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April 3, 1992

92-58

**BJCPA proposes arbitration,
hints compromise possible**

By Herb Hollinger

NASHVILLE (BP)--Arbitration or compromise could be solutions to the dispute between the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and the SBC Executive Committee over a \$300,000 capital fund account held in escrow since 1968, according to an exchange of letters between the two groups' legal counsels.

BJC legal counsel Oliver S. Thomas sent a letter, dated April 2, to James P. Guenther, legal counsel for the Executive Committee. In the letter Thomas proposed the dispute be submitted to "binding arbitration."

"We propose that this arbitration be facilitated by Sam Ericsson (former executive director of the Christian Legal Society who has probably arbitrated as many disputes as any other Christian leader), the chairpersons of both the Executive Committee and the BJC and one or more of their designates," Thomas said in the letter.

But Thomas also hinted the Washington-based religious liberty organization would consider a possible compromise.

"We were even prepared to entertain some sort of compromise, but your clients' indifference toward the rule of law and callous attitude toward an agency that continues to serve Southern Baptists faithfully cannot go unchallenged," Thomas said.

The dispute has been brewing since last year when the BJC asked for the funds, held by the Southern Baptist Foundation in Nashville, which, it claims, belongs to the BJC. However, the SBC Christian Life Commission also claims the funds. The SBC has stopped all allocations to the BJC and will vote on a recommendation in June which would sever all formal ties.

The Foundation asked the Executive Committee in September for clarification on the matter. In February the Executive Committee decided to present the matter to the annual meeting of the SBC in Indianapolis in June with a recommendation the corpus be reallocated. The recommendation also asks for the SBC to give the Executive Committee discretion in the reallocation.

Guenther picked up on Thomas' language about compromise. In his April 3 letter, Guenther said, "Mr. Thomas' reference to the possibility of a settlement of this controversy by compromise did not escape my attention. As attorneys we understand that part of our duty includes the exploration of any settlement opportunity. I will immediately convey to the chairman of the Executive Committee any offer which your client wishes to make."

One problem with the BJC's proposal is a time limit, Guenther indicated.

"On the same day the offer was received I was authorized by the chairman to make this response. We are evidencing our willingness to deal with this matter promptly. However, I must express our concern that the offer, characterized as an 'offer of Christian conciliation,' is made to expire in just 15 days," Guenther said in his letter. "I would hope a conciliatory spirit might last longer than that."

Guenther said the Executive Committee does not have a meeting scheduled until June 8 at the SBC meeting in Indianapolis "and there is no way the Executive Committee could accept this offer in the time allocated."

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The two attorneys took turns stating their respective cases in their letters as well as building cases for who is to blame.

"I can understand why the BJC would prefer to have its claim to the money adjudicated under a private arrangement rather than to sue the Southern Baptist Convention as it has threatened," Guenther said. "If the BJC took this dispute to a court for resolution, the BJC would be violating the very principles of church-state separation which the BJC has historically championed."

Thomas said: "Although we appreciated receiving partial payment in the amount of \$81,036, justice will not be served until the rest of our money has been turned over to us ... That the Executive Committee would attempt to transfer ownership of these funds to another Baptist entity is unconscionable."

Thomas did say in his letter the BJC has no choice but to pursue the matter. However, before considering other options, Thomas said, "we want to extend a final offer of Christian conciliation."

Guenther used strong language toward the BJC for even considering legal action.

"It seems patently inappropriate for these former partners (BJC) even to contemplate a suit to force the SBC to make further contributions to the BJC if the convention decides it does not want to (give the money to the BJC)," Guenther said. "Would these other Baptist bodies not extend to the SBC the right they would claim for themselves: the right of any Baptist general body to determine for itself how it will use its money?"

Guenther added, "As attorneys, we are satisfied that the money is the property of the convention and not the BJC. To suggest that the convention is being asked to violate a trust is contrary to our understanding of the facts and the law. There is no trust."

The Executive Committee had been asked by the convention to hold the capital needs money for all these years pending the BJC's development of a plan for its use which was consistent with the convention's allocation, Guenther said. "It never has."

Since 1968, income payments totaling \$654,638 have been sent to the BJC, Guenther said, in addition to the operating monies allocated by the SBC and paid to the BJC.

Guenther also noted since the Thomas' letter has been released to the Associated Baptist Press exclusively, the Executive Committee's response would be channeled through the convention's news service, Baptist Press.

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Seven agencies drop plans
for Fellowship exhibits

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
4/3/92

NASHVILLE (BP)--Seven out of eight Southern Baptist Convention agencies changed their minds this week about sponsoring exhibits at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship annual meeting in Fort Worth, Texas, April 30-May 2.

