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May 29, 1992

92-91

CORRECTION: In the BP story May 27 titled "Executive Committee conducting mail ballot on homosexuality," please change the 8th paragraph, 2nd sentence to read:

According to the SBC business office, Pullen has given \$557.50 in Cooperative Program and foreign and home missions gifts during that period while Binkley has given \$175.85 for the Cooperative Program.

Thanks,  
Baptist Press

DBU dismissals stir questions  
of politics or procedure

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press  
5/29/92

DALLAS (BP)--An anti-feminist assistant professor of sociology and a dean who refused to investigate complaints against him claim they lost their jobs at Dallas Baptist University because of denominational politics and "politically incorrect" views. University officials, however, maintain the two were released for unwillingness to comply with procedures.

David Ayers, assistant professor of sociology and criminal justice, and John Jeffrey, dean of the College of Humanities and Social Science at DBU, were notified May 22 of the university's intention not to reappoint them for the 1993-94 academic year and were released immediately from their 1992-93 responsibilities without stated cause.

The two non-tenured faculty members were told their contracts were being paid up and they were given until 11 p.m. the next working day to vacate their offices.

"Conservative faculty members are nervous. They are wondering who's next," Ayers said, noting he believes his dismissal stems from his conservative stand within the Southern Baptist Convention and for his willingness to confront "politically correct" feminist ideas.

"That is absolutely not true. And I say that as a conservative and a member of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas," said Ed Pauley, DBU academic vice president. "It was not theologically or politically motivated. It was procedurally caused."

According to DBU administrators, Ayers and Jeffrey were terminated by non-reappointment due to their insubordinate unwillingness to cooperate with a simple investigation, not due to any "vendetta" against conservatism as alleged by Ayers.

Conflict began to surround Ayers after he spoke at an April 1 DBU faculty "faith and learning" luncheon, presenting a summary of his paper, "The Inevitability of Failure: The Assumptions and Implementations for Feminism." The paper had appeared as a chapter in "Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood," a Crossways Books volume recently named Christianity Today's "Book of the Year."

The paper challenged the feminist idea that gender roles are learned, not biologically differentiated; it alleged even evangelical Christians tend to unquestioningly accept feminist ideals as portrayed in the media; and it asserted feminism is based on indefensible presuppositions and is destructive to society.

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Following Ayers' presentation, William E. Bell Jr., dean of DBU's Mary C. Crowley College of Christian Faith, presented a scheduled response in which he basically affirmed his colleague's ideas.

Due to the level of interest generated among faculty by Ayers' presentation, a follow-up luncheon was scheduled April 29 and Deborah McCollister, DBU assistant professor of English, was invited to present an alternative viewpoint.

In a sociology class on the family, Ayers distributed photocopies of McCollister's paper to his students and placed on reserve in the university library tapes of her luncheon address and his own.

On May 11, Pauley informed Ayers he was to appear before an eight-member ad hoc committee named by DBU President Gary Cook. Ayers was told that at the committee meeting he was to respond to questions regarding defamatory comments he allegedly made in class concerning McCollister's presentation, as well as releasing tapes to students of a private faculty meeting and distributing copies of a colleague's paper without her permission.

In a memo, Ayers responded he was guilty of no wrong-doing and that his actions were within academic freedom guidelines as outlined by the American Association of University Professors and stipulated in the university's faculty handbook.

"As far as the charge of making the tapes public, that boggles my mind," Ayers said. "The meeting was taped and the tapes were being sold for 75 cents each to students by the media services office of the university."

Furthermore, Ayers said, the "private" faculty forum April 29 was held in an open area on the first floor of the university library and a number of students heard McCollister's critique of Ayers' paper.

Ayers also questioned whether off-the-cuff comments he allegedly made in class were any worse than those made by McCollister in her prepared address or by other faculty who, he claimed, had defamed him.

"I was not aware the tapes were being sold, and when I learned that was the case, that issue was removed from the table for discussion," Pauley said.

Concerning the location of the faculty luncheon, Pauley explained that the private room at the Baptist Student Union which normally would have been used was unavailable and the library was the only available area suited to a meal function.

