteer from Tallahassee, Fla., who directs humanitarian aid efforts in Kazakhstan.

"I have to hold back the tears," he said. "I never dreamed I would experience an occasion of this kind. It's not been many years ago that relations between our two countries were very strained. There was a lack of trust. Today we see that all behind us. We see this as only the beginning, the first step, of which our children will be the beneficiaries."

Mason was a member of the Southern Baptist delegation that witnessed the recent opening of the Kazakh-American Friendship Center. The center was partially funded by Cooperative Services International, Southern Baptists' humanitarian aid organization.

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The center establishes a base for humanitarian help in the region and aids work on the Kazakh-American school currently under construction in Zaisan. The school is scheduled to open in September. Also funded by CSI, the school will meet a need outlined by the Kazakhstan government. A joint Kazakh-American team is designing the school's curriculum.

Zaisan, located about 20 miles from the Kazakh border with China, was devastated by two earthquakes in 1990. The humanitarian aid of CSI is the first and only international aid provided to the people in the region. With Kazakhstan's independence from the former Soviet Union, Zaisan may become a strategic gateway for international trade with China.

The Kazakh-American school will establish a Christian presence in the region, according to Brian Grim, a Southern Baptist worker and vice-president of the Central Asian Foundation. The school will be staffed by Kazakh and American teachers.

"We hope at least 50 percent of the teachers come from private Christian schools in the United States," Grim said. "They are such a great resource and we would like to see them involved internationally and not just in the confines of the United States."

Zaisan mayor Askerbek Belginov called the opening of the Friendship Center "a product of the changes in our republic. Among these changes is independence. Our republic is keeping its windows open to the whole world and to new opportunities This school opens new opportunities to this and future generations."

Robert Cuttino, a Southern Baptist from Nashville, Tenn., and education director for the Kazakhstan project, said the new school will operate with three goals based on American educational principles: to produce enlightened, active and responsible citizens; to train students for lifelong learning; and to equip students for responsible livelihood.

"Above all, the aim is to share the love of Christ in a meaningful way with a long-term commitment," Cuttino said. "Our desire is to see students become responsible and responsive adults. We want them to see the world around them -- to see the needs, to be able to understand the needs and address them."

The school will open with students in the first through third grades. Ultimately, 360 children will enroll in grades one through 11. English instruction will begin in the first grade.

"The friendship house is two cultures coming together and the school is those two cultures cooperating to educate people," volunteer Steve James said. "Our purpose is not to open an American school but a Kazakh-American school. We have many important things to teach one another. One of the most important comes in the form of a saying from our Scriptures. The first commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind. The second is to love our neighbor as ourself."

The friendships already forged between Americans and Kazakhs impresses Southern Baptist workers.

"The people of Zaisan have been willing and gracious to open its window to us -- to give us a glimpse of Kazakh language and culture and people," James said. "I pray we will not only catch a glimpse but that we will begin to look one another in the face as friends."

Workers in Central Asia outline
opportunities for more personnel

By Beth Sammons

ZAISAN, Kazakhstan (BP)--Zaisan looks like any small mountain town in the dead of winter: gray clouds threaten to heap more snow on already-piled porches. Children bundled in caps and mittens ride atop sleds pulled by older siblings. Cars slip and slide along the icy streets.

Until recently, Zaisan was just one among the many forgotten cities within the republics of Soviet Central Asia.

"Many people think of Central Asia as simply the blank space in the middle of a wall map. It's a place without a name or face," said Brian Grim, a Southern Baptist worker and vice president of the Central Asian Foundation.

After years of veiled existence under stern Soviet rule, the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union are forging new relationships with other peoples of the world. Wedged between Russia, southwest Asia and China, the 1.5 million-square-mile region includes the newly independent republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan.

Kazakhstan alone is four times the size of Texas, with a population of 18 million people, 8 million of whom are Kazakhs. The rest are ethnic Russians, Ukrainians and Koreans as well as other Central Asian peoples. The region is rich in natural resources and a center for space programs and nuclear testing.

"We're now open to the whole world and equal members of the international community," said Zaisan mayor Askerbek Belginov during opening ceremonies of the Kazakh-American Friendship Center in December. "Our republic is keeping its windows open to the whole world and to new opportunities."

The friendship center is one of the humanitarian projects funded in Central Asia through Cooperative Services International, the Southern Baptist aid organization.

According to Grim, Zaisan's open door is only one example of the openness throughout Central Asia.