Baptist Press learned the Radio and TV Commission, as of late April 1, decided to opt out of an exhibit at the Fellowship's Resource Fair at Fort Worth's Tarrant County Convention Center. However, the Annuity Board told Baptist Press late April 2 it has not changed its plans to have an exhibit and earlier Woman's Missionary Union, an auxiliary to the SBC, indicated it also would sponsor an exhibit.

In addition, a Southern Baptist Theological Seminary spokesman told Baptist Press late April 1 the seminary would not have a formal exhibit. Originally, four of the six SBC seminaries -- Midwestern, New Orleans, Southern and Southwestern -- had planned to use a joint display at the Fellowship meeting.

However, all have since decided against the exhibit but some will sponsor alumni meetings.

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In addition to the seminaries, other SBC agencies deciding this week not to exhibit include: Sunday School Board, Brotherhood Commission, and Radio and TV Commission.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is an organization created last year in Atlanta composed of moderate Southern Baptist churches and individuals who are critical of current conservative Southern Baptist Convention leadership.

The decisions came somewhat as a surprise because of the timing. All seven agencies made the changes public this week. Although there were several suggestions as to why, sources said the explanation by James T. Draper Jr., president of the Sunday School Board, probably came as close to stating the real reason as any.

Draper, in making the SSB announcement March 30, said, "Cooperative Baptist Fellowship promotional materials advocate bypassing existing Cooperative Program channels. We want to avoid any misunderstanding that, by our presence, the board would be supporting any avenue of mission support that would erode the Cooperative Program."

Morris Chapman, Wichita Falls, Texas, pastor and current president of the SBC, told Baptist Press he did contact "several of our agency leaders and I am grateful for the prayerful and deliberate consideration with which they gave their decisions."

Chapman, president-elect of the SBC Executive Committee after the Indianapolis annual meeting in June, said he shared his conviction (about the CBF) "with whom I talked but there was absolutely no conversation that bordered on any type of threat or coercion."

"While our SBC agencies make their own decisions, I appreciate their supporting the cooperative spirit of the SBC," Chapman told Baptist Press. "I wholeheartedly support their decisions to not set up exhibits at the CBF meeting."

"The Fellowship is laying a foundation for a new denomination while claiming to be loyal to the SBC," Chapman said. "The Fellowship is organizing competing agencies. It does give designated gifts to some of our agencies. But it is by no stretch of the imagination, giving through the SBC Cooperative Program. Rather it is deliberately attempting to divert funds from our CP to their plans of giving. This is not the Southern Baptist way."

The Fellowship's moderator, John Hewett, Asheville, N.C., pastor, said "we deeply regret" the decision by the SBC agencies.

"We had hoped to provide those attending the widest possible exposure to Christian resources for ministry, mission, education and evangelism," Hewett said. "We will make the vacated space available to other exhibitors whose publications and ministries fit the overall goals of the Fellowship."

Hewett said invitations to those SBC agencies will be extended for the Fellowship's 1993 meeting in Atlanta.

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Homosexuality issue raises
tough questions for Baptists

By Jon Walker

Baptist Press
4/3/92

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Although many Southern Baptists may wonder why the controversy, the homosexual union at a North Carolina church is far from a simple issue.

"Pullen pushed the button on the mother of all issues for conflict" is what one person told Michael Hawn, minister of music at Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh.

"Pullen is trying to say Jesus spoke to various persons that were disenfranchised by society," Hawn said. He didn't condone their behavior but he loved them. He did more than say, 'Hate the sin and love the sinner.' He embraced them publicly sometimes."

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Yet, Raleigh pastor Jim Cogdill said Pullen has done "the least loving thing" a person can do -- condone what God has already condemned. Cogdill is pastor at Wake Crossroads Baptist Church in Raleigh and has been active in opposing Pullen's decision to bless a marriage-like union of two homosexual men.

What makes this debate particularly intimate is Hawn and Cogdill are both professors at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. In addition, adjunct professor Charles McMillan, in his role as the Raleigh Baptist Association's director of missions, is presiding over the association's response to Pullen's action. Pullen pastor Mahan Siler also once was an adjunct professor at Southeastern.

These close connections to the "mother of all issues" prompted Southeastern trustees to issue a "Statement of Concern" about Pullen and also about Binkley Memorial Church in nearby Chapel Hill which is considering licensing a homosexual divinity student. Binkley Church is named after the second president of Southeastern, Olin T. Binkley.

Southeastern trustees asked Southern Baptists to "understand that we disassociate ourselves and our institution from these local church actions." The Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention and the leadership of the North Carolina Baptist Convention also have taken action condemning the church's stand.

