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Walls still blocking gospel,
East European Baptists say

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press
2/4/94

DORFWEIL, Germany (BP)--The Berlin Wall may have fallen, but repressive governments and power-hungry state churches still erect barriers to evangelical work across Eastern Europe.

That was the message Baptist leaders from 18 European countries delivered to a consultation on human rights and religious freedom held Jan. 26-30 in Dorfweil, Germany, sponsored by the European Baptist Federation (EBF). They gathered to plan how to deal with problem areas. Baptists are a minority religious group in the region and still have to fight for their rights. In some countries they worry about the direction new laws on religion may take, and a bewildering variety of para-church groups and non-Christian cults are flooding most of the countries.

Baptist hopes for work in Eastern Europe soared as the Soviet Union and its empire broke apart, but "very soon we noticed that many things came back," said Karl-Heinz Walter, EBF general secretary.

Leaders at the consultation repeatedly agreed with a description offered by Denton Lotz in an opening message. Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), likened the situation in Eastern Europe to the New Testament account of a man who was delivered of a demon. The demon returned to the man, bringing other demons with him.

The demon of communism left but has come back with other demons, Lotz said.

Religious oppression by insensitive governments still haunts the region. One key problem identified in discussions: Baptists in the region usually don't know national and international laws protecting religious rights. Some countries have signed international accords that include sections on religious rights, but local government leaders either do not know of such agreements or ignore them.

Baptists in almost all the countries said their ties to Baptists in other lands have been crucial to helping them win religious rights. They praised EBF and BWA leaders for giving them more stature when dealing with governments. In several cases leaders of the two Baptist bodies have intervened directly on behalf of local Baptists.

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Resurgent majority churches -- Orthodox in some countries, Roman Catholic in others -- are creating problems for minority evangelicals in many areas. In some countries Orthodox leaders only oppose Baptist work. In several others, Orthodox leaders have allied themselves with former communists to regain power and create state churches.

Majority churches across Europe are reacting to the rapid growth of evangelicals in many places. Such growth threatens the favored status of Roman Catholics and Orthodox churches, which are supported by the governments of many countries in the region.

EBF leaders plan to work with the Baptist World Alliance to improve relationships with such churches. Two major dialogue sessions with Orthodox leaders are planned for later this year.

An Orthodox leader in Russia wrote Walter to request dialogue because "Orthodox and Baptist relationships are down to zero." An example: Orthodox church leaders in Russia have reprinted a 1911 brochure that accuses Baptists of being heretics.

"The church is always tempted to use force" to propagate its beliefs, Lotz told the Baptist leaders in a reference to state churches. "The temptation for worldly powers is always there ... but the state doesn't know how to preach the gospel."

BWA leaders have had dialogue sessions with both Lutheran and Roman Catholic leaders to improve relationships and stop local persecution of Baptists, Lotz said.

Other Baptist leaders talked of invasions of American and Eastern cult groups. They also described problems with scores of para-church organizations that work against Baptist unions in some countries. Economic problems also continue to complicate such Baptist efforts as church construction.

A representative of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) attending the meeting promised to help Baptists win religious rights if they cannot negotiate effectively with local governments or state churches. Most of the non-Catholic churches of Europe are members of the conference, including Orthodox bodies.

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Religious liberty roundup:
mixed bag in Eastern Europe

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press
2/4/94

DORFWEIL, Germany (BP)--Here are country-by-country highlights of religious liberty problems and progress in Eastern Europe as described by Baptist leaders attending a Jan. 26-30 consultation in Germany:

-- BULGARIA: A strong propaganda campaign against Baptists and other evangelicals continues to plague work in Bulgaria, said Theo Angelov, president of the Bulgarian Baptist Union. Baptists have tripled their numbers in four years, but former communists now run the government and have allied themselves with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to oppose evangelicals.