"It was not our intention for the meeting to be held in an open space," he said.

Pauley also noted no specific formal complaints had been registered concerning classroom statements by other faculty regarding Ayers and he felt McCollister in her address "had acted as a scholar would act in a scholarly context," not unprofessionally.

After Ayers stipulated that he felt questions should be asked by a ranking faculty member rather than an ad hoc committee, Pauley cancelled the May 18 committee meeting and instructed Jeffrey, as Ayers' dean, to investigate the complaints and report his findings.

According to Pauley, Jeffrey initially greeted the proposal warmly, terming it a "substantive move" on the university's part. However, the next day he refused to participate in the investigation, alleging Ayers' rights to due process and academic freedom had been violated, and he advised Ayers to seek legal counsel from a Christian attorney.

"Why the unprecedented, radical departure from due process? Why was this faculty member being singled out? The only answer one can draw is it was based on his politically incorrect views on feminism," Jeffrey said.

According to DBU's president, the investigation proceeded in an unconventional manner because Ayers himself made it a divisive issue on campus, although Ayers points to high student evaluations as evidence he was not disrupting the educational process.

"The ad hoc committee was named due to the serious nature of the dissension David Ayers had created on campus," Cook said. "It had become a campus-wide problem, not one confined to within one department."

Jeffrey and Ayers both said they have no plans currently to pursue legal action against the university but they would welcome any investigation by the AAUP or one of the university's accrediting agencies.

Meanwhile, university officials ask what more they could have done to satisfy Ayers' and Jeffrey's desire for due process once the questions were raised about Ayers' conduct.

"When Mr. Ayers asked that the issue be handled through conventional academic channels, it was remanded to Dean Jeffrey and the ad hoc committee meeting was cancelled. When he asked for an apology, I offered him a written apology for inadvertently creating the impression that by distributing questions to committee members, I was -- in his words -- 'making the charges public,'" Pauley said.

"It seemed we had done everything they asked and their hard-line response was both surprising and dismaying.

"It's distressing that so many good things have happened in the last few years at DBU and this sort of thing detracts from the telling of that story," Pauley said. "And it's disheartening that John Jeffrey and David Ayers were a part of that good story of what has happened during Dr. Cook's tenure so far, and they are no longer."

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House vote on fetal ban  
appears short of override

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press  
5/29/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--An attempt by Congress to overturn a ban on federal funding of transplanted research using tissue from induced abortions apparently will fail.

On May 28, the House of Representatives approved lifting the moratorium but fell 12 votes short of the two-thirds required to override a promised veto by President George Bush. The May 28 vote was 260-148 in favor of the conference report on the National Institutes of Health reauthorization bill (H.R. 2507).

"This is an important victory," said James A. Smith, Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission director of government relations. "The forces arrayed against us on this vote were impressive, including most of the medical lobby, the disease victim advocates, some veterans organizations and the pro-abortion lobby. To still get enough votes to sustain a veto in light of this is nothing short of miraculous."

The Bush administration and pro-life advocates oppose lifting the ban for reasons including concerns about a potential increase in the number of abortions and possible abuses in securing the tissue. Proponents of rescinding the moratorium say safeguards in the legislation would prevent such occurrences.

Nine days before the House vote, the president issued an executive order establishing a bank supplied by fetal tissue from ectopic pregnancies and miscarriages. Tissue from both sources is allowed under the moratorium. The Department of Health and Human Services and some researchers said this would provide enough ethical tissue to meet research demands. Opponents of the moratorium said tissue from these sources would not be effective.

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Many representatives called for overturning the ban because promising, though unproven, results have been reported in curing such diseases as diabetes, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's.

While some representatives said it was not an abortion issue, both pro-choice and pro-life advocates said the vote on the NIH bill would be counted as such by them.

"President Bush deserves a big pat on the back for personally lobbying members of Congress on this issue and for issuing the tissue bank executive order," Smith said. "Both actions were keys to this victory.

"While this is a significant victory, it's not yet a complete victory. Pro-life Southern Baptists shouldn't take anything for granted. Representatives still need to hear from concerned citizens in order to reinforce their resolve to vote to sustain the president's veto."