To many Southern Baptists it may seem clear-cut that homosexuality is wrong. Yet some argue, including Pullen's pastor Mahan Siler, there is a distinction between homosexual behavior and homosexual orientation.

"Your sexual orientation is determined by whether you are sexually attracted to persons of the same sex or of the opposite sex," wrote Siler in a letter to the church's deacons. This "basic sexual orientation is discovered, not chosen," he wrote. Therefore, he concluded, "The Bible does not condone" homosexual behavior but it "does not condemn homosexuality as a sexual orientation."

Furman Hewitt, professor of Christian ethics at Southeastern, agrees. "The Bible does not speak to homosexuality as an orientation. At most it condemns certain forms of homosexual practice," he said in an interview.

In contrast, Southeastern professor Wayne McDill does not see a distinction between sexual orientation and sexual practice. From a standpoint of biblical authority, he said, there is no question homosexuality is wrong. His doctoral work was in Christian ethics and he once taught the subject as an adjunct for Golden Gate Baptist Seminary in California.

In McDill's view, Pullen has "decided, in order to be compassionate and understanding with these people and their desires, we have to overrule traditional interpretations of biblical restrictions as to sexuality." McDill stressed the best way to interpret the Bible is to look at what the author originally intended to write.

Although Hewitt agrees it is important to look at the original context of biblical passages, he does not see such a clear-cut condemnation of homosexuality in the Scriptures. "I am reluctant to make easy negative judgements on what I perceive to be silence. I think that means I am taking the Scriptures seriously," he said.

Concerning ministry to homosexuals, Hewitt suggested the best way to minister is to affirm their right "to be what they are and be able to express what they are as long as they are operating in the same moral boundaries as heterosexual persons." Those moral boundaries mean ruling "out promiscuity and things like that." However, acceptance of homosexuals into the church needs to be qualified by affirming "heterosexuality is the norm for human beings" when it comes to social structures and marriages, Hewitt said. He said this is his opinion and not one Baptists are likely to adopt.

Hawn echoed this view. "In terms of evangelism, condemnation is not going to draw (homosexuals) into the church and probably will not change their mind. That doesn't mean the church condones promiscuity, violence and other things often associated with the gay lifestyle."

Hawn pointed out, "Here is a segment (of society) that's disenfranchised and, in our spirit of evangelism and outreach, we wanted to make a statement that was more than condemnation."

Cogdill, a professor of evangelism at Southeastern, said, "My point of view in dealing with someone who is a homosexual is to help them see their sin and how their sin separates them from God." He said then they can repent, believe and "have a right relationship with Jesus Christ."

McDill said it is important not to reject sinners, including homosexuals. On the other hand, compassion does not mean accepting their bondage. "These people are captive of a lifestyle destructive to the normal, wholesome, healthy outlook of a human being," McDill said. "We don't help them by trying to affirm them or encourage them in their bondage. We help them best by trying to help them be free of that."

Further complicating this debate is the issue of local church autonomy. Baptists have traditionally held each church is independent of all other churches and only loosely associated with each other through local associations, state and national conventions. Therefore, a local church does not have to seek permission from any other body before it makes a decision.

"We wouldn't be Baptists if we expected everyone to come out the same on a position," said Hawn, Pullen's minister of music the last seven years. Although he does not agree with every decision the congregation has made, Hawn is "very proud" of a church that would take such an issue seriously and do its best "to make a Christian response." Pullen's process included small group discussions, often deacon-led, with materials available on the issue for further congregational research.

However, Cogdill, in his opposition to Pullen's decision, points out autonomy cuts both ways. "Just as Pullen is autonomous" with the right to do what it did, he said, other churches, "like the one I pastor, also have the right to say this is wrong."

"In something like this, that is so clear-cut in Scripture," he added, "it's very easy to seek the mind of Christ. You just open the Bible and see what the Word of God says."

Yet Siler wrote it would be "presumptuous" to ask a homosexual to be celibate. Therefore, after seeking "the mind of Christ," he agreed to bless the gay union "in faithfulness to the higher biblical norm of justice and mutual care"

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Jon Walker is a first year M.Div. student at SEBTS. He works in the seminary's communication office.

South Carolina, Furman
can't reach agreement

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
4/3/92

COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)--Special committees from Furman University and the South Carolina Baptist Convention have been unable to reach a settlement setting the stage for a lawsuit contesting recent Furman charter changes.

At issue is an October 1990 decision by Furman's trustees which amended the school's charter giving trustees authority to elect future trustees. Trustees had been elected by the state Baptist convention since the school was chartered in 1826.