"For more than 500 years there's been no significant Christian witness among the Central Asian peoples," he said. "In God's timing, today gives us an opportunity to share Christ's love To do this we need a lot of personnel quickly."

A growing number of Christian workers in Central Asia are providing assistance through several development projects. Working in conjunction with the Central Asian Foundation, CSI volunteers help staff new schools and international business institutes, distribute food and medical supplies and serve in other roles.

"Several republics are open to missionaries coming, while others that prefer not to have missionaries are open to Christians coming in assistance roles," Grim said. "Different parts of Central Asia have different degrees of openness, but all areas are open to Christians who come and desire to truly help in the economic, social and economic development of this part of the world. Opportunities abound for evangelical Christians willing to use their resources in Central Asia."

In Kazakhstan, several Southern Baptist workers teach in the Kazakh-American International Business Institute, which opened Nov. 18. The first courses include English, international trade, marketing, business ethics, accounting and finance. The project was undertaken in cooperation with the Kazakh government and supported partly through CSI.

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Working under Kazakhstan's presidential advisor, American business people also can teach, lecture and lead seminars at the Kazakh Presidential Institute of Economics and Business in Alma-Ata. Teaching opportunities are available in a variety of fields, including marketing, management, computer science, finance and economics.

"With the recent independence of Kazakhstan from the former Soviet Union, the republic is eager to join a free-market economy and become an equal member of the world community," Grim said. "Coupled with the current state of the economy, this makes the need for teachers and specialists in business even more urgent. This is an ongoing program with positions filled as specialists make themselves available."

Applicants should be Southern Baptists, have a college degree in a business-related field and teach business in schools or have practical experience in business, according to Grim. The Kazakh-American institute offers assignments for business people to lead seminars lasting from 10 days to four weeks. Assignments of one year or more also are available with the institute providing food, housing and local transportation.

Grim said high-ranking Kazakh leaders are more aware of the help and expertise Southern Baptists can offer after the highly successful U.S.-Kazakh Festival last June. During that two-week event, 330 Southern Baptists teamed up with Kazakhs in a host of humanitarian, cultural and economic projects.

Among other short-term opportunities, Christians can be involved in cultural exchanges, Christian music tours and evangelistic meetings. The Billy Graham organization is considering meetings in Alma-Ata, the capital of Kazakhstan, pending an invitation from the Kazakh government.

Two-year positions are open to individuals interested in education and medical work, participation in drama teams and other special ministry projects. Two-year personnel qualified to teach English, business or technical skills are needed to teach in new schools.

Grim issued an urgent call for two-year Southern Baptist personnel to lead outreach projects throughout Kazakhstan. He added that experienced church planters are needed to serve as coaches for teams of local believers.

Career positions available include logistics coordinators to help other personnel; humanitarian needs project coordinators for medical and feeding programs, health and community development; community and economic development coordinators to enlist U.S. Christians to respond to Central Asia's economic crisis through developing business partnerships, economic development projects and technical training; and production and marketing specialists to work in a new multimedia center.

Grim also highlighted plans for additional cultural and economic exchanges with the United States. Approximately 100 exchange participants from Kazakhstan are currently in the United States, including students, medical personnel and business interns.

"We anticipate over the next 12 months to have somewhere between 600 and 1,000 people going to America. We hope this is just the beginning of a much larger program," he said.

The second Kazakh-American cultural exchange is planned for May 10-15 in Pennsylvania and other states. About 300 Kazakhs, representing a variety of professions, are expected to attend.

Other projects in the works for Kazakhstan include the establishment of a media center for Central Asia. The center will make possible local printing of literature and the production of radio and television programming helpful to the moral and spiritual lives of Kazakhs.

"We're interested in producing programs and material of benefit to Kazakhstan -- programs on economics, family life and spiritual life," Grim said.

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Representatives of various Christian organizations are making plans for the 1993 Trans-Asia Project, also known as "Marco Polo: The New Generation." The project will bring together peoples of Central Asia and the worldwide Christian community to cooperate in humanitarian, cultural and economic development activities.

Using last summer's U.S.-Kazakh festival as a model, TAP will attempt to mobilize thousands of summer Christian volunteers from several denominations and agencies to work in 400 different cities. The project will include performances, medical work, exhibitions, educational projects, business seminars, construction and building projects, language clubs, media crews and sports events.

Southern Baptists interested in working in Central Asia should contact CSI, P.O. Box 6767, Richmond, Va., 23230-0767, or call 1-800-866-3621 for more information.

