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94-3

MOSCOW -- Evangelicals wary as Russia opens new legislative session.
ATLANTA -- Declining home missions income leads to HMB hiring freeze, study.
WASHINGTON -- 'Condom campaign,' critics charge of AIDS advertising.
CALIFORNIA -- 19th Avenue Baptist Church responds to Calif. action.
CALIFORNIA -- Pastor regrets polarization from challenge of woman pastor.
LOUISIANA -- Her last call from Bosnia cut off after 3 minutes.
UKRAINE -- Ukraine Baptist leader dies from heart failure.
NASHVILLE -- Miller presented as director of new division at BSSB; photo.
ATLANTA -- Linda Johnson to lead Baptist Olympics ministry.
ATLANTA -- Chaplain's case still pending.
ALABAMA -- Women make peace with past in prison support groups.
OKLAHOMA -- His mission trip, her prayers set stage for marriage vows.

Evangelicals wary as Russia
opens new legislative session

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
1/7/94

MOSCOW (BP)--As Russia's first freely elected lawmakers take their seats in Parliament Jan. 11, evangelicals are watching warily -- unsure whether a weak democratic majority can stave off new attacks against non-Orthodox Christians and missionaries.

They fear, among other things, those elected as "democrats" could abandon the fight for religious freedom and cave in under the pressure of a resurging national pride tied to Russian Orthodoxy.

About 23 percent of Russians who voted in December's nationwide elections favored the party of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, a fascist and extreme nationalist.

That means Zhirinovskiy, who vows to isolate Russia from the West and return it to glory, will appoint 59 representatives to fill seats in the 450-member lower chamber of Parliament. An additional 11 Zhirinovskiy delegates were elected at large to the chamber in district voting.

Communists captured 65 seats in the lower house, including 32 party appointments and 33 at-large candidates.

"The elections were sort of like a cold shower for the Russian government and the West," said Mikhail Morgulis, a Ukrainian-born evangelical. Morgulis lives in the United States and has extensive contacts with evangelical leaders and government officials in republics of the former Soviet Union.

"Since reform began, this ultra-right movement was developing," he said. "At first it was underground. Now the real situation of what is going on in Russia has come to the forefront."

The pro-reform party backing President Boris Yeltsin will seat 96 delegates in the lower house -- 56 by party appointment and 40 at large. That's the most of any party but still only about a fifth of the seats. Other new delegates are independents or represent smaller parties whose alliances are yet untested.

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It's too early to know for sure, but indications are that about half the members of both houses of Parliament claim to support reform. The last Parliament started out like that, too, and ended in a hail of tank fire after trying to overthrow Yeltsin and seize power.

The new constitution ratified by voters in December provides for two houses of lawmakers. Two delegates from each Russian region were elected for the upper house, which is similar to the U.S. Senate. A law must pass both houses. A 75 percent majority is required to override a presidential veto.

Russian Orthodox leaders last year used anti-reformers in the legislature left over from Soviet days to pass a law that would have outlawed foreign missionaries and bolstered Orthodox influence in Russia.

After two presidential vetoes, that measure finally died with Yeltsin's dismissal of Parliament in September and subsequent attack on the Russian White House, where it meets.

The night before the elections, Orthodox Patriarch Alexei II appeared on television. The supreme Orthodox leader declared future delegates to Parliament, if they are truly committed to Mother Russia, will rid her soil of non-Orthodox Christian groups from the West.

Now hard-line Orthodox leaders may find a new friend in the charismatic Zhirinovskiy. The fear and hatred of foreigners he preaches, characteristic of much of Russian history, parallels their attempts to portray foreign religious influence as sinister.

Zhirinovskiy was televised just after the election visiting an Orthodox church. Ironically, as millions watched, he crossed himself in reverse order and had to be corrected during an Orthodox ritual.

Reformers have feared what they call the "red-brown axis" -- an alliance of communists and fascists -- as it has solidified in response to recent economic woes. Since real economic reform has been blocked by powerful communist holdovers at all levels of Russian government, economic chaos has resulted. It has sparked rampant inflation, unemployment and corruption.

Zhirinovskiy and other leaders who hate or fear foreign influences, however, pin all the blame on the West, and call for banning Westerners -- and their religion -- from Russian soil.

The defunct law to ban missionaries gained its momentum partially because of this backlash against the West, said Norm Lytle, who leads the organization of 46 Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board missionaries in the former Soviet Union.

"When I was in the United States in October and people asked me how strong the communist influence was here, I told them the real concern is this resurgent ultra-nationalism," Lytle told Baptist Press in a telephone interview from Moscow. "But I had no idea it would prove itself as strong as it did in the elections."

Evangelical leaders see Russia's brief romance with the West fading fast. Many expect Russian lawmakers to revive attempts to limit foreign missionary activity and restrict non-Orthodox worship.