In November at the annual meeting of the state convention, messengers authorized the convention president to appoint a special committee to pursue a declaratory judgement on the legality of the Furman action. The committee met in January and decided to seek a reconciliation with Furman before proceeding with any legal action.

"Our committee has with great regret concluded that it is not possible to reach a negotiated settlement," said a statement released by the state convention Committee on Furman April 2 in Columbia to news media.

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"A settlement is not possible because neither side is willing to concede control of a majority of seats on the board of trustees to the other side, and because Furman University has refused the offer by South Carolina Baptists to settle the matter through arbitration," the statement said.

John E. Johns, president of Furman, said the university was "very sorry" the convention committee has "decided to proceed with legal action against Furman."

Johns said the Furman trustees' executive committee met with two different convention committees over a year and a half because it was hoped it would be beneficial to both.

"Unfortunately, the agreement we reached last summer with the convention's Furman Relations Committee was never voted on by the convention," Johns said.

Regarding the two proposals presented by the convention committee, Johns said both were given serious consideration but rejected because "the first proposal would have required the (Furman) trustees to rescind the action it took in October 1990 ... (and the second proposal (was) unacceptable because of important legal issues involved and the expense of arbitration procedure."

Furman offered a "counterproposal," Johns said, which would guarantee three of the five trustees elected by Furman each year would be South Carolina Baptists. The other two would be members of Christian churches. However, all five trustees would be elected by Furman.

The convention's Furman committee will present convention officers an eight-page report of its findings within two weeks. The report calls for a special meeting of the general board of the convention to receive the report.

The statement said the committee was charged with determining whether the action by Furman was legal.

Chaired by Timothy E. Head, pastor of Cooper River Baptist Church in North Charleston, the committee said it was unable to reach a negotiated settlement and "having our offer of arbitration refused by Furman, we have no choice but to reluctantly proceed to take the necessary legal steps to contest the validity" of the Furman charter change.

"It had been our hope and prayer to avoid such action, but having exhausted any possibility of settlement, we have no choice but to carry out the expressed wishes of South Carolina Baptists. We will abide by the wishes (of the state convention) in this matter," the statement said.

In his statement to news media late April 2, Johns said Furman's position is clear.

"We will not give up control of the election process of university trustees. However, we have been willing to discuss all other aspects of Furman's relationship with the convention, including an arrangement whereby all of the funds received from the convention would go into financial aid for South Carolina Baptist students.

"We remain confident of our legal position," Johns said. "Furman is a very strong institution academically and financially. It can survive and prosper without financial support from the convention ... We hope that South Carolina Baptists will decide not to pursue legal action against Furman, for the sake of both Furman and the convention."

Furman's 1991 allocation of Cooperative Program money, \$1.6 million, and the 1992 allocation, \$1.8 million, are being held in an interest-bearing account. The Greenville school has about 2,500 students.

**Pro-life alternative
to living will offered**

By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--A pro-life alternative to living will documents has been produced by the country's largest right-to-life group.

The "Will to Live," introduced recently by the National Right to Life Committee, is a legal document enabling a person to give written instructions as to what medical and lifesaving treatment he would want if he were to become incompetent. It also names someone as his health-care agent to carry out the Will to Live if he is unable to speak for himself.

Designed to prevent involuntary euthanasia, the Will to Live allows a person to protect his life by making clear he wants food and water when near death or when terminally ill. Under most living wills, food and water can be treated as medical care rather than basic necessities.

The Will to Live also specifies the person desires life-saving treatment except in the circumstances he designates. In the document, space is provided for the person to specify which treatment he wants withheld or withdrawn if death is imminent or he is in the final stage of a terminal illness.

The document rejects use of an organ or tissue obtained in a way contributing to another person's death or an organ or tissue procured from an induced abortion.

The Will to Live is needed because a living will "operates under the assumption that people would rather be dead than disabled, old or infirm," Burke Balch, NRLC's state legislative director, said in a written statement at the document's introduction March 26.

"Many people think, 'I don't want to be hooked up to a bunch of machines when I'm about to die anyway,' so they sign a living will to avoid that. But a living will goes much further and is much more dangerous."

Ben Mitchell, Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission director of biomedical and life issues, welcomed the introduction of the Will to Live.

"Many ethical, medical and legal experts have been concerned about the limitations of the standard living will documents," Mitchell said. "Living will is really a misnomer. It is, in fact, a dying declaration and only allows a person to state the circumstances under which he or she wants to be permitted to die without certain medical treatments. A living will suffers simultaneously from ambiguity and inflexibility, not to mention the fact that there is a presumption in favor of death rather than life."