-- LITHUANIA: Baptists in Lithuania have just 320 members in six churches, but their numbers have doubled in the past two years, said Albertas Latuzis, a pastor and chairman of Lithuanian Baptists. Lithuania is one of the Baltic states that won independence from the Soviet Union. Baptists have much more freedom than during communist times. "We have many opportunities and we distribute many New Testaments and other books among the people," said Latuzis, who also serves as a director of the Lithuanian Bible Society. But Lithuania's new constitution, written in 1992, lists only nine religious groups as "recognized," including Roman Catholics (95 percent of the population), Lutherans, Orthodox, Jews and Muslims. Baptists aren't on the list. "The law provides equal rights for all but in practice only Catholics get it," Latuzis said. In earlier times communists spread slanderous rumors about the Baptists, such as the claim that Baptists eat small children. Now Catholic priests spread such rumors, he said.

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-- ALBANIA: An estimated 5,000 evangelical believers now meet in five dozen churches in Albania -- impressive figures for a country that just a few years ago had no churches and billed itself as the most atheistic country in the world, said Chris Burnett. A native of Scotland, Burnett is a physician and missionary of the Baptist Missionary Society, seconded to the European Baptist Federation to coordinate Baptist work in Albania. More than 100 church-related organizations are working now in Albania, he said. Christians can work relatively freely now, but they have watched several attempts by the Parliament to impose an anti-Christian law. Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter visited the country last year to urge that the government adopt an open or neutral stance on religion. But Burnett said conditions remain tense: Some Christian workers are under surveillance and some telephones have been tapped. Muslims also are eager to win Albania. More than 200 mosques, schools and hospitals have been built by Muslims in the last two years in an effort to reach the country.

-- GEORGIA: Baptists in the former Soviet state of Georgia now have 35 churches and 7,000 members, a small group for a republic with about 5 million inhabitants, said GURAM KUMELASHVILI, who leads Georgian Baptists. But Baptists include five ethnic groups and are growing rapidly. Growth would be even faster if Baptists didn't encounter constant opposition from government and Orthodox Church leaders, he said. The Orthodox patriarch used his annual Christmas message to blast Baptists and other non-Orthodox groups. Georgians embracing non-Orthodox faiths, he warned, are "selling out their families and their state." Such "sects" have no connections with God, he stated. Last March Baptists rented a sports hall to carry a satellite-transmitted broadcast of a Billy Graham crusade, but an Orthodox-organized group blocked the entrances. "We called the police but nobody came," Kumelashvili said. Despite the problems, Kumelashvili has been asked to speak to a commission drafting a new law on religion. Baptists also were allowed to speak on television once to describe their religion.

-- MOLDOVA: Baptists in Moldova hope Parliament elections in February will lead to the changing of a law on religion adopted two years ago. Baptist leader VICTOR LOGINOV said the law starts well but ends by forbidding proselytizing. While Baptists do not favor stealing members of other church groups, Loginov said, in the past such an anti-proselytizing law has been used by the Orthodox Church to attack Baptists and other evangelicals. Because of infant baptism and its national church status, the Orthodox Church has considered all citizens Orthodox, regardless of whether they believe in God or have any connection with the Orthodox Church. In the past, a citizen who wanted to become a Baptist had to get permission from an Orthodox priest, Loginov said. The law also calls the Orthodox Church a "church" while all other religious groups are called "cults or sects." It also says all matters of religion are under the control of the government. Visiting Baptist leaders have been told the state intends to guarantee freedom of conscience and the freedom for every person to profess religious faith freely. Baptists hope after the next elections those promises will be kept.

-- RUSSIA: Aside from well-publicized Orthodox opposition, a lack of adequate buildings makes life uncomfortable for Baptists in Russia, said Baptist leader VICTOR RYAGUZOV. But a more serious problem is new religious groups who bring strange practices and make outreach difficult. "You can imagine the feelings of the Orthodox people when the preacher jumps on a Bible and says, 'This is my foundation!'" he said. "You can imagine what the Orthodox person thinks when he sees an advertisement for charismatic meetings and the title is 'Coming to the Lord through Sex.'" Also active are Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and other cult-type groups familiar to America. Ryaguzov urged Baptists of other lands to support work in Russia. "If Russia gets sick, the whole world will get sick," he warned.

