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September 2, 1993

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**Wir service changes story
about Russian law action**

By Marty Croll

**Baptist Press
9/2/93**

MOSCOW (BP)--One of the world's farthest-reaching news services, which reported Aug. 27 that Russian President Boris Yeltsin had defeated Parliament in a face-off on religious restrictions, reversed its story Sept. 1.

The Associated Press told Baptist Press its Moscow bureau has determined the controversial new Russian law on religion "still contains" the restrictions. The original AP story, which went to thousands of news outlets worldwide, had declared Parliament removed the restrictions in response to an outcry from world religious and political leaders.

However, the wire service buried its latest interpretation of the law eight paragraphs into a story about Pope John Paul II's visit to the Baltic region, released for use by morning newspapers Sept. 2.

Human rights experts seemed to agree the Associated Press fell victim to the same disinformation campaign that has characterized passage of the law twice in Parliament.

The law places restrictions on foreign missionary activity and evangelism by Russians not associated with the Russian Orthodox Church. It reverses the freedom of religion act Parliament passed in 1990, which opened the way for preaching all kinds of doctrine on Russian soil. Yeltsin's legal advisers in the Kremlin reportedly could not immediately determine whether he would be able to veto the revised law.

Since April, evangelicals have accused communist- and Orthodox-controlled media outlets in Russia of putting a misleading spin on news stories about the law. One widely spread falsehood: that Russian Baptist leader Vasily Logvenenko supported the law, when in fact he campaigned against it.

Russian lawmakers talked as if they were supporting Yeltsin in his cries for democracy and religious freedom while they passed the restrictive amendments "with shameful enthusiasm," charged Parliament member Gleb Yakunin.

Yakunin is an Orthodox priest who has fought efforts in Parliament to bolster the Orthodox position and restrict other religions.

EDITORS' NOTE: Please substitute the following story for (BP) story titled "Hurricane Emily brushes N.C. coast; disaster units 'ready' but not called," dated 9/1/93.

Hurricane Emily brushes N.C.;
N.C. disaster unit called in

By Steve Barber

Baptist Press
9/2/93

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptist disaster relief units from 11 state conventions were poised to provide assistance this week if Hurricane Emily came ashore, but only one unit was called to "move in" after the storm brushed by North Carolina's Outer Banks and headed back out to sea.

One of North Carolina Baptists' two units began feeding operations at Buckston, N.C., Sept. 2, serving some 1,400 meals that morning to hurricane victims and relief workers.

The other units were "prepared to go, just in case, but we're thankful the heavenly father pretty much spared us this time," said Douglas Beggs, vice president of program services for the Brotherhood Commission, which coordinates multi-state disaster response for Southern Baptists.

Beggs said an early "flyover" assessment the morning of Sept. 1 did not show extensive damage along the North Carolina coast.

In addition to the N.C. unit, a unit from Ohio was on standby in Raleigh as Emily approached. But the Ohio unit was released to go home Sept. 1 as on-site coordinators decided the North Carolinians could handle any needs resulting from the storm, including mass feeding. Early indications are that other feeding units will not be needed.

According to North Carolina Brotherhood officials, cleanup crews of North Carolinians will be organized.

Other state disaster feeding units ready to go but not called upon were those from Alabama, Georgia, Maryland, South Carolina and Virginia. Units from Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee were to provide further back-up, if needed.

The Brotherhood Commission's primary Southern Baptist program assignment is missions education for men and boys. Disaster relief is an outgrowth of the agency's emphasis on mission action."

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CLARIFICATION: In (BP) story titled "Ed Young facing tax bill in property record mixup," dated 9/1/93, please change the words "back taxes" in the first paragraph to "previously unassessed taxes."

Thanks,
Baptist Press

Baptist Book Stores, Olan Mills
announce directory partnership By Michael Tutterow

Baptist Press
9/2/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Baptist Book Stores and Olan Mills, Inc., have announced a partnership for providing church directories, effective immediately, according to Charles A. Wilson, vice president for trade and retail markets at the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Mark King, director of the retail division's direct marketing department, said he believes the merger of Baptist Book Store Directory Service with Olan Mills should bolster Southern Baptists' confidence in the service.

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King said Olan Mills currently provides directory service to more than 1.3 million families in more than 10,000 churches each year.