"The Will to Live offers another alternative to the standard living will forms and may avoid the abuses to which the living will is liable. The Will to Live is a needed document for pro-life citizens and I will be delighted to see it adapted for use in each state in our nation."

There are different forms of the Will to Live for each state. A free copy of the Will to Live is available by sending a self-addressed, stamped, 9 1/2-inch envelope to Will to Live Project, Suite 500, 419 Seventh St. NW, Washington, DC 20004. Extra copies may be purchased.

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**Project Brotherhood delivers
innoculations for 50,000 in CIS**

By Jim Burton

**Baptist Press
4/3/92**

CENTRAL ASIA, Commonwealth of Independent States (BP)--After five days of delay in Moscow, innoculations for 50,000 children arrived in two Central Asian capitals.

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A volunteer medical team led by John Anderson, a physician from Dallas, carried the inoculations into the former Soviet Union. Purchased by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, the Foreign Mission Board and Texas Baptist Men, the DPT, tuberculosis, oral polio and measles inoculations cost an estimated \$36,000.

The inoculations were part of the first phase of Project Brotherhood, a North American Baptist response to food and medical needs in the CIS. Initiated by the Baptist World Alliance, the Brotherhood Commission is coordinating the cooperative response.

The Moscow delays and domestic airline complications caused the team to split, with Anderson going to one city and the others to another. In each city, health officials took possession of the inoculations.

"Our plan was for the medical volunteers to do mass inoculations," said Jim Furgerson, Brotherhood Commission adult division director. "We communicated this to health officials along with information about how the shots would be administered."

"All correspondence with Central Asian health officials indicated their agreement with our goals," he added.

Instead of allowing volunteers to perform the inoculations, health officials distributed the inoculations to neighborhood clinics where staff nurses gave the inoculations.

"We encountered some cross-cultural confusion," said Furgerson, who led a project assessment team in Central Asia. "Mass inoculations to us meant thousands of children a day receiving shots at a central location. To them, it means 40-60 children a day in four or five clinics."

The medical volunteers struggled with not being able to accomplish their assignment.

"I came to a real peace while I was there through some Scriptures I found," said Jimmie Borum, a registered nurse from Dallas. "For me personally it was an expensive trip and not what I thought I would be doing."

"I feel we worked into God's plan instead of making him work into ours," she added. "I am not sorry I went."

The greatest frustration was not accomplishing the goal of administering inoculations, said Mike Barnes, a registered nurse from Jackson, Miss.

"The good thing that happened is the possibility that we have opened some doors for medical exchanges," Barnes said. "Through us getting in there we found out what their needs are."

In each locale, Baptist leaders in both capitals worked with local health officials to arrange the project.

"Though we were extremely disappointed that the volunteer medical team did not get to perform their assigned task, local officials in both cities know who sent the inoculations," Furgerson said.

The CIS is currently in transition from a socialist to a free-market economy. However, the government still holds a tight reign on land.

"In each city we negotiated with officials for land or buildings to start Baptist churches," Furgerson said. "Officials promised full cooperation in each city. I think it shows their appreciation for the inoculation effort."

The volunteers included: Anderson; Bill and Melba Wilkerson, Henderson, Texas; Mike Barnes, Jackson, Miss.; Laverne Barnes, Jackson, Miss.; Martha Robinson, Shelby, N.C.; Nina George, Collinsville, Ill.; and Jimmie Borum, Dallas.

Korean Southern Baptist evangelism team
finds rich harvest in Central Asia By Jim Burton

CENTRAL ASIA, Commonwealth of Independent States (BP)--An 18-member Korean Southern Baptist evangelism team from six states discovered multiple opportunities for ministry in Central Asia.

More than 450 decisions for Christ were registered in nine meetings by the team during their 10-day visit, said Tommy Sohn, pastor of the First Korean Baptist Church in Dallas.

"There is a big spiritual need here," said Jonathan Lee, a layman from Tulsa, Okla. "This country has been without spiritual blessing for a long time."

"Now it has opened up. I believe we have a big challenge here telling them what God can do for them," added Lee, a 24-year employee of American Airlines, where he works as a computer analyst.

The team came to Central Asia at the request of D.K. Moon, pastor of a Korean Baptist church. Founded Feb. 28, 1991, it has a baptized membership of 188 with attendance between 300 and 350.

There are an estimated 400,000 Korean-Russians in concentrated areas of Central Asia, Moon said. Former Soviet General Secretary Joseph Stalin forced thousands of Korean ethnics from the Far East in 1937 to Central Asia.

"We never thought about such a large number of Koreans in Russia," Sohn said. He started the church last February and stayed for six months until Moon, a Korean American, could get to the field.