"Zhirinovskiy has plans for himself and for Russia, and they don't include us," said Sharon Linzey, a college professor in Moscow working to help Russian Christian groups form networks with those in the West. "He has made some scary statements about wanting foreigners out. He's fit to order for our worst fears."

If the past is any indication, reformers might not recognize actions against non-Orthodox Christians as contradicting democracy.

"There isn't a strong appreciation of freedom being indivisible," explained Anita Deyneka, an evangelical worker in Russia since before the breakup of communism.

"I know people who are reformers and democrats but who also want a favored position for the Russian Orthodox. ... They don't see it as a contradiction."

Linzey and others believe the Parliament facing Yeltsin now could resist him even more than the last one. How he might respond to such resistance as it affects religious freedom and foreign missionaries is anyone's guess.

Baptist leader Gregori Komendant said it will be difficult for Yeltsin to pass discriminatory laws without losing credibility in the West.

"However, it is possible that if a law is passed restricting foreigners more generally, then it would be easier to pass a law relating to foreign missionaries," he cautioned. "Still, it would be contrary to the thrust of the new constitution."

Instead of enacting "such a primitive law," Yeltsin will find more subtle ways to limit the influence of Western Christians, Morgulis said. Outside the more progressive cities, local leaders in some areas still act as if Russia is run by communists. In some places building permits for churches are hard to come by and Christians still face persecution.

"Yeltsin very much needs the support of the Orthodox church and he's under strong personal influence of the Patriarch," he added. "He's going to be trying with all his might to gain back the people's respect and admiration through the Orthodox church."

Lytle urged Christians to pray now more than ever for Russia. As communism has lost its grip on the region, other evils seek to fill the vacuum, he said.

"This ultra-nationalist spirit represents all kinds of ideologies reaching out for people's hearts and minds here," he warned. "We need to be on our toes."

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Declining home missions income
leads to HMB hiring freeze, study By Martin King

Baptist Press
1/7/94

ATLANTA (BP)--Decreased gifts to the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board from its two major income sources in 1993 caused the agency to implement a temporary hiring freeze and conduct an internal study which may lead to "minimal" downsizing.

According to unaudited figures, the 1993 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering totaled \$36.3 million, compared to \$37.6 million the previous year -- a 3.5 percent decrease. Cooperative Program receipts at the HMB were \$676,000 less than the projected budget for the year.

The special Easter offering comprises 47 percent of the mission board's income, while the Cooperative Program accounts for another 35 percent.

Larry Lewis, Home Mission Board president, said although the special offering decrease is disappointing, it is not a surprise.

"The 1992 Easter Offering was a record, nearly a 7 percent increase over the previous year. In these uncertain financial times, we knew it would be difficult to maintain that kind of increase, so we budgeted for an offering of \$36 million." The final total is 1 percent over the budgeted amount and thus, according to Lewis, will not immediately impact work on the mission field.

"However, we are concerned about potential budget shortfalls from all income sources for this year and next, 1994 and '95. In fact, I have asked our management staff to study our organization with the possibility of some minimal downsizing toward the end of this year or next," Lewis explained.

Lewis said he has implemented a hiring freeze at the agency for the first three months of the year, anticipating the internal study to be complete by spring.

"This action should not be seen as an extreme measure. We are simply not filling vacant positions in Atlanta until we have a better feeling for 1995 income projections. It's simply prudent management," he said.

A number of SBC entities implemented staff reductions and reorganizations last year including the Sunday School and Foreign Mission boards, the Stewardship Commission and several state conventions.

Lewis called on Southern Baptists to renew their support of both the special missions offering and the Cooperative Program. "We cannot meet ever-increasing spiritual needs across our country with ever-decreasing resources."

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'Condom campaign,' critics
charge of AIDS advertising

By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--The federal government's new advertising initiative to prevent the spread of the AIDS virus is little more than a campaign to promote the use of condoms, critics have charged.

The Department of Health and Human Services recently announced details of the effort and previewed the television and radio advertisements. The public service announcements, produced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), began on at least one TV network the same day, Jan. 4. It is the first time the federal government has paid for advertising specifically endorsing the use of condoms.

While HHS officials said the initiative emphasizes abstinence as well as condom use, none of the three English-speaking radio ads provided reporters discusses abstinence. Only three of the eight English-speaking TV spots focus on refraining from or delaying sexual intercourse. The ads, some quite provocative, are targeted at sexually active 18- to 25-year-olds, a HHS release said.

It is a "veiled condom promotion campaign, as if that is going to end the epidemic," said Shepherd Smith, director of Americans for a Sound AIDS/HIV Policy.

"I went down to the meeting (kicking off the campaign) thinking they were going to unveil a comprehensive program," he said. "It was not a comprehensive program. We were not happy at all."

The non-condom ads are "not effective abstinence spots," Smith said. Two of these ads have been used in the past. None of the three "abstinence" ads specifies waiting until marriage before having sex.