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-- BELARUS: Baptists in Belarus, formerly part of the Soviet Union, have much more freedom than fellow Baptists in other areas, reported Stepan Komartchuk, president of Belarussian Baptists. That's a big change from communist times, when churches were severely persecuted and some Baptist pastors spent years in prison. About 10,000 Baptists worship in 130 churches in Belarus, a country with about 10 million people. The Orthodox Church is very strong in Belarus, Komartchuk acknowledged, "but the law of religion in our country does not allow any religion to be the state religion or to be over the others." Baptists can minister in prisons and hospitals, have opened many new Sunday schools across the country and have set up a Bible correspondence program. They also help victims of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Despite the openness, Baptists feel pressure to work and evangelize quickly in case the freedom doesn't last. "In history there were times when we were persecuted and then we were not persecuted, then we were persecuted again," Komartchuk said. "The times of persecution are to clean our hearts for service."

-- HUNGARY: Hungarian Baptists have won legal recognition under a new constitution, as have at least 50 other religious groups in the country, said Kornel Gyori, general secretary of Hungarian Baptists. But Roman Catholics claim about 70 percent of the population and are trying to regain their church-state status, lost with the communist takeover in 1948. Unlike those in some other Catholic-dominated countries, however, Baptists and other evangelicals can provide their own teachings for children in schools. "We can write, publish or build anything if we have the money. We can also hold services in prisons and in the military," he said. Baptists have received several major buildings and land confiscated by the communists in years past. They hope to create a new working group of smaller evangelical churches to assure that they can maintain their rights.

-- CZECH REPUBLIC: Few quarrels have erupted between church groups in the republic, mainly because the country is highly secularized, said Pavel Vychopen, leader of the Baptist union. Catholics, the Reformed Church and Lutherans take part in an ecumenical council to which Baptists also belong, Vychopen said. At one recent gathering Protestants and Catholics prayed together. One problem has arisen, however, because of a move among Catholics to canonize a priest who killed many Protestants before he was killed by Protestants in the early 1600s. "They were foolish enough to ask what we thought," Vychopen said. "We said, 'Please don't do that.'" Czech Baptists now have the freedom to evangelize and even teach the Christian faith in schools. They also have access to prisons and are trying to get access to the military, he said. But Baptists aren't using all the outreach methods they should because "we have lost these methods you in the West are accustomed to," Vychopen said.

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Southern Baptist aid helps
many in former Yugoslavia

By Mike Creswell

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DORFWEIL, Germany (BP)--Southern Baptist aid is the only thing keeping many Serbians and Croatians from hunger as war drags on in the former Yugoslavia.

Serbian Baptists say the war and United Nations-imposed sanctions have destroyed their economy. A retired person's entire monthly pension check buys only one or two eggs, said Avram Dega, a Baptist pastor in Vrsac, near the Romanian border. Some people have had no meat for months.

"There is a lack of almost everything now," Dega said while attending a Baptist conference on human rights and religious freedom Jan. 26-30 in Dorfweil, Germany.

The United Nations and other organizations are having problems getting food and medical supplies into Serbia. But Southern Baptists have just launched their third major aid program in the region, and it is delivering tons of food to Christians and thousands of refugees, said Southern Baptist missionary Bill Steele.

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Steele coordinates the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's relief program from his base in Ljubljana, Slovenia. He and his wife, Debbie, of Columbus, Ga., and their two children lived in Belgrade, Serbia, until worsening conditions last year forced them to relocate to Slovenia, another new country formed out of what was formerly Yugoslavia. Slovenia borders Austria.

Southern Baptist aid is being delivered in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia with help from Baptists living in all three areas. The civil war ravaging these remains of Yugoslavia has killed thousands and caused one of the biggest refugee movements since World War II.

Southern Baptists' first \$225,000 aid program two years ago delivered 400 tons of food to the region. The second one, last year, delivered \$250,000 worth of food -- 480 tons.

A third \$250,000 program already has delivered 80 tons of food since December. More aid will be delivered in the next two months. An additional \$50,000 is providing about 50 tons of food to southern Serbia, the area formerly known as Montenegro.

Southern Baptists have provided another \$30,000 for emergency medical supplies through the Foreign Mission Board and also have established a cattle project in Croatia to help improve cattle stock on farms there. Southern Baptists in Texas, Virginia and other states also have given at least another \$50,000 for food, medicine and other supplies, Steele said.