Messengers to the 1991 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention approved a resolution on the sanctity of human life supporting the moratorium.

The moratorium was instituted during the administration of President Ronald Reagan in 1988 and continued by President Bush's new HHS secretary, Louis Sullivan, in 1989. Sullivan's extension of the ban came despite a special panel's recommendation to lift it.

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Kazakhs taste freedom  
in U.S. exchange visit

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press  
5/29/92

HARRISBURG, Pa. (BP)--All his life, Mustapa Suleimenov of Kazakhstan heard talk of the United States.

"We were told America was not so nice and they were bad to us and we should be bad to them," said the wealthy beverage distributor from the former Soviet central Asian republic. "But now we see with our own eyes it is not so."

Suleimenov, 42, now sees the American spirit as a power to solve world problems. As guests of Southern Baptists in several states, a delegation of high Kazakh government officials and other leaders like Suleimenov tasted the fruits of freedom during a May 10-25 visit to the United States.

They were not disappointed.

"I am very glad that, as I expected, democracy is in practice here," said Erkegali Rakhmadiyev, Kazakhstan's minister of culture, in an interview during his visit. "The people are free, they can work and they can work hard. They like their country, and they are the products of democracy."

Southern Baptists' involvement with sprawling, mineral-rich Kazakhstan came as officials planned a visit there last summer by 330 Americans, mostly Southern Baptists. The friendship tour was dubbed "Senim," meaning "Trust."

This year's return visit by Kazakhs -- Senim II -- is the second stage of what is planned to be an annual event. In two years it has grown in size and influence far beyond what organizers first envisioned, said Stan Smith, general coordinator for the Kazakh-American festival in the United States.

"The Kazakhs turned to us as a source for helping them develop their country," said Smith, director of overseas partnership for Southern Baptists in Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey. "We said to them that at the heart of everything we do is our faith."

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Kazakhstan, a rising world power in the wake of the Soviet Union's breakup, has begun to fashion its emerging autonomy after some elements of the American system -- including religious freedom.

"In Kazakhstan we are multi-confessional," Rakhmadiev said. "You can find Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Judaism. If the country cannot provide freedom for all confessions, then the government can judge itself as being incapable of providing democracy."

Rakhmadiev said he is reading the Bible for the second time.

Last year Wallace Williams, executive director of the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania-South Jersey, visited Kazakhstan during the Senim exchange. As television cameras rolled, he participated in the adoption of a religious freedom manifesto jointly crafted by Muslims, the Orthodox church and evangelicals there.

The visiting Baptists noted one of their faith's distinctives is freedom for all to worship as they please.

"We showed them how simply it works, that we're faithful in our belief but we don't let it intrude in our government," Williams said. "They gave us an official invitation to come in and teach our religion." Kazakh officials also asked Baptists "to be sure and take them to our churches" when Kazakhs came to America, he added.

Penn-Jersey Baptists coordinated the Kazakhs' U.S. visit. More than 300 Kazakhs ventured into prominent businesses, concert halls, public offices and churches to study the workings of American free enterprise, democracy and culture -- and to share their own national heritage. The delegation included some of Kazakhstan's most famous citizens, including the head of the Russian Orthodox Church in Kazakhstan.

American organizers have been intrigued, to say the least, by the willingness of people at high levels of Kazakh society to develop relations with Baptists.

"In Kazakhstan there has been an incredible movement of God," Williams said. "In a short period of time, through a relatively small group of people, we have complete access to every level of government over there. Only God can do that."

Rakhmadiev pointed to a people's diplomacy. "In the past understanding between the nations was reached by politicians but this kind of union and understanding (was) fragile," he said. "We think the unions which form with the help of culture between the peoples will be the most appropriate and long-lasting unions. Relationships between persons and spiritual closeness of people can save civilization."

Baptist organizers made no stipulations about what American hosts should or shouldn't tell their guests. "The reason we're able to have this kind of event is because the Kazakhs understand we want to share our faith but not in an offensive way," Smith said. "We're viewed as people who are strong in religious beliefs but respectful of other beliefs, and we respect their traditions. This has given us the freedom to share."