"Southern Baptists believe 'True Love Waits.' The Clinton administration believes true love wears a condom," said James A. Smith, director of government relations for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "According to this administration, one is only sexually irresponsible when failing to use a condom no matter what type of sexually deviant act he or she would choose to perform.

"These ads advance the faulty, and tragically deadly, notion of 'safe sex.' Even in the recycled 'abstinence' ads, there is no attempt to set a high moral, or even public health, standard of fidelity, chastity and monogamy. The condom culture has achieved an additional victory at the expense of more human lives," Smith said.

"True Love Waits" is the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's highly popular program which calls for young people to pledge to remain sexually abstinent until marriage. President Clinton is a member of a Southern Baptist church.

The CLC's Smith said, "I'm once again deeply troubled that a president who claims the Baptist heritage of freedom of conscience is willing to endorse a project which attacks the consciences of millions of Americans. Thomas Jefferson said in the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, 'To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves is sinful and tyrannical.'"

HHS Secretary Donna Shalala said in remarks prepared for the news conference, "Young people need to know that the surest way to prevent AIDS is to refrain from having sex, but we also need to be realistic.

"By age 20, 86 percent of young men and 77 percent of young women report having had intercourse, according to the CDC. Our duty as public health officials is to save lives," Shalala said.

Among the condom ads are:

-- "Automatic," a 30-second TV spot in which a couple, gender unrecognizable, is embraced in bed. A packaged latex condom jumps from a chest of drawers in the room, scurries across the floor, up the side of the bed and under the covers, while a voice says: "It would be nice if latex condoms were automatic. But since they're not, using them should be, simply because a latex condom, used consistently and correctly, will prevent the spread of HIV."

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-- "Turned Down," a 30-second TV ad in which a silhouetted heterosexual couple kiss and begin disrobing. The woman says, "Did you bring it?" The man responds, "Uh-oh, I forgot it." The woman says, "Then forget it," and turns on the light. A female voice says, "Next time, don't forget it and every time make it part of the relationship."

-- "Naked," a 60-second radio ad in which Anthony Kiedis of the Red Hot Chili Peppers music group talks about being naked at different times, including when he has sex, and acts as if he is disrobing while he is speaking. He says, "I'm naked, see? And what I have here is a condom, a latex condom. I wear one whenever I have sex, not whenever it's convenient or whenever my partner thinks of it. Every time. Look, they're very easy to open (sound of package opening), a breeze to put on. And best of all, they stop the spread of HIV. Now I'm naked, with a condom. But I'm not sayin' you should have sex, and I'm not sayin' you shouldn't have sex. But I'm sayin' wear a latex condom if you're gonna have sex. Just think of this helpful demonstration and remember: You can be naked without being exposed."

Each of the condom ads tells listeners to call a toll-free 800 number for a free brochure, which some of the ads describe as being about correct use of condoms.

CDC officials defended condom usage as a viable prevention against HIV transmission. In a two-year study in which 123 couples, one partner infected and one uninfected, "consistently and correctly" used condoms, none of the uninfected partners became infected, the CDC's James Curran said.

Shepherd Smith said "there is compelling evidence to say otherwise" about condom use. "Prevention is abstinence," he said. "Other things are risk reduction."

An 18-month study reported in 1987 by the Journal of the American Medical Association found 10 percent of uninfected married partners became infected despite using condoms. A study reported in JAMA in 1988 found a 1 in 11 risk of infection after 500 sexual encounters with an infected partner.

According to news reports, only the Fox network had agreed to use the spots without changes in content or restrictions on the times they would be aired.

The AIDS National Interfaith Network and the Episcopal AIDS Coalition were among religious groups endorsing the advertising campaign.

The CLC encouraged Southern Baptists to ask their local TV and radio stations to refuse to use the condom ads.

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19th Avenue Baptist Church
responds to Calif. action

By Mark A. Wyatt

Baptist Press
1/7/94

FRESNO, Calif. (BP)--The exclusion of San Francisco's 19th Avenue Baptist Church from last November's California Southern Baptist Convention meeting "bears implications that reach far beyond" California, the church warned in an open letter Dec. 7.

But church leaders say 19th Avenue will continue cooperating with the state convention despite the controversial action Nov. 16 when messengers from the church were refused seating at the CSBC annual meeting because their pastor is a woman.

"We see this action as an alarming first step toward a convention in which criteria for participation are narrowly defined by the theological interpretations of a specific group," the letter stated, adding "the autonomy of every Southern Baptist church" could be affected.

Written by three of the church's deacons -- Francis DuBose, Elise Pryor-Harden and Michael LaPrade -- the letter states it "summarizes the thoughts of those present" at a church business meeting Dec. 5. It was the second meeting in as many weeks where members of 19th Avenue discussed the convention's 213-204 vote before issuing a formal response.