"The proven leadership of Olan Mills in the pictorial directory industry guarantees Baptists not only a superior product, but also quality customer service," he said.

He added a recent BSSB survey indicated Olan Mills is highest in customer satisfaction among Southern Baptists.

Red Lanford, national director of marketing with Olan Mills' church directory division, pledged Olan Mills' 65 years of photography experience to produce "the highest quality church directory, as well as the highest quality of individual and family portraiture" for Southern Baptists.

Lanford said "a majority of our employees are Southern Baptists who understand the needs of local Baptist churches. This partnership has taken seriously churches' concerns and has designed our program to guarantee the finest directory Southern Baptist churches have ever had."

Olan Mills uses "cutting-edge technology" to ensure timely return of directories to churches, he said. Photo sessions are conducted with Video Image Proofing (VIP), which allows persons to view and select directory portraits immediately after the photography session.

Olan Mills can process a directory within 45 working days of receiving a church's directory materials. Lanford said average turn-around time for producing church directories in 1993 has been 33 days.

Baptist Book Store Directory Service and Olan Mills may be contacted by calling 1-800-845-1157.

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Michael Tutterow is a pastor and free-lance writer in Mars Hill, N.C.

Tribe's first mission trip
gave boost to other Indians

By Connie Davis

Baptist Press
9/2/93

RIPLEY, Tenn. (BP)--When Lumbee Indians from North Carolina decided to do their first missions work away from their home, they chose to work with other Indians -- Choctaw Indians in Ripley, Tenn. The outcome was a close kinship probably understood only by Native Americans.

That kinship wasn't assured. Members of the two tribes are certainly different. The Lumbees, the largest tribe east of the Mississippi River, live among 40,000 other Lumbees near the southeast coast of North Carolina. Only about 125 Choctaws live in Lauderdale County in west Tennessee.

Choctaw Indians were moved by the American government to reservations. One forced migration was along the Trail of Tears, which crossed Tennessee. In contrast, Lumbee Indians never lived on reservations.

Lumbees don't have a language other than English and their heritage is Christian, explained Bruce Swett, a Lumbee and pastor of Berea Baptist Church in Pembroke, N.C. Choctaws have a native language and religion.

Despite differences, the 17-member team from North Carolina found a lot in common with the Choctaws of First Indian Baptist Church of Ripley during the week they spent together in August.

Linda Powers, a member of Tennessee church, enjoyed the Lumbee team because many of the members were educators. Linda and her husband, Mike Powers, bivocational pastor of the church, also are educators.

The mission team conducted Vacation Bible School and home visitation. The effort focused on about 12 families, who live in the Halls area, said local church member Juanita Vaughn. Halls is about 10 miles from Ripley and the church. Although 10 miles is a short distance, explained Linda Powers, it isn't to someone who doesn't have transportation.

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The work was successful, reported Vaughn, because the shared culture, although limited, provided an entree into homes. Choctaws, like herself, are hesitant around people they don't know, she explained. She said she couldn't really explain the openness of the Choctaws to the Lumbees in any other way. Those visits resulted in a high attendance of 36 at VBS, she added.

The members of the two tribes learned about the other. Eddie Sampson, 17, a Lumbee, said both tribes have a lot of pride and hold pow wows. Tammy Jackson, 15, a Lumbee, noted the two tribes play different games, which they shared during the week.

The team thanked six churches in Big Hatchie Baptist Association which fed them. That hospitality made the trip much less expensive than planned, Swett said.

The experience was so good, reported the North Carolina team, that their first missions venture will not be their last.

"It was Indians identifying with Indians," Swett said. "We had something in common."

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**Hundreds make decisions
at student conferences**

By Chip Alford

**Baptist Press
9/2/93**

NASHVILLE (BP)--A total of 168 students made commitments to missions or full-time Christian ministry, 36 rededicated their lives to Christ and eight made public professions of faith during Aug. 13-20 student conferences at Ridgecrest (N.C.) and Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist conference centers.

"Year after year we see a large number of students make commitments to missions and full-time Christian service at Glorieta and Ridgecrest," said Charles H. Johnson, director of national student ministry at the Baptist Sunday School Board which sponsored the conferences.

"Today there are missionaries around the world who made their decisions for missions at these annual conferences."

Many students also experience "a new calling to share their faith" as a result of attending the Southern Baptist student conferences, Johnson said. Several students at this year's conference, for example, were led to Christ by other students.