In one conversation, culture minister Rakhmadiev asked Smith what he thought about people who do not follow Smith's religion. "I said our desire is that all people would believe as we do," Smith replied.

Rakhmadiev then inquired, "What about those who choose not to believe as you?"

"We will respect them," Smith responded.

Rakhmadiev smiled and said, "You Baptists are very progressive and I like that."

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

Kazakh officials learn  
about American democracy

By Marty Croll

HARRISBURG, Pa. (BP)--A presidential cabinet member in Kazakhstan said he and others visited the United States in May as guests of Southern Baptists "to breathe the air of democracy."

The cabinet member, Minister of Culture Erkegali Rakhmadiev, said he and the nation's president, deputy prime minister and three other ministers came to the United States in May to glean knowledge of American democracy. That knowledge could help in framing Kazakhstan's new constitution as an independent nation, he said.

Kazakhstan, one of the 15 former Soviet republics, has emerged as a world power with its own nuclear arms following the demise of the Soviet Union. About 41 percent of its 17 million people are ethnic Russians. The second-largest group consists of native Kazakhs whose ancestors were nomadic herdsman descended from the Turks.

Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbaev, came to Washington at the invitation of President Bush. But the other dignitaries' entree was a cultural exchange organized in Kazakhstan by friendship forces in the two countries and the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania-South Jersey. More than 300 Americans visited Kazakhstan last year as a result.

During this year's round of the exchange, more than 300 Kazakhs -- including performing artists, government officials, businessmen, educators, religious leaders, doctors and a Kazakh cosmonaut -- came to the United States for 15 days, May 10-25. Most stayed with Southern Baptist families.

Through a broad network of Southern Baptists, the delegation visited prominent companies, government offices and concert halls in several states. Kazakhs saw free enterprise and democracy close up and shared the strong points of their own national heritage.

During visits with Bush, U.S. cabinet officials and American businesses, Nazarbaev agreed to slash his country's nuclear arms and allow Chevron Corp. to develop Kazakhstan's oil resources.

Even so, Rakhmadiev said, "The visit of our president to America can be viewed not only as a mission where he wants to sign economic and cultural agreements with the U.S. government but also to take advantage once again of being in an atmosphere of democracy. That's very important before the adoption of our new constitution."

One of Nazarbaev's earliest contacts with Americans came last summer when the 330 mostly Southern Baptist visitors traveled to Kazakhstan for the first round of the exchange. The two countries dubbed the effort "Senim," meaning "Trust."

That exchange not only triggered cooperation between Americans and Kazakhs in economics, science and culture but also brought them spiritually closer, Nazarbaev said during his visit to the United States.

During early stages of Senim, Southern Baptists became one of the first groups of foreigners to contribute money and other resources -- including personnel -- to help Kazakhs boost their living standards and recover from decades of Soviet exploitation. Senim has been credited with bringing some \$12 million in aid to the nation.

Soviet policy in Kazakhstan had left a primary natural water resource drained, an entire region crippled by nuclear contamination, and widespread economic chaos. Now, Southern Baptists sponsor workers there in humanitarian aid, economic and cultural development and applied linguistics, including Bible translation.

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Through the Senim program, "many of our American friends discovered for themselves Kazakhstan and Kazakh people and their culture and customs for the first time," Nazarbaev said. "I hope the last icicles of former suspicion between our peoples melted away during those days."

During a ceremony marking the end of the Kazakhs' visit to the United States May 25, Deputy Prime Minister Myrzatai Dzholdasbekov read Nazarbaev's message to participants in the exchange.

The deputy prime minister, one of the president's close advisors, said members of the delegation had met new friends and nailed down business contacts that should prove mutually profitable. Among immediate benefits was the drafting of an agreement by Pennsylvania and Kazakhstan to share resources.

Dzholdasbekov said Kazakhs seek peace and cooperation. "It was not the wish of the Kazakh government or Kazakh people" to maintain such a level of nuclear armament and technology as the Soviet Central Committee decided it should, Dzholdasbekov said in an interview. The Central Committee "never asked us," he said.