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A copy of the letter was faxed to The California Southern Baptist newsjournal by the church's pastor, Julie Pennington-Russell. In it, the church refuted charges it violated Scripture by calling a woman pastor.

"We reaffirm that 19th Avenue Baptist Church is a Spirit-led family of faith that believes and follows the teachings of the Bible as the authoritative word of God. We do affirm and consider ourselves to be in full agreement with the Baptist Faith and Message," the letter declared.

Reference to pastors in the Baptist statement of beliefs "is not gender specific," said the letter, which requested "that those who claim we are out of harmony" with the statement cite their references.

According to the letter, 19th Avenue follows what its members "believe to be the soundest, most widely accepted principle of biblical interpretation, which is to take into account all the scriptural references relating to a doctrine of faith or practice, and not to rely on one or two proof texts that support our view." Thus, the letter stated, members of the San Francisco church "believe it is clear that the New Testament affirms women in ministry in numerous ways."

Contacted by the California paper for comment, Dan Nelson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Camarillo, said: "I disagree with the statement that it is not gender specific. There are all kinds of masculine references."

Nelson, who initiated the challenge against 19th Avenue's messengers, stressed he has "no bitterness" toward Pennington-Russell. He also acknowledged 19th Avenue's right to call a woman as pastor even though he believes it is not scriptural.

"I think there is church autonomy in that they decide what they want to do," Nelson said. "The convention is autonomous also," he added.

The open letter from 19th Avenue expressed church members' "sincere thanks for the outpouring of support shown us by individuals and churches from California and across the country."

"Such generosity of encouragement has made us feel even more connected to God's greater body of faith," the letter concluded.

Nelson said he was glad to learn the church intends to stay involved with the state convention and continue to support it financially.

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Pastor regrets polarization
from challenge of woman pastor By Mark A. Wyatt

Baptist Press
1/7/94

FRESNO, Calif. (BP)--The pastor who initiated a successful challenge against seating messengers from a church with a woman pastor at the November California Southern Baptist Convention meeting says he was stunned by the outcome.

"I thought the thing was (ruled) out of order," said Dan Nelson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Camarillo. "I was sort of stunned that the discussion continued. ... The rapidity of it stunned me."

The convention voted 213-204 not to seat messengers from 19th Avenue Baptist Church in San Francisco Nov. 16 because the church's pastor is a woman. Nelson said the action confirmed his belief most Southern Baptists are opposed to women pastors.

Nelson said he thought the matter was settled when the convention's credentials committee ruled the challenge invalid. He was surprised by the subsequent action overruling the committee and convention parliamentarians.

"I regret all the controversy," Nelson said. "I realized I was putting my neck on the chopping block, so to speak, and I really didn't want to do that. I wish someone else would have made the motion" challenging 19th Avenue's messengers.

"I have no viciousness toward that church or its pastor," Nelson said. And though admitting he has never met or talked with Julie Pennington-Russell, the church's pastor, he said he "would be glad to sit down and dialogue" with her or anyone else.

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Nelson said he was "surprised at the reaction of denominational workers" to the successful challenge. He cited the motion by Karl Ortis, director of missions for San Francisco Peninsula Baptist Association, which includes 19th Avenue.

Before surrendering his own credentials as a messenger, Ortis offered a motion calling for the convention to refund missions gifts which 19th Avenue Baptist Church had given during the past year. The motion was referred to the CSBC executive board for action.

"I think because you work for the denomination doesn't mean you can't say anything, but you should be very cautious," Nelson said. Such statements "run the risk of alienating churches," he said.

Nelson also referred to a letter written by Greg Sumii, director of the CSBC missions ministries department. In his letter, which was published in The California Southern Baptist Dec. 2, Sumii said the convention action was a result of "prejudice" and more time was needed for discussion of the issue.

"Unfortunately, the direct approach of challenging the messengers makes it look like we're prejudiced, but we're not," Nelson said. However, he agreed more discussion is needed.

"It's a hard issue," Nelson said. "The answer would be to have more dialogue. I see it as a stand for biblical principles, not a witch hunt. I don't have an agenda."

Nelson said he "would be supportive" of a proposed amendment to the CSBC constitution adding a church's practice as another measure for judging its eligibility for membership. He noted currently "if they give to the Cooperative Program and don't adopt articles in conflict with 'The Baptist Faith and Message' we have no way to challenge them."

And Nelson expressed concern about setting a precedent by seating messengers from churches with women pastors, saying it lead to deciding whether to accept churches with homosexual pastors.

Nelson was quick to say he is "not lumping women pastors with homosexuals," adding, "I don't know that it's immoral" for a woman to be a pastor, Nelson said. "It's just not scripturally sound."

But saying women should not serve as pastors does not mean they don't "have a vital role to play," he added.

