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Missionaries gain legal
status to operate in Russia

Baptist Press
4/12/93

MOSCOW (BP)--The Russian government has granted Southern Baptists the legal right to operate in Russia as a nonprofit religious organization.

The new status clears the way for missionaries to buy and sell property, hire people and bring whatever they need into the country.

It was approved just weeks after 20 Southern Baptist missionaries assigned to republics of the former Soviet Union met for the first time and formed the Commonwealth of Independent States Mission (organization of missionaries).

At that two-day meeting in Moscow, missionaries elected Norman Lytle of Gadsden, Ala., as their coordinator. Until last fall Lytle directed the Baptist conference center in Israel. He began his missionary career in Israel with his wife, the former Martha Yocum of Louisville, Ky., in 1964.

Twelve Southern Baptist missionary families are assigned to the Commonwealth of Independent States now, including seven in Moscow. Others are in Belarus and the Ukraine. Still others will transfer into Latvia, Estonia and Siberia within months. Southern Baptists have built up personnel in the region since the Soviet Union broke up in 1991.

More than 90 other Southern Baptist workers who practice professional skills throughout the Commonwealth of Independent States are not connected with the new mission.

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(BP) map mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Map stands alone without cutline.

**Baptist pastor at forefront
of Los Angeles peace effort**

By Mark A. Wyatt

LOS ANGELES (BP)--As jurors in the Los Angeles taped beating trial prepared to consider evidence and render a verdict in the case of four police officers accused of violating the civil rights of Rodney King, a Southern Baptist pastor was among those leading efforts to head off possible civil unrest.

Lonnie Dawson, pastor of New Mt. Calvary Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles, joined other ministers in announcing a publicity campaign urging residents and businesses from Long Beach to south-central Los Angeles to "Keep It Good In The Hood."

"We are trying to develop a mind-set that we will not, should not, cannot destroy our city again," Dawson told a news conference March 30.

Dawson is president of the Southern Area Clergy Council whose leaders detailed plans to help curb possible flare-ups like those which resulted in scores of deaths and massive destruction after the first King trial nearly a year ago.

Unlike some in the community, the ministers do not expect violence to result from the second trial involving the four police officers or from the trial of four men accused of beating truck driver Reginald Denney during the 1992 riots. Still, they are working hard to make sure the community remains calm no matter what verdicts are returned.

The ministers group plan called for distributing a half million fliers printed in English, Spanish and Samoan. The handbill lists several damaging effects of violence: It destroys a family's future; demeans the local economy; divides the community; decreases property values; increases insurance costs; costs lives and jobs; interferes with education; destroys spirituality.

The efforts to head off violence have been covered on several Los Angeles television stations as well as the CBS Evening News and CNN.

"This has been a fantastic movement," Dawson told The California Southern Baptist April 8. He credited the California Southern Baptist Convention Missions Ministries Department with helping fund the printing of the fliers.

In addition to the publicity blitz, Dawson helped lead a peace march and rally Apr. 10. The march route along Compton Boulevard called for two groups of participants to converge on Martin Luther King Plaza.

In the advisory Dawson said the coalition designed the event "to continue being proactive in getting out a positive message to the community." The project was to be co-sponsored by the SACC, Baptist Ministers Conference of Compton, Compton Police Clergy and the City of Compton, he added.

Dawson told the Los Angeles Times he believes "we can head off (riots) or at least minimize participation."

"You have to believe your effort will have some effect," Dawson said.

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**Mohler fields students' questions
during visit to Southern Seminary** By Pat Cole

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Questions about the role of women in ministry dominated the first meeting between Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's president-elect and students.

R. Albert Mohler Jr., who will assume the presidency of Southern Baptists' oldest institution Aug. 1, reiterated his personal opposition to women serving as pastors of churches during a question-and-answer forum April 8 with more than 300 students. Mohler said, however, he believes other ministry positions could be filled by women. He also emphasized all degree programs of the seminary will be open to female students and that faculty members commit no "theological offense" if their views on that issue differ from the president's.