"I am surprised to see the church growing so quickly," Sohn said. "Leaders are already leading Bible studies."

The primary function of the evangelism team was to hold services throughout the region.

"We have visited collective farms to spread the gospel," said Chu Hon Yi, a cardiologist from Virginia Beach, Va. Aside from his evangelism efforts, Yi treated 120 patients for hypertension in a day. He called the project an exciting experience.

"I am wishing to come here permanently if God leads me," Yi said.

The evangelism team of pastors and lay people learned of numerous needs in Central Asia Korean-Americans could fill in the areas of education and medicine.

"Teachers are in short supply," Lee noted. "People like us could be very, very helpful here. I will seriously consider coming here to be an English and Korean-language teacher."

Lee's conviction is shared by his wife, Yung Ja, a registered dietitian.

"People are spiritually very hungry. They have not heard anything about God," said Mrs. Lee. "Their attitude is very sincere and humble. They do not complain about long worship hours."

The success of the Korean Southern Baptist evangelism team is indicative of the missions spirit that pervades Korean-American Baptists and Baptists in South Korea, said Dan Y. Moon, Brotherhood and language missions director for the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission in Memphis, Tenn.

"Koreans are people of prayer," Moon said. "God has given them a tremendous burden for lost people. More and more we are seeing Koreans enter difficult areas of the world to live and preach the gospel, not just to Korean ethnics, but among all people groups."

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Team members included: Kei Wol and Chu Hon Yi, Virginia Beach, Va.; Francis and Casey Oh, Honolulu; Tommy Sohn and Hyung Kim, Dallas; Jong Yong Lee, San Antonio; Sang Kil Chang, Houston; Esther and David Han, Los Angeles; Sun Oh and John Park, Cypress, Calif.; Judy and David Kim, Upland, Calif.; Eun Mee Bang, Tampa, Fla.; and Jonathan and Yung Ja Lee, Tulsa, Okla.

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(NOTE TO EDITORS: The state Baptist newspaper of each participant will receive photo specials mailed from the Brotherhood Commission.)

Brotherhood assessment
team surveys CIS

By Jim Burton

Baptist Press
4/3/92

KHABAROVSK, Russia (BP)--A 15-day tour of three republics in the Commonwealth of Independent States by a Project Brotherhood assessment team revealed numerous ministry opportunities for North American Baptists.

Eight Baptist Men's leaders -- denominational leaders and laymen -- toured Far East Russia and two Central Asian Republics. They found strong Baptist churches experiencing growing pains, said Jim Furgerson, team leader.

"The Baptist superintendents and pastors want to start more churches," Furgerson, Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission's adult division director, said. "But without financial support and pastoral training they face some frustrations," he added.

The team discovered about 50 potential projects ranging from church building to English-language teachers to food distribution.

"Concern over food and medical needs was a primary motivation for our involvement," Furgerson said. "But we now realize that while food and medicine are needed, they are short-term solutions. Our greatest long-term impact can come in classrooms and through pastor and church leadership training."

Officials at institutions of higher learning asked for English-language teachers and said Bible teaching could be included in the curriculum.

"English is becoming a global language," Furgerson said. "Students are eager to learn."

At the same time, religion is a hot topic throughout the CIS. After 70 years of communism and its atheist doctrine, young and old want to know whether there is a God.

"The people we met asked tough questions about the incarnation and good and evil," Furgerson said. "Their interest is genuine. I've never seen so many people that anxious to hear the gospel."

At the request of the Baptist World Alliance, the Brotherhood Commission is coordinating Project Brotherhood, a multi-denominational response by North American Baptists to meet needs in the CIS.

Besides the project assessment in the Far East and Central Asia, the first phase of Project Brotherhood includes the distribution of 570 tons of USDA food in Moscow. Volunteers will be needed there through August, said Douglas Beggs, Brotherhood Commission program vice president and Project Brotherhood coordinator.

People interested in participating in Project Brotherhood as volunteers should contact their state Brotherhood office. Contributions for the distribution of food and medicine in the CIS may be sent to Project Brotherhood, Brotherhood Commission, SBC, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38104 or Baptist World Alliance, 6733 Curran St., McLean, VA 22101.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: This story supersedes "Project Brotherhood team discovers needs in Central Asian republics," which moved in (BP) 3/27/92.

(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Brotherhood Commission.

Older adults don't deserve
treatment society gives them

By Terri Lackey

LAS VEGAS, Nev. (BP)--Society's contagious misconception of aging as undesirable shoves a huge group of adults into a category they do not deserve, a Christian researcher said.

"This country has a serious perception problem with aging. In a nutshell, the world views aging as not a very desirable thing," said Steve Taylor, an official with Age Wave Inc. of Emeryville, Ca.