"The whole issue is, we're almost saying the highest calling is a pastor," he explained. "I think the highest calling is a mother," Nelson said, adding individuals such as Lottie Moon prove women also can be effective teachers and missionaries.

The convention "wasn't as enjoyable" as it might have been without the controversy at the start of the first session, Nelson said. He acknowledged the issue has "polarized the convention" but said he is not sure if the division will continue.

"I just don't know what's going to happen. I can't anticipate myself challenging this church every year," Nelson said. "I don't know if the convention wants to go through that again. I think one convention like this in a decade is enough."

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Her last call from Bosnia
cut off after 3 minutes

By Lacy Thompson

Baptist Press
1/7/94

PINEVILLE, La. (BP)--It is not at all hard to guess what Tinka Milinovich wants to see happen during the coming year.

What is hard is imagining how it might happen.

Milinovich is a 20-year-old, second-year Louisiana College student from Bosnia-Herzegovina. She has not been back to her home country since her junior year in high school. She came to the United States in an exchange program for her final year of high school. As it drew to a close, she planned to go home and then return to the states to study music at Louisiana College.

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But things were getting bad in her home country -- and Milinovich's parents told her to stay in Louisiana. They sent her money for the first year of college.

So began what continues to be a long ordeal for the young student. The last time she talked to her parents was Nov. 30, three days after her birthday. She was sleeping when the telephone rang, and it took her awhile to realize it was her mother on the other end.

"We were talking and I asked her something about what was going on (in the country), but she said, don't talk about stupid things," Milinovich recalls. "She wanted to talk about me and what is going on in my life."

Unfortunately, there was not time for much talk. Milinovich's mother quickly explained the call could last only six minutes. She said she would talk three minutes and then Milinovich's father would talk three minutes. The call did not last even that long, however. It was cut off after three minutes.

Still, it was contact -- and that is important. Milinovich goes long stretches without word from home. Letters have to be taken out of the country by those who leave and then mailed. Overseas relatives attempt to keep in touch via shortwave radio.

Meanwhile, Milinovich continues to hope -- even after months and months of brutal news from her homeland, even after countless accounts of the fighting that has consumed that part of the world.

"As long as I'm living, hope will be there," she says during a telephone conversation from the home of New York relatives. But the hope is getting harder -- and the fears are growing.

From the outset of the ethnic hostilities in her homeland, Milinovich has worried about her family, about their safety. Now, she worries about something even more frightening. "Now, I'm kind of more worried if I'll see them again," she admits. "It's kind of hard to think about that."

Milinovich has completed yet another semester of school. The funds from her family have long been exhausted, but an anonymous donor gave enough money to take care of her fall school bill. School leaders now are raising monies to pay for Milinovich's current semester.

Milinovich spent Christmas in New York with her relatives. In many ways, her Christmas there -- her second Christmas away from her immediate family -- was like those she enjoyed in Sarajevo -- full of busyness, shopping and trying to get everything done at the last minute. Milinovich adds to it by speaking mostly Croatian during her stay with her relatives. It helps her reclaim a piece of her heritage, offsets the feeling she has of losing touch with her own native language.

"It's homey here," she says of New York visit. "I like it. It's not home, but almost."

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Ukraine Baptist leader
dies from heart failure

Baptist Press
1/7/94

KIEV, Ukraine (BP)--Jacob Dukhonchenko, president of the Union of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Ukraine, died Dec. 20 from heart failure in a hospital in Kiev. He was in his late 60s.

Dukhonchenko had headed the Baptist Union of Ukraine since its founding in 1992, after Ukraine gained independence from the collapsing Soviet Union. Before that he led Ukrainian Baptists during the repressive years of communist rule, and he paid the price.

"'The Duke' will always be remembered as a ... defender of the truth, man of God, faithful pastor, leader of the church in the Ukraine, who endured great trials, a decade of imprisonment, all the while standing firm in our Christ," wrote Ukrainian Baptist leaders in a letter informing the Baptist World Alliance of his death.

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During the Soviet era Dukhonchenko worked as vice president of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. He was known and respected by many world Baptists.

"Brother Dukhonchenko was a great soldier of the faith," said Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance. "He was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ and in all of his communications and in all of his work he desired only to proclaim Christ and the coming of his kingdom."

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Miller presented as director
of new division at BSSB

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
1/7/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--Michael D. Miller, director of the church growth division for the California Southern Baptist Convention since 1991, has been presented in a letter to Baptist Sunday School Board trustees as the candidate to direct a new BSSB division.

Gene Mims, vice president of the board's church growth group, said Miller is anticipated to become director of the division, tentatively named the church leadership, ministry and worship division, on Feb. 1, pending responses from trustees to a letter mailed in mid-December.

While trustee approval is not required for filling a division-level position, Mims said input from trustees is "critical" because the leadership role is "a strategic position relating to church staffs." He said the usual 10-day period provided for trustees to comment on such a letter was extended to Jan. 15 because of the holidays.