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The student forum was part of a four-day visit by Mohler to the Louisville, Ky., campus which included a dinner meeting with the faculty and administrative staff plus individual meetings with the vice presidents and deans.

Mohler told students he found it impossible for him to "square the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry" with his interpretation of the New Testament.

That interpretation of Scripture was challenged by Dwayne Merritt, a student from Ripley, W.Va. "Either you have picked some Scripture to give more credence than others or you are allowing your political stance to give more credence to your answer than Scripture," he said.

"I would reject the notion that the position on women that I articulate is wanting for Scriptural support," countered Mohler, adding that he was "driven" to his position by Scripture. "In terms of my own internal conflict on the issue, the egalitarian impulse found within the larger society and within the church would drive one as much as possible to the other conclusion."

Cathy Anderson of Charlotte, N.C., prefaced her question by saying she came to Southern upon the advice of mentors who said the school would affirm women in ministry. She asked if she could count on him as president to support her if she sensed a call to the pastorate.

"I want to support our students who are here insofar as they are here in answer to God's calling for training for ministry in the churches," Mohler replied. "In terms of supporting an individual call to the pastoral ministry, that is something that you should not look to a seminary president for support."

The seminary supports its students best by "training them well and offering them the highest quality of education we can offer," he said.

Terri Farless of Ft. Valley, Ga., told Mohler she had been called to be a pastor. "We don't need anything else from a denomination that has wounded and hurt us, but especially from an institution that has not affirmed us in a lot of ways," she said. "By God, we are called, too."

Greg Pope of Douglasville, Ga., took issue with a statement that Mohler made regarding Southern's role within the Southern Baptist Convention. "I want a Southern Seminary that is not just part of the Southern Baptist Convention but that leads the Southern Baptist Convention," Mohler said.

Instead of the seminary leading the convention, Pope suggested that on the women's issue the seminary would be following rather than leading the convention.

"Southern Seminary needs to take a leadership posture in the denomination," Mohler maintained. Yet he said he does not "trust institutions that set themselves up to be prophetic." A prophetic stance is something that is recognized outside an institution, he added.

David Allred of Oliver Springs, Tenn., told the next president he could accept him as "an emissary of the convention" but could not yet accept him as an "ambassador of God." Allred said he was "hurt and angry" about the direction Mohler could take the seminary. Yet he said he hoped everyone on campus could experience reconciliation, and he asked Mohler if he would work for that.

"I am committed to reconciliation," Mohler said, "and am open to hear and respond."

In response to a question about professors who might not conform to his interpretation of the Abstract of Principles, the seminary's confessional document, Mohler said: "I want to interpret it (the abstract) just as it was intended by its authors, the committee that pulled it together. When it comes right down to it, it is the president's responsibility to interpret the document and do so as forthrightly as possible, as honestly as possible, as fairly as possible and take whatever actions and recommendations that are appropriate given that document, its history and its function as a contractual document of this institution."

During his dinner meeting with faculty and staff, Mohler expressed his openness to hearing input from the seminary's professors and administrators. He said he will begin meeting individually with each faculty and staff member after he assumes full-time duties as president-elect May 1.

"This is a great ship, Southern Seminary, a majestic vessel," Mohler told the faculty and staff. "It's building up steam for the future. The gangway is clear. The steps are down. The doors are open. And I pray and invite all who can and who will to come with us. All who wish to work for the best of this institution come with us."

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Native American Baptists launch
missions to Latin American tribes

Baptist Press
4/12/93

By Mary E. Speidel

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Russell Begaye grew up on reservations in New Mexico and Arizona as the son of a Navajo medicine man.

Begaye believes this background uniquely equips him and fellow Native American Christians to share their faith with other Indian groups overseas.

"We have similar cultures, language structures and spiritual, social and economic struggles," said Begaye, who directs Southern Baptist work among Native Americans in the United States and Canada for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta.