Taylor's company studies the demographics of an aging population and the implications for churches. He spoke to a group of senior adult leaders during a conference at West Oakey Baptist Church in Las Vegas, March 26-28. "A Celebration of Life -- The Senior Adult Years," was a partnership event with the Nevada Baptist Convention, the Southern Nevada Baptist Association and the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministry department.

Taylor said the country is youth-obsessed, and advertising campaigns aimed at obtaining more youthful appearances prove it.

"Youth is where it's at," he said.

The world views older adults as angry, cranky, self-centered, complaining, dependent, vulnerable, selfish and a burden, he said. People treat older adults in condescending ways.

"One of the single most common complaints of older adults is that they are treated condescendingly," Taylor said. "People talk to them as if they don't understand what is being said. They speak louder, simpler and slower."

"Personally, I think the time has come to question the world's view of aging," Taylor said.

"When the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, life expectancy was 35," Taylor said.

In the 1850s it was 40, and by 1985 that number had climbed to 75, where the figure presently stands, he reported. The average life span continues to rise, and should reach 90 by the turn of the century.

In a separate conference session, Frank Pollard, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jackson, Miss., asked, "Who told us that 65 was old?"

Updated age groupings place the 40-60 group as median adults and the 60-80 group as older adulthood, Pollard said. "You don't even get to say you're old until you're 80.

"What makes us feel old before our time are the M & M twins -- media and mirrors," Pollard said.

"Mirrors can lie to you. They can tell you you're old, and they shouldn't," he said. "Don't let the mirror rob you of your vision."

A person doesn't get old until he loses his enthusiasm," Pollard said. "It has nothing to do with the accumulation of years."

Brian Harbour, pastor of First Baptist Church of Richardson, Texas, said churches should value their more mature members.

"The greatest thing churches need today is spiritual maturity. The spiritually mature members constitute stability in today's church," he said.

Harbour challenged the senior adults not to rest on their laurels of maturity.

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"Don't live in the past tense of your spiritual lives. Living the Christian life is not just a decision but a decision followed by a process. One thing God expects from us is one thing all of us can do -- be faithful.

"We might not be able to sing or teach Sunday school classes, but the Christian life is not about success. It's about faithfulness," he said.

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No retirement for older Christians;
churches should use them to fullest By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press
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LAS VEGAS, Nev. (BP)--The word "retire" should not be a part of the older Christian's vocabulary, two Christian researchers agree.

"For a Christian, there is no retirement," said Steve Taylor, an official with Age Wave Inc. of Emeryville, Ca., a company that studies the demographics of an aging population and the implications for churches.

Win Arn, director of L.I.F.E. International of Monrovia, Ca., a resource organization for church growth through senior adult ministry, said people "who don't have anything productive to do after retirement usually die within seven years" after leaving work.

Taylor said churches should pay attention to the resources they have in senior adults and use them.

"The older adult group is not just a group that needs to be ministered to," he said. "It is just as important they do the ministering."

Likewise, Taylor said churches should not restrict senior adults to minister only to their kind.

"You don't want to restrict the role of older adults to ministering to older adults," he said. "They need to be leaders in all facets of the church."

Arn said today 20 percent of church members are age 55 and older, while only 10 percent are ages 13-20. In 30 years, 33 percent of a church's congregation will be 55 and older, he projected.

"If you took the number of people age 65 and older and had them hold hands, they would stretch from the earth to the moon, back to the earth and to the moon again," Arn said.

"There are 45,000 people more than 100 years old. That number has doubled in the last decade," he said in stressing the population growth among senior adults.

In a recent survey in which Arn polled 500 churches, "two thirds had youth directors, but less than 10 percent had senior adult directors," he said. "Soon the day will come when youth directors will be trained in (ministering to) both youth and senior adults."

Arn said he believes churches are finally beginning to recognize the older adult population as a valid resource for growing congregations.

"The church of tomorrow will be functioning under a new paradigm," Arn said. He explained paradigms as a grid of values and rules through which one interprets life.

"For example," Arn said, "in Columbus' day, the paradigm was that the world is flat. It's a way of thinking."

The church that is successfully reaching senior adults has changed its paradigms, he said.

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Under the old paradigms, senior adults required volunteers, now they are volunteers; they were considered care receivers, now they are care givers. The senior adult program in a church consisted of one group; now there are several groups, Arn said of churches which are successfully reaching seniors.

A church with an effective senior adult ministry will provide older adults opportunity to use their retirement years meaningfully, he said.

He said he believes volunteerism among senior adults will change.

"Meaningful work will replace busy work."