The new division will include the church leadership and church music ministries departments, Genevox Music Group and ethnic and black church growth component.

Mims said Miller "has a good grasp of church growth in the cutting edge environment of California and experience with the state's church growth group. He's got 15 years' experience in building and growing churches as well as in taking that to a state level. He brings a young, fresh, exciting addition to our own vision."

During his tenure in California, Miller led the church growth division's expansion to include new departments for youth ministry and children's and preschool ministries. He also helped direct restructuring of CSBC college and singles ministry programs after Executive Board members eliminated nine student ministry positions last year.

Miller, 37, is a native of Oklahoma City and a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee. He holds the M.Div. degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and the D. Min. degree from Talbot Theological Seminary in Los Angeles.

Before assuming his responsibilities with the CSBC in 1991, he was pastor of Valley Baptist Church of Bakersfield six years. Earlier, he was pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church of Bakersfield from 1982-85.

Prior to his work in California, he was minister of singles and youth for N w Hope Baptist Church in Mansfield, Texas, a Baptist Student Union director for Seminole Junior College of Seminole, Okla., and pastor of First Baptist Church in Earlsboro, Okla. He was licensed to preach in Midwest City, Okla., in 1974, and ordained in Earlsboro, Okla., in 1978.

He has been listed in Who's Who in America Christian Leadership and in 1993 received the Award for Excellence in Ministry from the California Baptist Foundation.

He and his wife, Pat, are the parents of a son, Matthew, and a daughter, Mary.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by BSSB bureau of Baptist Press. Mark Wyatt contributed to this story.

Linda Johnson to lead
Baptist Olympics ministry

By William Neal

ATLANTA (BP)--Atlanta International Ministries (AIM '96) has elected a director to lead the Baptist ministry efforts related to the Atlanta Olympic Games in 1996. Linda Faye Johnson, director of resort ministries for the Greater Orlando (Florida) Baptist Association, will assume duties as director of AIM '96 in mid-February.

Johnson was elected at the Jan. 4 meeting of the AIM '96 steering committee upon the unanimous recommendation of a special search committee chaired by Clarence Drummond.

Drummond, who serves as director of the Georgia Baptist Convention's special missions department, said Johnson's work in Orlando was impressive and exemplary. "Her sense of calling to this kind of ministry is profound. ... Linda's record in ministry initially brought her to our attention. Our strong perception of divine leadership convinced us conclusively that she is the one to lead the Southern Baptist ministry for the Olympics."

Johnson's election came after months of deliberations and interviews with a host of qualified candidates from throughout the Southern Baptist Convention. Search Committee members commented they had settled on Johnson because of her organizational skills, experience in working with volunteers and vision for what the Olympic ministry could accomplish.

A career missionary under appointment with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, Johnson has served since 1991 as director of resort ministries in Orlando but she first came to central Florida in 1981 as a US-2 HMB missionary. She has served in various capacities since that time on both the associational and state level in special ministries, especially related to resort ministries.

A native of Oklahoma, Johnson, 35, is a graduate of Oklahoma State University in Stillwater. She is married to Lloyd E. Johnson and they have two daughters, Brittney Louise and Shannon Wells.

Bill Lee of the HMB's special missions department, has known Johnson for many years. Commenting on her qualifications, he noted: "Linda Johnson has been an outstanding resort missionary. She is an effective communicator, has strong administrative abilities and knows how to utilize all types of volunteers. She has extensive experience in developing ministries to special events. Georgia Baptists are indeed fortunate to have her to direct AIM '96."

AIM '96 was organized in 1992 for the purpose of coordinating efforts of all Baptist entities wanting to be involved in ministry projects related to the Olympics. It is supported financially primarily by the Georgia Baptist Convention and the HMB. Representation on the steering committee also includes metro Atlanta Baptist associations, the Foreign Mission Board, Woman's Missionary Union, Brotherhood Commission, Baptist Sunday School Board and various ethnic groups in Georgia.

The AIM '96 steering committee and its smaller administrative committee set the policies, guidelines and ministry design to be followed by AIM '96 staff in coordinating the volunteers involved in Olympics ministry. Russ Barker, director of missions for Atlanta Baptist Association, will be the primary liaison between the administrative committee and Johnson and her staff.

Details of the ministry design and information on how volunteers (both local and out-of-state) can become involved in the Olympic ministry will be shared through upcoming issues of the AIM '96 newsletter, copies of which may be requested from the AIM '96 office.

The AIM '96 office is temporarily located in space provided by the HMB in the same building with the Atlanta Baptist Association. Correspondence can be addressed to P.O. Box 78005, Atlanta, GA 30357; the office telephone number is (404) 872-0086.

**Chaplain's case
still pending**

By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (BP)--An honorable discharge has been recommended for a Southern Baptist Air Force chaplain but final action on the case is still pending.