Begaye, who is based in Arlington, Texas, recently visited the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Va., to firm up plans to involve Native American Southern Baptists as volunteers among indigenous people groups in Latin America. He was accompanied by Bill Barnett, pastor of Indian Nations Baptist Church in Seminole, Okla. They represented the Native American Southern Baptist Fellowship, which includes about 520 churches.

The group already has sent volunteers to assist career missionaries working among the K'ekchi' people in Guatemala. Three Southern Baptist home missionaries -- all Native Americans -- spent a week in February helping to lead evangelistic services at a K'ekchi' Baptist church in Pocola. They are Jimmy Anderson and Alpha and Ron Goombi, who work among Native Americans in Oklahoma and Nebraska, respectively.

Future projects in leadership training and evangelism are planned in June among the Mam people in Guatemala, the Miskito and Garifuna in Honduras and the Kuna in Panama. A group of Native American Baptist women also will attend the Honduran Baptist Woman's Missionary Union annual congress in October.

Leaders from the Native American fellowship approached board officials last year about getting involved in volunteer missions among indigenous people groups, said James Cecil, an associate in the board's volunteers in missions department. Some of the group's leaders already had discovered common cultural ties with Indian groups in other parts of the world and with Latin American Indians living in the United States.

As Native Americans experience volunteer missions overseas, "it will heighten their interest in foreign missions and help them to see the need for their further involvement," Cecil predicted. "As a result, we feel several of them will make themselves available for career missions or for service through the Foreign Mission Board's International Service Corps." The service corps provides opportunities for Southern Baptists to serve in overseas assignments ranging from four months to two years.

Begaye estimates about 60 Native Americans work as Southern Baptist home missionaries. He said he knows of at least one full-blooded Native American who formerly served as a Southern Baptist foreign missionary.

The volunteer projects grew out of a trip Begaye and Anderson made to Central America last year to learn how Native American Southern Baptists could work as volunteers among Indians there. They spent time with Southern Baptist career missionaries who work among the region's indigenous people.

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Southern Baptist missionaries and national Baptists in Central America lead Baptist work in more than a fourth of more than 90 indigenous groups in the area, according to a 1990 Foreign Mission Board area report. In South America, Baptist work exists among many of the numerous Indian groups there, such as the Quechua, Guajiro, Guarani and Mapuche people.

Joe Bruce, the board's interim vice president for the Americas, said in Guatemala alone, where he is based, there are 20 different indigenous people groups. He estimates that figure exceeds 100 in Mexico. About 45 million Indians live in Latin America.

On their trip, Begaye and Anderson, a Creek Indian, discovered common cultural ties with these groups opened doors for communicating the gospel.

In Guatemala Begaye found "almost an immediate attraction, commonalty and brotherhood" with the K'ekchi', including common traditional foods, clothing, language structure, tribal worship, fears and struggles.

"Some of the words are even the same," he said of the K'ekchi' and Navajo languages. Southern Baptist missionaries have worked among the K'ekchi', descendants of the ancient Mayans, since the 1960s.

In Honduras the Native Americans visited Garifuna villages with Southern Baptist missionary Stanley Stamps, who has coordinated translation of evangelistic tracts into the Garifuna and Miskito languages. No Baptist work exists yet among the Garifuna, also known as the Black Caribs, descendants of the Caribbean's first inhabitants. Southern Baptist missionaries currently work among the Miskito people in Honduras and Nicaragua.

Begaye and Anderson were the first North American Indians many of the Garifuna and members of some other tribes had ever met. "When people learned we were Indians, they wanted to meet us. They invited us to come back. They said they wanted to hear the gospel from fellow Indians," Begaye related.

"I had the feeling I was participating in the first steps of something very exciting and promising in respect to our mission in Honduras and to the kingdom's cause," said Stamps, from Prentiss, Miss.

Stamps observed the Native Americans achieved "immediate rapport and acceptance" among the indigenous people they met and believes their future volunteer projects will bring a "new dimension" to what career missionaries already are doing. He said he also believes the experience will open up new horizons of service for Native American Southern Baptists and show Hondurans "the makeup of Southern Baptists is rather heterogeneous."