"Our president, Mr. Nazarbaev, has signed a treaty with President Bush, and I think this is a gesture of the peaceful policy of our government. We think this reduction should take place elsewhere around the world," he added.

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

Florida pastor will ask SBC  
to limit severance gifts

By Jack Brymer

Baptist Press  
5/29/92

SANFORD, Fla. (BP)--A Florida pastor has announced he will make a motion during the Southern Baptist Convention in Indianapolis to limit severance gifts by convention agencies and institutions.

Bobby McFalls, pastor of Westview Baptist Church in Sanford, said, "I will move that the Executive Committee and the trustees of all agencies, boards, commissions and theological seminaries of the Southern Baptist Convention be limited in authorizing additional severance benefits, deferred income and escrow transfers, and related benefits as gifts for employees of their respective entities."

McFall's six-point motion would: 1) prohibit any severance package for employees with less than five years' denominational service, except those benefits designated by policy; 2) put a cap of \$25,000 on benefits for those with five to 10 years' service; 3) limit the maximum of any severance package to \$50,000, excluding unused vacation time, accrued sick leave and other severance benefits stated by policy; 4) provide no additional luxury gifts from monies contributed by churches through the Cooperative Program and special missions offerings; and 5) provide no lifetime travel and expenses without approval of the SBC in annual session.

The sixth point of McFalls' motion calls for all SBC entities to report to the 1993 meeting in Houston June 15-17 on how the matter was handled by their respective trustees.

"Unless we do something within our ranks to correct some of these trends, it is going to have an adverse effect like we could not imagine," McFalls said.

"My heart is overwhelmed with what could happen in our great convention -- for which I am eternally grateful to and a champion of -- unless something is done," he said.

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A native of South Carolina, McFalls said he is a "lifetime Southern Baptist." He attended Fruitland Bible Institute and has been in the ministry for 35 years, 20 of which have been the pastorate. He was a vocational evangelist prior to accepting the Westview pastorate.

McFalls said he planned to make the motion in the first business session of the convention Tuesday morning, June 9.

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Chaplains' ministries expand  
in wake of military cutbacks

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
5/29/92

SAN FRANCISCO (BP)--Chaplain Jerry Mize's ministry to the grieving goes beyond just one soldier to an entire army base.

Like 55 other U.S. military installations, the Presidio of San Francisco, where Mize is assigned, is scheduled to close by 1995.

Another 46 will be realigned or reduced and more than 340,000 military positions will be trimmed, according to the U.S. Defense Department.

Troops facing uncertain futures often experience depression, anxiety and malaise, say chaplains struggling to maintain a ministry in the face of the military draw-down.

"It is like a ministry to the dying because this base is dying," Mize said. "Across this post, there's a feeling of 'What's the purpose?'"

Established by the Spanish in June 1776, the Presidio is older than the country it protects. An appointment here used to be an honor, Mize said. Today, it's a curse.

"When they get assigned here, their initial reaction is, 'What did I do to deserve this?'" Mize said. Defense cutbacks after the Cold War have resulted in this ironic situation, he said.

"Our prayers have been answered. We got peace," Mize said. "And when we got our prayers answered, looky what happened: We lost our jobs."

The troop level is being cut in half in Hanau, Germany, one of 52 foreign installations being reduced or closed.

"It has been a higher stress factor for most because there's a lot of unanswered questions," said chaplain Marti Hayes, who is assigned there.

Troops scheduled to come home from abroad are hearing rumors of overcrowded posts, expensive housing costs and waits of up to three months for their cars to be shipped to the states, she said.

Those remaining abroad face decreasing support systems, such as schools for children or on-base stores, said Lew Burnett, director of military chaplaincy for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, which endorses chaplains.

"Where they know the installation is going to stay open, they do make arrangements for the support systems. But where there's a question of whether that activity's going to stay, they don't get any kind of support," said Burnett, who just returned from visiting chaplains in Germany.

"Some people have to shop on the German economy, which is much higher."

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The draw-downs also are leading to fewer promotions. Since length of stay in the military is based on rank, many people are being forced into early retirement, Hayes said.

Such tensions can lead to a variety of problems such as marriage disputes, Hayes said. "When the stress rises in a soldier, that usually goes home to the family and the family picks it up."