The New York Times reported Dec. 21 that Lt. Col. Garland Robertson was granted an honorable discharge and was planning to appeal the decision. Robertson said an honorable discharge was recommended, but the issue must move through military channels until the secretary of the Air Force makes a final decision.

The Air Force secretary could follow the recommendation for a discharge, enforce Robertson's retirement or retain his active duty status, Robertson said. Robertson, a Mississippi native, is stationed at Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene, Texas.

In 1991, Robertson, wrote a letter to the editor of the Abilene Reporter-News before war was declared in the Persian Gulf. The letter questioned the wisdom of using military force to evict Iraqi soldiers from Kuwait.

The Air Force offered Robertson early retirement but he refused, saying "the question was real significant. It is important that chaplains be allowed to speak out on legitimate concerns from their faith community."

Chaplains are free to express their views but military regulations require authors of such letters to not use their military identification, said Lew Burnett, Home Mission Board director of military chaplaincy. Robertson was reprimanded for identifying himself with his military unit in the letter. The reprimand was reported in the local newspaper.

Robertson has 26 years of active and reserve military duty, including service as a pilot in Vietnam for which he received the distinguished flying cross of heroism in combat.

He left the military in 1976 to pursue master of divinity and doctorate degrees in ethics from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He returned to the Air Force as a chaplain in 1982 and was endorsed by the Southern Baptist chaplains commission in 1983.

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**Women make peace with past
in prison support groups**

By Keith Hinson

**Baptist Press
1/7/94**

WETUMPKA, Ala. (BP)--Several inmates at Julia Tutwiler Prison for women in Wetumpka, Ala, say they are coming to terms with deep emotional pain, thanks in large part to the guidebook, "Making Peace with Your Past: Help for Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families."

Designed for use with support groups and released in 1992 by the Baptist Sunday School Board's discipleship and family development division, the course by Southern Baptist pastor Tim Sledge was described by one inmate as "the hardest thing you'll ever do in your life."

"When I started the group, I was determined not to open up, and no one was going to make me do it," said Susan, a 33-year-old inmate who addressed a November orientation session for others interested in a new series of Making Peace groups.

As Susan and the other women in her group began to work through the Making Peace guidebook and share their feelings, she said she began to face things from her past she had previously avoided.

"My mother's phone bill went sky high," Susan said of her collect calls home from prison pay telephones. "I spent a lot of time on the phone, talking to her and crying."

Susan also began a relationship with her father after a separation of many years, and she said: "I no longer have a desire to do drugs, I'm not a violent person anymore and I don't solve everything with anger."

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The prison support groups were initiated by Ray T. Baker, coordinator of chaplaincy and correctional ministries for the Alabama Baptist State Convention. The guidebooks were purchased for the prisoners with funds donated by New Home Baptist Church, located a few miles north of the prison. Volunteer group facilitators were enlisted from area churches.

Baker said the initial results from Making Peace have drawn the attention of members of the Alabama State Board of Pardons and Paroles and prison officials.

Shirlie F. Lobmiller, prison warden and member of First Baptist Church in Prattville, Ala., said she believes the course will benefit inmates serving long terms as well as those eligible for parole.

"Some of the inmates who remain here will be like yeast," she said. "We're willing to let God infiltrate this institution and take it over."

Emily Filipi, a member of Fort Toulouse Baptist Church in Wetumpka and a volunteer facilitator, said, "Leading the group was one of the hardest things I've ever done but also one of the most rewarding. Some nights, I would go home and go to bed, and I was just wrung out."

Filipi's co-facilitator Pat Ingram, also a member of Fort Toulouse church, added, "One of the hardest things for me was when the ladies shared what they had been through in the past, because I had never heard of such things, even on TV."

Filipi, Ingram and other volunteers heard inmates tell of sexual and physical abuse, often beginning in childhood and continuing into adulthood and marriage.

"The majority of the women here," Lobmiller noted, "had been victims for years before they finally retaliated."

But for participants in the Making Peace group, the desire to retaliate for past wrongs is now diminished.

"I had unforgiveness toward myself and others," said Charlene, a 35-year-old inmate in prison for killing her stepfather after years of abuse.

"I even had unforgiveness toward my mother, which I hadn't identified before entering the group. Taking part in the group opened a can of worms, but toward the end it was great," she said.

Charlene sent her copy of Making Peace to her mother and children to help them understand her emotional struggle and journey.

Frances, a 32-year-old inmate convicted of drug trafficking, said she had a negative self-image before she entered the Making Peace group. "I was mean and low-down," Frances said. "For years, I hated me. What I've been in the past, I hated. I feel a lot better about myself now. I used to jump on prison officers or anyone else, but after I made peace with myself, I see that I am somebody."

Inmates described the group sessions and daily assignments as emotionally grueling.