One of the collegiate witnesses was Michelle Williams, a freshman at Hillsboro Community College in Tampa, Fla. She led a friend to Christ Aug. 19 after the final worship service at Ridgecrest.

"She had a lot of questions about Christianity and she was holding back a little because she was afraid how her parents would react," Williams recounted. "But she knew that something was missing in her life. I told her that I knew what was missing -- she had never asked Jesus Christ into her heart.

"I prayed with her and she accepted Christ. I've witnessed before, but it was just planting seeds. I'd never prayed (the prayer of salvation) with anyone until that night. It was such a great experience. It has really challenged me to be more open in sharing my faith."

More than 2,300 students attended this year's student conference at Glorieta and 980 attended the Ridgecrest meeting.

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**Operation Lydia not
just for women anymore**

By David Winfrey

**Baptist Press
9/2/93**

DETROIT (BP)--Doc Lindsey wants people to know that Operation Lydia isn't just for women anymore.

More than a year after it began under joint sponsorship of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the Woman's Missionary Union, some still think the church-starting strategy is exclusively a female endeavor, says Lindsey, a home missionary.

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"It started out as a women's thing but it immediately changed," says Lindsey, director of missions for the Greater Detroit Baptist Association. "This is the essence of church planting."

Operation Lydia offers a procedure for multiple church starts through laity-led home Bible studies. A lot of attention has focused on women organizing the Bible studies, but Lindsey says it works with men or women.

He says the process is receiving attention from Baptists and other Christians worldwide as an effective church starting plan. Saturated by a 14-day prayer strategy, Lydia calls for Bible studies in the homes of unbelievers with the hosts' friends and neighbors.

"This is what's been going on for 2000 years," Lindsey says. "If a guy had a Ph.D. in church planting, this is still what he would be doing."

Floyd Tidsworth, director of the Home Mission Board's new church extension division, praises the program's ability to penetrate communities. "It really takes the indigenous approach for starting new congregations."

Like its namesake, Operation Lydia's principles date back to the New Testament church, Lindsey claims. "It's so simple that even clergy can understand it," he jokes. "It's a quick strategy, but it's not lightweight."

As director of missions in an urban association, Lindsey touts Lydia as ideal for communities where property values prohibit land purchases for building a traditional sanctuary. The plan also is effective in rural settings to reach people who don't attend church, he says.

Christians who aren't preoccupied with a building can place more emphasis on reaching people, says Lindsey, pointing to the New Testament church's growth without "budgets, buildings, bookstores and bishops."

"They didn't have any of those Bs for years and the church grew faster than ever," he says. "It looks like the more we have the slower it gets."

Instead, he says, Christians should rely on God to supply the resources for his work, Lindsey says. "We believe the resources are in the harvest. Whatever you need is there now."

Since Lydia's development, Lindsey has held more than 60 training sessions, including those with missionaries to 17 countries and Baptist workers in about 10 states outside Michigan. Lindsey says he gets about 10 calls a day from people interested in the concept.

"This really seems to be a movement of God," he says. "We're just trying to share what we have and give it away."

In Michigan alone, more than 20 Bible studies have been formed, and a church recently constituted that began as a Lydia effort, Lindsey says.

"We think there are hundreds of them (nationwide), but we don't know for sure," he says. "We just stand amazed because of what's happening."

More information about Project Lydia is available from the Greater Detroit Baptist Association at (313) 961-7780.

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'U-John' sues 36 religious
bodies for \$10 trillion

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
9/2/93

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptists might have to start passing the offering plate twice each Sunday following the filing of a \$10 trillion lawsuit alleging fraud and breach of duty against 36 Christian, Jewish and other religious bodies.

"This is an off-the-wall lawsuit," says James Guenther, legal counsel for the convention since 1966. "We have a lot of lawsuits that have no merit, but we've never had one that made as little sense as this one."

The civil action, filed in April at the U.S. District Court in Atlanta, alleges eight infractions, including fraud, blasphemy, "global disruption of peace" and "defamation of the divine character."

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"I don't think anybody in the Southern Baptist Convention is taking it seriously," Guenther says. "It's just regrettable that in our system the convention has to go the expense of responding to it."

In addition to the Southern Baptists, defendants include the Diocese for the Armenian Church of America, the United Methodist Church and the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.