Getting supplies into the war zones has proven difficult. But since local inflation has devalued the Serbian dinar, Steele and his Baptist co-workers can buy food inexpensively with Western currencies such as U.S. dollars or German marks.

Dane Vidovic, a deacon of First Baptist Church in Belgrade, said he and other Baptists in the city depend on food and other goods supplied by Bread of Life, an aid organization Baptists operate in cooperation with Pentecostals.

Bread of Life leaders report Southern Baptists are the backbone of their aid program. They feed about 1,000 families a month; up to 80 percent of the food is provided by Southern Baptists. Baptists in both Croatia and Serbia also have organized relief agencies to help refugees.

Dega and Vidovic reported Baptists encounter hostility from some quarters. Baptists are a minority in Serbia, for example, while the Serbian Orthodox Church predominates.

"We often are accused of siding with anti-Serbian forces," Vidovic said. "In principle we have all the proclaimed rights which others do, but once we attempt to claim those rights we usually confront unfriendly reactions."

Added Dega: "The Serbian Orthodox priests are always saying that only the Catholic and Orthodox churches are the true churches -- only they have the Holy Spirit. All others are 'sects of the devil.'"

Baptists in Croatia, meanwhile, feel pressure because they aren't Catholics like most other Croatians, said Josip Mikulic, a lay leader of Zagreb Baptist Church and head of a Baptist relief agency called My Neighbor.

"To be Catholic means to be Croat and to be Croat means to be Catholic," he said.

Yet Croatian Baptists have won respect from the Catholics for their relief work, he said. Records for My Neighbor show they have aided 41,000 refugees. And while acknowledging the war's horrors, Mikulic pointed out the war has led some to find new life values.

"After losing everything they turned from materialism. They realize they need something else," he said. "Our churches are full."

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He says Russian Baptists have
'secret weapon' for freedom

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press
2/4/94

DORFWEIL, Germany (BP)--Russian Baptists have deployed a "secret weapon" in their fight for religious freedom in recent months.

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A proposed law that would have banned foreign missionaries and stifled religious freedom for non-Orthodox Russians died when President Boris Yeltsin used tanks to dissolve the hard-line Russian Parliament last October.

But even as Russia's political maelstrom was spinning, Baptist layman Anatoly Pchelinzev was quietly working behind the scenes.

Until last year Pchelinzev was a colonel in the Russian army. Today he wears the dark suit of a businessman, although he still has a military man's trim haircut and erect bearing.

While working in the army as an attorney, he began publishing articles in legal magazines defending the rights of Christians. Three years ago he and other Christian military officers set up an association to defend Baptists.

"This association united Orthodox, Baptists and others, and I was the president," he said.

Baptists need someone to help them maintain their legal rights, he said, because "too many people think if you are Baptist you are not a patriot of your country."

His superiors were "not happy" when they learned of the organization, Pchelinzev said with a wry smile.

"To be Baptist in the army is very difficult. That's why I always felt pressure and persecution," he told a Baptist consultation on human rights and religious freedom in Dorfweil, Germany, Jan. 26-30.

After he left the army, Pchelinzev began working as a human rights consultant for the Russian Parliament. In recent months he has headed a commission preparing a new law that would allow Christians to fulfill their military service commitment through non-combat work.

When the Parliament began debating a new law on religion last summer, Pchelinzev immediately saw it would be disastrous if passed. The law would have installed the Russian Orthodox Church as a state church, severely limited other Russian religious groups and banned foreign missionaries.

Pchelinzev helped bring together a group of Christian lawyers. They sent President Boris Yeltsin a formal letter criticizing the new law. Pchelinzev also met with Yeltsin's chief of administration several times.

"We told him about the mistakes in this law," he said. "We told him this law violates human rights. I told him I would not continue as human rights consultant for (Parliament) because it was adopting laws against human rights."

Russia's new constitution passed in December, by contrast, reflects freedom of conscience, he said. "The main point is that all religions are equal before the law."

Pchelinzev acknowledged reality doesn't always reflect such high standards. For example, Yeltsin has signed a law saying lands that originally belonged to Orthodox churches and were confiscated by the government must be returned. "But for Baptists he did nothing," he said.