Pam, a 34-year-old inmate convicted of forgery and theft, remembers being in her cell and working on exercises in a chapter titled "Release from Shame."

"That chapter sent me running from the dorm crying," she said, adding she went quickly in search of a fellow group member who shared her sorrow. "I had the emotion of shame but didn't realize what it was. It was like someone had taken a sledgehammer and hit me on the forehead.

"It's a hard thing to deal with -- carrying your own shame as well as someone else's. I learned to let go of the other person's shame and deal with my own," Pam said.

When Baker asked the inmates what they would say to motivate people on the outside to train as volunteers to lead support groups, one inmate spoke of the mutual blessing received by prisoners and outsiders.

"The volunteers who come here from outside to help with support groups and chapel services sometimes remark what a blessing they get from coming," said Patricia, a 50-year-old inmate convicted of second-degree assault. "But we get a blessing too."

Patricia, a regular attender at prison chapel services, is a Baptist who had never been in legal trouble until she found herself in the midst of an abusive, adulterous relationship. She shot her abuser twice and ended up in prison.

"I knew from day one that adultery was wrong but I was so lonely I committed it anyway," Patricia said.

Partially through the Making Peace group, Patricia said she realized how her involvement in sin led to her eventual imprisonment. Now she wants to warn others to avoid similar situations.

Tammette, a 23-year-old inmate, seemed eager to enter the new series of Making Peace groups. She will complete her prison sentence Jan. 30, 1994, and said she wants to make peace with her own self and her family.

"I have a 4-year-old son and I want to be able to relate to him better," Tammette said. "I'd like to mend bridges with my parents too." Some inmates who expressed interest in a Making Peace group could not enroll because they are eligible for an upcoming work release program.

Baker said he hopes area churches in Birmingham and Montgomery -- the two work-release centers for women inmates in Alabama -- will provide leadership and materials for Making Peace support groups.

He led a recent orientation session for 25 inmates interested in new series of Making Peace support groups at the prison. A second course, "Untangling Relationships," is in the planning stages.

Baker told the group they must sign the covenant in front of the Making Peace guidebook before entering a support group. The covenant pledges the signer's commitment to make attendance a top priority, to keep confidential all information discussed in the group and to be willing to confront and be confronted by other group members.

"It's a serious commitment," Baker told the inmates. "It's going to be tough and it's going to be hard but it's all about affirming and supporting each other as you make peace with your past."

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His mission trip, her prayers
set stage for marriage vows

By Dana Williamson

Baptist Press
1/7/94

TULSA, Okla. (BP)--Laura Smith had a gut feeling it might happen, but members of Memorial Baptist Church in Tulsa were taken completely by surprise.

At the conclusion of Memorial's foreign mission study in mid-November, mission speaker French Scott, standing on the platform, dropped to one knee and asked Smith to marry him.

Scott, a member of Memorial who had returned from a two-week mission trip to Indonesia, had completed his presentation, and WMU director Pam Birch was turning the service over to pastor Marc Dreyer when Scott asked if he could make one more comment.

He said he wanted to say a special "thank you" to Smith, who had been his prayer warrior and had stayed home during his trip to Indonesia. As she stood, the congregation applauded Smith's commitment to Scott's mission endeavor.

Gasps were heard throughout the congregation and a somewhat shocked Laura began to cry as the kneeling Scott asked, "Will you marry me?"

As the congregation wept and applauded, a teary-eyed Laura accepted Scott's proposal of marriage and lifetime mission commitment.

Scott and Smith met at Williams Telecommunications in Tulsa where both are employed. Smith's desk at the time was next to a friend who also knows Scott. When Scott came to the friend's desk to borrow a manual, Smith was talking with the mutual friend. Scott introduced himself, and when Smith returned to her desk a few minutes later, there was a note on it which asked her to call Scott at his extension.

Their first date in August was to a church service at Memorial where Scott was a member. Smith belonged to Bixby Christian Church. After church they went to a pier on the Arkansas River and "talked for hours," Smith said.

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"We knew then we would probably get married," she said. "We picked up a rock, wrote 'God is love' on it, signed it and dated it."

"We call it our Ebenezer Rock," Scott said, explaining the passage in 1 Samuel 7:12 where Samuel set up a stone and called it Ebenezer, meaning "thus far God has brought us."

Scott is completing a master's degree in computer science from Tulsa University. Smith is a marketing student at Oklahoma State University. Scott said he felt a call to missions while in high school and hopes to combine missions with his career in computer science. Scott described Smith, who joined Memorial while Scott was in Indonesia, as also open to missions.

Smith said she thought Scott might propose that night, but was surprised by the way he did it. The couple has set Aug. 6, 1994, as a wedding date.

Dreyer, who was given the service after Scott's marriage proposal, was a little in awe.

"I'm good," he said, "but not good enough to follow that!"

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