Begaye added Native American Southern Baptists' beliefs about the Bible provide an important point of connection in evangelizing fellow Indians, both at home and abroad.

"We view the Bible as the authority," he said. "Indians see medicine people as infallible. Their prayer sticks, rattles, drums, chants and rituals all have authority."

When Indians accept Christ, they naturally transfer that sense of authority to their new-found faith, Begaye explained. "The Bible becomes the full authority. God is the only God. Jesus is the only way to salvation."

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Lou Ann Cave contributed to this story. (BP) photos (one horizontal and one vertical) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Cutlines available on SBCNet Newsroom.

North Korea: hermit kingdom
or next open door for gospel? By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
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SEOUL, South Korea (BP)--Korea once was the reclusive "Hermit Kingdom" of the East -- closed to the outside world and closed to the Christian gospel.

North Korea still is, but maybe not for long.

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The communist north remains hermetically sealed off to most outsiders. And it definitely has a king: the "Great Leader" Kim Il Sung, absolute ruler for more than four decades. It even has a crown prince -- Kim's son, Kim Jong Il. The "Dear Leader" already has assumed much of his elderly father's powers in the first dynastic succession in a communist state.

While the rest of the communist world has begun opening to the world, North Korea seems frozen in time. Despite limited attempts to attract more investment and tourism from non-communist countries, the government reportedly fears too much foreign influence will undermine its rigid control of society.

Meanwhile South Korea races ahead economically, struggles toward full democracy and -- most significant for the church -- solidifies its status as the Asian powerhouse of Christianity.

What is now North Korea was once the heart of Korean Christianity. But Christianity was suppressed in the north after Korea was divided and communists took over following World War II. Many believers fled south, died under persecution or were killed during the Korean War.

Russia has finally reopened its doors to the gospel, at least for the moment. China is still firmly communist, but officially admits -- and more or less allows -- tens of millions of Christian believers to worship. Albania, once the self-proclaimed "world's first atheist state," is witnessing the rebirth of a vital church.

In North Korea, by contrast, a grand total of three church buildings can be found -- two Protestant and one Catholic, all in the capital of Pyongyang. That's three more than existed before 1988.

But times are changing too fast for North Korea to ignore. Its "juche" philosophy, also known as "Kimilsungism," calls for absolute self-reliance. Yet it must increase international ties to pay off a large foreign debt and survive economically. Communism has failed politically or economically almost everywhere else, and even North Korea's closest ally -- China -- is pressing it to open up.

"The economy of North Korea has shrunk over 20 percent in the last two years," said a close observer. "Exports have dropped off radically with the fall of communism in the Soviet Union. Even China refuses to sell oil and other raw materials to North Korea without payment in hard currency."

How to generate more hard currency? Foreign tourism and investment. But tourism poses a dilemma. "To permit tourism is to permit the outside influence so undesirable to the communist government," explained the observer, who asked not to be identified. "To restrict tourism is to bar the entrance of hard currency that is so needed for the continuing survival of the communist regime."

One foreign visitor to North Korea last year was Billy Graham, who dined with Kim Il Sung himself and spoke to scholars and official Christian leaders. Some say the visit, like Graham's trips to Moscow before the fall of communism there, was stage-managed by the government for public relations advantage abroad and minimal impact at home.

Still, the Graham visit was "very significant," insisted missions researcher David Barrett. "You can't apply normal criteria of judgment to things like that. How many other people would have been able to do it, to start with? The fact he was able to do it and others could not means that it's a significant step forward. They went out of their way to receive him, which is really quite extraordinary."

Added the unnamed observer: "When the movement of a glacier is measured in millimeters, any movement or change must be considered significant."

Also, even the North Korean government and the officially recognized Christian association admit religious activity goes on outside the church buildings in Pyongyang. House churches, both recognized and unrecognized, meet around the country.

"Information keeps coming through that house churches are multiplying, the same as in China 20 years ago, when nobody thought there would be this enormous surge," Barrett said. "It's a development on both sides of the (Chinese) border with North Korea."