According to the lawsuit, the plaintiff "U-John, king-priest of the Universal Sovereign," contends to represent all who profess a Bible-based religious affiliation. On behalf of this worldwide plaintiff, U-John claims:

-- For more than a century, the defendants have enticed the plaintiff to actions against its best interest through fraudulent claims to be God's representatives.

-- The defendants failed to provide spiritual guidance leading to uplifting the plaintiff "and its world-wide associates" from sin, decadence and spiritual malnutrition.

-- Because of the "malicious, wrongful, greed-based fraud and breach of duty" by the defendants, the plaintiff has been forced to live under the constant threat of nuclear war and annihilation -- "a most hideous form of mental cruelty."

-- The plaintiff also claims he has suffered injuries including warring conflict and "inadvertent neglect of personal, family and professional development and subsequent loss of income."

In asking for \$10 trillion (that's a 1 followed by 13 zeros), U-John seeks general and punitive damages as well as past, present and future lost earnings.

Ironically, U-John claims to represent the members of the very bodies being sued, Guenther points out. "It's a pretty goofy concept."

The lawsuit lists a Decatur address for the "Royal Embassy of U-John," but attempts to contact U-John were unsuccessful.

The matter is currently handled by an Atlanta law firm hired by the convention's insurance company, Guenther says.

"It should be dismissed without much of any expense suffered by the Southern Baptist Convention," he says. "If we don't get it dismissed in these early stages, then that will be another story."

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**Ministers need total commitment,
Pollard tells seminary students**

By Susan Simko

**Baptist Press
9/2/93**

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Ministers must practice total commitment to Christ, Frank Pollard, pastor of First Baptist Church in Jackson, Miss., told students and faculty during a chapel service Sept. 1 at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

"Have you bought what you're selling?" Pollard asked. "To have a Christ-less preacher in a pulpit is indeed a tragedy. It's like an armless man trying to lead his baseball team as a pitcher to the World Series."

Crippled preachers stifle their congregations and eventually lose their pulpits, according to Pollard, former president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in California and one of Southern Baptists' most popular preachers.

"I talked with some of these men after their moral bankruptcy, and their falls had taken everything away from them," Pollard said. "They sadly said, 'I neglected my walk with the Lord. I learned to go everywhere making speeches about God and not talk to God.'"

Pollard also told students not to preach until they were sure God had called them to the task.

"My advice to everyone is to understand that the call of God is not some wonderful gift. The call of God is a compulsion. It is a desire. It is a lifestyle. It is the knowledge that this is the only thing you can really do with your life if your life is to be lived well."

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Living out the call means leading churches to put their relationships with Jesus above everything, including growth, he said.

"Somehow we need to come back to the fact that growing churches -- that is, in numbers and dollars -- is a byproduct. It is never the real goal of a body of the Lord Jesus Christ," Pollard said. "We need to be people who understand that we are here to share a message that the world must know or die."

Pollard cautioned ministers not to neglect their congregations by itching to preach in "more glorious places."

"They (ministers) abuse the people they serve by always looking somewhere down the road, looking for a better place, looking for something else to do," he said. "Be careful that you understand that your career is in God's hands."

"I hope you determine real quickly that your's is the kind of life in which you have been called of God and you will be placed by God and you will be led by God and you will leave that in his hands," Pollard said.

"One of the lamentable things in this land today," he said, "is to see churches filled with empty people where the commitment to Christ is not real or genuine, but an even greater tragedy than that is to see a place of leadership for those who sing and those who teach and those who counsel and those who preach who are themselves not filled with the kind of love and total commitment to the Lord Christ that the world must see and know."

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Latvian pastor launching
ministry to Russian Jews

By James Dotson

Baptist Press
9/2/93

ATLANTA (BP)--Victor Latsis understands the threat of religious persecution. As a former church planter and evangelist in his native Latvia, the Baptist pastor knows what it means to be constantly under the threat of imprisonment. He knows what it's like to be questioned for 12 hours by the KGB just for writing former Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev a critical letter.

Today, however, he has other concerns. After finally gaining immigration rights four years ago, Latsis is now intent on building a ministry to Russian-speaking Jews at Clairmont Baptist Church in Atlanta.