"Volunteers are a priority but prayer is the key," Grim said. "A project of this magnitude will only be accomplished by people praying and responding to God's leadership. The door to Central Asia is definitely open."

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Louisiana church calls
pastor how many times?

By Gary W. Griffith

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SIBLEY, La. (BP)--"Take Me Back and Try Me One More Time" means more than the title of an old country and western song to Virgil Groves.

The Louisiana Baptist pastor affectionately uses the old tune to sum up his fourth call to the same pastorate -- First Baptist Church of Sibley, La.

There are no records to prove it but the 65-year-old pastor may have the state record for "repeat" pastorates, says James Carter, director of the Louisiana Baptist Convention's Church Minister Relations Division.

"I've heard of a pastor who has served two churches two times and some who have served one church twice but I don't know of anyone else who has been called to serve in a church four times. It must be a record," Carter asserts.

Groves began his pastoral ministry in 1954 and has been pastor of 10 Southern Baptist churches in Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas. He also was pastor of Midway Baptist Church in Sarepta, La., twice.

He first accepted a full-time pastorate at FBC of Sibley in 1964, serving two years in the north Louisiana community. The church called him back in 1968 and he stayed five years. In 1983 Groves accepted FBC's call for the third time and served until December 1989 when he retired.

"Then two years I served as an interim pastor or a supply preacher in other places every Sunday," Groves recalls. "So when I got a call from the (First Baptist) church pulpit committee a fourth time, I told them I'd pray about it. But this place has always had a warm spot in our hearts and God always seems to call us back here. Over the years, this church has become home."

For the fourth time, Groves and his wife, Georgia, moved back to FBC of Sibley in March 1991 to a part-time pastorate. "Before we came back, the word was out that the church was going downhill and couldn't last. But the Lord knew different and I knew different," Groves maintains.

In the last 10 months, FBC of Sibley has recorded 26 additions, with 10 of those through baptism. Sunday school attendance has grown from an average of 15 to almost 50. And the church's resident membership now totals more than 90, Groves reports.

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Deacon A.T. Prince was an FBC member the first time Groves accepted the pastorate and he was on the pulpit committee that called Groves last March.

"To be honest, the main reason we've kept asking Bro. Groves back was because we wanted (his wife) Georgia back," Prince teases.

The deacon says the main advantages of "recalling" a former pastor is that he already has relationships with church members and is familiar with the church and its history. "With Bro. Groves, the church gave a unanimous call. He is close to all the members, they all just love him and they know him. That's not usually the case with a new pastor."

In his repeat pastorates, Groves says he has found a disadvantage that is also an advantage. He explains: "When I came back, a lady with three kids came up to me and said: "Do you remember me, Bro. Groves? I was a toddler when you were first here. That can make a fellow feel old. But at the same time, you're able to see deacons and Sunday school teachers who grew up under your ministry and are teaching and performing other ministries. Then you realize that you have been able to touch their lives. That is rewarding."

The Groveses say the church has become home because of the Sibley people, their involvement in the community and the fact that much of the rearing years for their three children, a son and two daughters, were in Sibley. Groves also is a substitute teacher in area schools and chaplain of the Sibley Fire Department. The couple also is active in several community projects.

When asked why he would move away from a church field that had become home to him and his family, Groves says he didn't necessarily want to move but was being obedient to God's call.

"It's real strange looking back at how God has directed my ministry," Groves says. "He has used us to help rebuild churches' facilities and congregations' fellowship. We've been involved in building and repairing churches that were more than 100 years old and we've been involved in ministering to congregations that needed healing

"God has blessed our ministry everywhere we've been. But he has always allowed us to return home to Sibley."

Once the decision was made to return to Sibley the fourth time, Groves says, "we realized the joy of it would be that we would be able to give something back to the church. The other times it seems like they were always giving but now we're giving something back."

Groves says "giving something back" involves working himself out of a job. He is leading the church to focus on paying off its debt on a parsonage and auditorium so a "younger preacher who can give full-time service" can be called, he says.

With Groves' part-time salary, the church has been able to double and sometimes triple debt payments recently, he says. "Now the church only owes about \$10,000, which hopefully will be paid off this year. Once they get a younger, full-time preacher, then the church will really blossom again."

Groves doesn't know exactly when those plans will come to fruition. But he knows how much longer he'll serve the church -- "until the Lord gets through with me here."