Arn suggested senior adults can be the "best ministers of love in the church.

"Ministries of love, both giving and receiving, will receive greater priority in the church," Arn said. "Senior adults tend to be the most loving people in church. It is easier for senior adults to say, 'I love you,' and hug someone than any other group."

Taylor and Arn led leadership seminars during a conference at West Oakey Baptist Church in Las Vegas, March 26-28. "A Celebration of Life -- The Senior Adult Years," was a partnership event with the Nevada Baptist Convention, the Southern Nevada Baptist Association and the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministry department.

About 400 people attended the Las Vegas event, and another 1,200 people attended a similar partnership conference held in Memphis, Tenn., earlier in the month.

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Pastors, churches should
develop spiritual covenants

By Pat Cole

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Relationships between pastors and congregations will be strengthened if they develop a "spiritual covenant" with each other, participants at a recent Southern Baptist conference on "Minister/Congregation Bonding" concluded.

A total of 58 pastors and laypersons from seven states reached that consensus during the meeting sponsored by the Dehoney Center for the Study of the Local Church at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

While not a legal document, a spiritual covenant should spell out expectations for both the pastor and the congregation, said Ernest White, director of the Dehoney Center. Persons abide by a spiritual covenant out of a sense of commitment rather than obligation, he said. "There should be mutual commitment instead of using it to force people to do things they don't want to do," said White, Gaines S. Dobbins professor of church administration and leadership at Southern.

Conference participants were selected from churches where a healthy relationship exists between the pastor and congregation. These congregations and pastors were identified last year during Southern Seminary's study on Quality in Ministry funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc. in Indianapolis. Lilly and the Baptist General Association of Virginia also shared costs for the conference.

During the event, pastors and laypersons concluded ministers and congregations must be sensitive to issues of compatibility during the pastor selection process. "The needs of the church and the strengths of the pastor must fit each other," White said.

Trust and communication also were determined to be essential elements of good relationships. "Churches and pastors can be open with each other and they need to be able to voice expectations," White noted. "The ability to address problems when they arise is crucial."

Other signs of good congregation-pastor relationships cited during the conference include:

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- Mutual care between the pastor and congregation.
- Concern by the pastor for the needs of all members of the congregation.
- Sensitivity by the congregation to the needs of the pastor's family.
- Opportunities for continuing education and growth for the pastor.
- An orderly transition process when the pastor leaves the congregation.
- An attitude that pastors and laypersons are co-laborers in the work of Christ.

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Child abuse remains concern
for college students

By Chip Alford

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NASHVILLE (BP)--For the fifth year in a row, college students responding to a Southern Baptist Sunday School Board magazine survey chose child abuse as the societal need or concern that troubles them most.

Five hundred and fifty-seven readers of "The Student" responded to a questionnaire published in the October 1991 edition of the magazine. Asked to choose from a list of 28 societal issues five that concerned them most, 46.3 percent picked child abuse.

"I was surprised when child abuse topped the list five years ago," Milt Hughes, editor of "The Student," said. "But after hearing feedback from students at seminars and meetings I realized that this issue was a much broader problem for college students than I had thought."

Hughes said the magazine's 1992 student survey will include more specific questions about child abuse to determine how many college students may have been victims themselves.

Other societal concerns most often picked by students responding to the 1991 survey included: abortion, 42.2 percent; the homeless, 33.7 percent; drug abuse, 33 percent; and racism, 30.7 percent.

Of the 557 respondents, 54 percent were female and 46 percent, male; 86 percent were white, 9.7 percent Asian, 1.6 percent Hispanic, and 1.4 percent black.

Slightly fewer than half (47.2 percent) of the respondents described their political views as "conservative," 35.1 percent as "middle of the road," and 13.7 percent as "liberal." Only 2.7 percent described their views as "far right" and 1.3 percent as "far left."

The respondents overwhelmingly preferred the New International Version of the Bible, and the majority said they viewed Scripture as "inspired by God," and as a "guideline for Christian living." Only 28.3 percent said they viewed the Bible as "inerrant, infallible" and even fewer (22.6 percent) as "authoritative."

The survey also showed 99.8 percent of the respondents had attended a religious service either frequently or occasionally in the last year, 96 percent had attended Sunday school and 90.3 percent had a meaningful quiet time. In addition, 32.2 percent of the students said they had drunk alcohol occasionally or frequently in the past year, 11.2 had smoked cigarettes, and 22.6 percent had had a sexual relationship.

The No. 1 personal concern chosen by respondents was their relationship with God (59.6 percent), followed by grades, 37.9 percent; time management, 33.9 percent; stress, 31.2 percent; and establishing friendships, 30.5 percent.

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