There are more than 2,000 people fitting that description in the area surrounding the church and more than 50,000 in the Atlanta metropolitan area, according to Latsis and Art Ballard, minister of evangelism and music at Clairmont. And through a combination of circumstances both men say could only have been God-ordained, Latsis and the church were drawn together for what could be the first Russian-speaking mission work among Georgia Baptists.

An engineer by trade, Latsis was a pastor by calling in his native country. From 1971, when a Christian friend encouraged him to leave the corruption of officially sanctioned churches, he worked with the underground church in Latvia. He started about 10 churches, he said, while barely making enough to feed his family. As an underground pastor, he was given a secular job below his abilities, he said.

One of the first instances of persecution was the letter to Brezhnev in 1979. From that point on, he said, the KGB watched him. Once they threatened him with imprisonment in Siberia for baptizing juveniles without the KGB's permission, but none of the children's parents would sign documents saying they had been forced.

The real concerns came for Latsis in 1987 while on a trip to meet with Billy Graham with other church leaders from his area. For some unknown reason, the car he was supposed to have been riding in veered into oncoming traffic. Three of the five occupants died. Two other suspicious car accidents within two years convinced him he needed to leave.

An earlier attempt to emigrate had been met by threats of confiscating his property and not allowing his family to go with him. In 1989, however, a Jewish friend invited him to Israel.

"In my spirit I am a Jew, because I love these people and all my friends were Jewish," he said. "If we consider by mother, I am a Jew. By father, I am Latvian."

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Because they were Christians, the move to Israel did not work out. But after a year in Rome, Latsis and his family were given an opportunity to come to Atlanta. The Christian Council of Metropolitan Atlanta had arranged for a family to sponsor them until they could make it on their own.

Since then, Latsis made a living primarily by doing auto mechanic work, but his calling was still to Christian ministry. He served brief periods as pastor to Ukrainian and Latvian groups but he always felt something was not right.

"They were looking for real Russian, but I'm not real Russian. I am Latvian," he said of the other groups he led. "I always felt in my heart, this is not exactly (the) ministry for me."

In the meantime, Ballard met a Russian Jewish couple last year for whom the church was able to provide assistance, and the couple eventually made a profession of faith in Christ. Ballard met Latsis when he began looking for an interpreter who could make sure the couple understood their decision.

Within about two months, they were working to establish a ministry, surveying the community to determine interest in forming a Bible study group.

At this point, Latsis is meeting with a small group of Russian Jews at Clairmont, teaching the basics of how the New Testament relates to the Old Testament teachings with which they already are familiar. Efforts also recently began to begin English-speaking classes in two high-rise apartment buildings that could serve as further opportunities for witness.

With the Jewish immigrants, Latsis said, he must start with the basics while being careful not to offend. Although they are Jewish, most were not practicing their faith because of the influence of communism.

"Basically, 97 percent of the Russian-speaking Jewish people in Atlanta never have heard about God," Latsis said. "They were not interested in God in Russia, because they lived very high positions in life If you mentioned the name of God, you would be persecuted, like me.

"This work is completely different from what I had," he said. "They are so open. But if you will tell just one word wrong, it will spoil everything."

But Latsis doesn't mind that challenge. "Right now, I don't doubt this ministry is for me."

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Sunday School Board delays
fall writers conferences

Baptist Press
9/2/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Expected changes in the Baptist Sunday School Board's Sunday school curriculum for 1995-96 have prompted the agency to delay its fall writers conferences for youth and adult curriculum writers.

According to Louis Hanks, director of the youth-adult department in the board's church growth-Sunday school division, the delay is necessary because of anticipated recommendations for changes in curriculum by the board's Program-Curriculum Design Task Force. That group has been studying the board's literature and possible options for improvements since February and is expected to issue a report soon.

"One thing churches are telling us is they want relevant materials that are designed, written and produced closer to their time of actual usage. Delaying our writers conferences will allow us to accomplish this, as well as give us time to fine-tune the emerging recommendations for changes for the '95-'96 materials," Hanks said.

The BSSB will be exploring different ways of training writers, Hanks said, adding writers conferences will be rescheduled "to maximize the potential for increasing relevance and timeliness of content."

Despite the delay in the youth and adult conferences, the fall conferences for writers of children and preschool curriculum will continue as planned, according to Cos Davis, director of the preschool-children's department of the board's church growth-Sunday school division.

"At this point, we're going ahead. We'll make adjustments (in the process) as necessary," Davis said.

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