Chaplains report their counseling duties have increased dramatically, Burnett said.

"Some of our chaplains are about to reach the point of burnout because of the workload," Burnett said. "Some of our chaplains in Europe are counseling 'till midnight and later."

To help ease the tension on base, Mize at the Presidio said he has offered "spiritual adventure retreats" such as white-water rafting. Soldiers develop a sense of teamwork during the day, and nighttime discussions have a spiritual emphasis, he said.

"We use this as a way to incorporate the soldier to the chapel," he said. "We show them the church is coming to them."

Hayes said she hopes churches near bases will offer help to soldiers adjusting to the draw-down. In addition to spiritual counseling, churches could offer transportation or house-finding help to those arriving from Europe, she said.

Another concern, Mize said, is the spiritual lives of retired military personnel.

The main post chapel at the Presidio, which was dedicated in 1931, is considered the church home for many retired military men and women, he said.

"The majority are here because they found the Lord here," Mize said. "When people have invested so much of their time and their tithes, it's sort of hard to tell them, 'Sorry, you've got to find another place to worship.'"

Still, he isn't giving up hope.

"I guess as time passes the Lord will give us the vision," he said. "Sometimes the Lord even works through Uncle Sam."

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(BP) photo of chaplain Jerry Mize available upon request from the Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press.

CLC encourages churches  
toward voter registration

By Louis Moore

Baptist Press  
5/29/92

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission is spearheading a major denomination-wide effort to get all eligible Southern Baptists to register to vote and to participate in the election process this year.

The campaign is nonpartisan and designed to encourage voter participation in the American political system, not in any one particular party.

The campaign was launched in time for Religious Liberty Sunday June 7 and for Christian Citizenship Sunday June 28. It will extend throughout the summer, including Day of Prayer for World Peace August 2, and into the fall general election Nov. 3.

"Churches have every right to encourage their members to be involved in the political process," said Richard D. Land, CLC executive director. "One way we can do this is by starting a campaign to register voters and then encouraging them to vote."

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The campaign includes mailing the agency's 1992 Citizen Christian Awareness Guide to the 38,000 SBC churches throughout the country and to convention leaders. The guide includes an article by CLC general counsel Michael K. Whitehead about legal rights of churches to conduct voter registration campaigns.

"Church leaders should not tell people for whom to vote but churches have every right -- even the responsibility -- to exhort every member of voting age, as an act of discipleship, to vote in every election," Whitehead said. "There is no 'violation of church-state separation' and no risk to your tax exemption in urging and helping members to be able to say, 'I pray -- and I vote.'"

The CLC has also produced a new Citizen Christian Awareness Campaign Manual detailing how local churches can organize voter registration campaigns.

The manual was produced in what Land described as "unprecedented cooperation that has developed over the past few years between the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and the CLC." The CLC's manual is a Southern Baptist adaptation of the NAE's voter registration campaign manual.

The manual begins with these words: "The increasing secularization of our culture makes it imperative that citizen Christians exert their influence on American public life. Increasingly, government is used to support values which are hostile to some Christian beliefs. We Christians too often stay out of American public life, rather than gratefully participating in representative self-government."

The campaign seeks to bring the influence of citizen Christians to bear on American public policy in defense of the church, moral values and religious liberty, the manual says. It seeks to do this in two ways: increased prayer and increased voter participation.

The manual says Christians "have the same civic rights as all other citizens and every reason in this increasingly secular age to claim and practice them." It also says, "The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission's Citizen Christian Awareness Campaign seeks to get Southern Baptists praying more for government leaders and more for crucial cultural issues which affect the church's mission."

"In addition to these public concerns, we have added another prayer objective -- national revival," the manual says. "The oft-cited promise of God to heal the land of His people (2 Chronicles 7:14) is based on the willingness of Christians to 'humble themselves and pray.' The need for another Great Awakening in America is self-evident; fervent, faithful prayer for it is the prerequisite. We need something greater than the revival at Nineveh for the United States of America."

"I believe the Citizen Christian Awareness Campaign has the potential," Land said, "to galvanize Southern Baptists and other evangelicals in a way that will bring powerful revival and reform to our nation."

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BWA addresses property threat  
to Baptist church in Russia

By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press  
5/29/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptists in St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad) who have completed a first phase of reconstruction of their Temple of the Gospel Baptist Church now fear they could lose the building originally owned by a branch of the Orthodox Church known as "Old Believers."

The building was abandoned by the government in 1930 because it was already in a bad state of repair. The Baptist community under the leadership of pastor Sergei Nikolaev saw its promise and gained government permission to obtain the building and renovate it. "When we convened a press conference to announce what we intended to make out of the old building, the journalists laughed," Nikolaev recounted.

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Now the Orthodox want the church building back, a sign of growing tensions between the Orthodox Church and Baptists.

Numerous Baptist volunteers from the United States and other countries helped St. Petersburg Baptists tackle the renovations. More than 1,700 people, including some 40 foreign guests from 10 countries, participated in services to celebrate the renovations in January.

In response to news about the church, the Baptist World Alliance has appealed to the mayor of St. Petersburg, Anatoly Sobchak, to do all in his power to assure Baptists their freedoms will be defended and their building will not be taken back.

In a letter to Sobchak, Denton Lotz, BWA general secretary, appealed to Sobchak on the grounds of religious freedom and justice. Lotz told the mayor that since the 16th century Baptists had "suffered from oppressive state churches that have unjustly used religion to force people in a certain mindset."

"As Baptists we have fought and died for religious freedom," Lotz said. "We have always defended religious freedom and are opposed to any type of state church mentality which demands adherence to state religion. We believe that freedom is best protected when it is given to everyone."

On the ground of justice, Lotz said "... justice would also demand that a building which was given to the Baptists in great disrepair ... should not suddenly be taken away from them after it has been renovated."

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Prayer meeting included  
in Crossover Indianapolis

Baptist Press  
5/29/92

ATLANTA (BP)--An evening of prayer will be added to this year's evangelistic activities before the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Indianapolis.

The prayer time will be Monday, June 8, in the ballroom of the Hyatt Regency Hotel, said Darrell Robinson, Home Mission Board vice president for evangelism. It will begin after the final session of the pastors' conference.

The meeting will focus on spiritual needs volunteers discovered as they participated in Crossover Indianapolis, an evangelistic endeavor including street witnessing, block parties, a Saturday night rally and door-to-door surveys.

People attending a school of evangelism and church growth in Las Vegas in May presented the gospel 52 times while conducting similar door-to-door surveys. They led 20 people to make professions of faith and discovered 94 prospects for local churches.

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Korean Baptists dedicate  
seminary's new campus

By Dara Wakefield

Baptist Press  
5/29/92

TAEJON, South Korea (BP)--The Korea Baptist Theological Seminary dedicated a new 55-acre campus May 26 on the outskirts of Taejon.

The new campus for the largest Baptist seminary outside the United States provides a student center, dormitories, athletic field, classrooms, offices and a library.

The seminary's first class of 49 students met in an old building in 1954, as Taejon began to rebuild after the Korean War. Today it has nearly 1,500 students and 1,800 graduates. It awards diplomas, bachelor's and master's degrees and doctorates in theology, religious education and church music.

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Park Seh Jik, chairman of the 1988 Seoul Olympic organizing committee, commended the seminary during the dedication ceremony for its role in training men and women for ministry. The prominent layman said Baptists are now the fourth-largest Christian denomination in South Korea.

"We have not yet received the gold medal," Park said. "But we're still trying."

The first seminary president, Southern Baptist missionary John Abernathy, was followed by missionaries Ted Dowell and Al Gammage. The first Korean president, Chong Chin Hwang, was named in 1977. Nine years ago Hu Xin, the current president, took office and today oversees a staff of 80.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board provided initial funding and faculty. Lottie Moon Christmas Offering funds purchased a 15-acre campus in 1967. In 1973 the Korean government recognized the seminary as an institution of higher learning, upgrading it from Bible school status.

Eighty-five percent of the school's operating budget now originates in South Korea. The seminary plans to raise its total financial support among Koreans by the year 2000.