In these formative times, he said, Baptist pastors must understand the general principles of religious liberty. He and other Christian attorneys have published a new book on law and religion and they want to send copies to all the nation's pastors.

"We must give it ... so they will know the law. They must know what rights they have," he said.

Pchelinzev worries about the new hard-liners in Parliament -- especially the much-publicized ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who dislikes evangelicals.

But, despite problems Baptists face in his country today, he told the Baptist gathering: "If my mother were alive to see me among you, she would rejoice."

He recalled that in the small Russian city where they lived, his mother was "almost pastor" of the Baptist church. Still, he said, "It was a long time until I came to Jesus."

As Pchelinzev works today to defend the rights of evangelicals throughout Russia, he carries on the family's tradition in new ways for a new day.

**2,000 attend funeral
of slain Christian leader**

TEHRAN, Iran (BP)--More than 2,000 people from across Iran braved bitterly cold weather at the Christian Cemetery Feb. 3 to attend the funeral of Haik Hovsepian-Mehr, superintendent of the Assemblies of God churches in Iran.

Hovsepian-Mehr, 49, reportedly was found dead Jan. 20 on a street in a suburb of Tehran, Iran's capital. He had disappeared Jan. 19 on the way to meet visitors at the airport. His family learned of his death Jan. 30.

Police said Hovsepian-Mehr's body was still warm when they discovered it. An autopsy showed he had been stabbed several times in the chest. The police told family members they were initially unable to identify Hovsepian-Mehr and so buried him in Beheshte Zahra, Iran's largest Muslim cemetery just outside Tehran.

The police granted the family's request to exhume the body for Christian burial but insisted the reburial be done immediately. Church leaders had hoped many Christians from outside Iran would be able to attend the funeral.

Iranian Christians outside Iran following the case said many non-Christians attended Hovsepian-Mehr's funeral.

"It was an occasion of profound sorrow as a dearly loved leader had brutally been martyred," said one Christian leader. "It also was a glorious event as the presence of God was clearly felt. A clear Christian message was preached."

Assemblies of God workers in the Middle East have speculated the slaying was a "contract killing" carried out because of Hovsepian-Mehr's much-publicized efforts to secure the release of Mehdi Dibaj. Dibaj is an Assemblies of God evangelist who was imprisoned nine years for converting to Christianity, then sentenced to death in December.

Iranian Christians mounted an intensive international publicity campaign for Dibaj's release and the U.S. government issued a statement in his behalf. Dibaj was freed from prison Jan. 16. Iranian government officials denied he was ever sentenced to death. He is still subject to recall by police, however.

Hovsepian-Mehr also had sought a United Nations investigation of persecution carried out by the Iranian government against Christians. In recent years churches have been closed and Christians tortured or harassed by police in an effort to stop Christianity's spread inside Iran.

Hovsepian-Mehr is survived by his wife and four children.

A memorial service for him was scheduled for Feb. 7 in Tehran. Another memorial service will be held Feb. 17 in London at Westminster Central Hall.

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**Billy Graham carries message
from Clinton to North Korea**

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Evangelist Billy Graham delivered a personal letter from President Bill Clinton to North Korean President Kim Il Sung during an early-February visit to North Korea.

The two-sentence letter concerned North Korea's refusal to allow international inspection of its nuclear facilities -- a growing international crisis. Military and intelligence groups suspect North Korea already may have one or more nuclear weapons.

The Southern Baptist preacher, still in east Asia after an evangelistic crusade in Japan, "did carry a message from President Clinton to President Kim Il Sung," confirmed U.S. State Department spokesman Michael McCurry Feb. 3.

The spokesman said Graham brought back a response, which was to be given directly to Clinton.

Clinton's letter was not made public, but it reportedly stressed the need for progress in negotiations over North Korea's opposition to U.N. inspectors checking its nuclear facilities. U.S. officials are losing patience with the continuing refusal and considering pushing for economic sanctions against North Korea.

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North Korea, in turn, warns such sanctions could lead to a new war on the Korean peninsula.

The trip was Graham's second visit to North Korea, where he met with Kim two years ago, preached to the tiny Christian community and lectured university students and scholars. He called at that time for more freedom for North Korean Christians, who have been heavily persecuted and restricted over half a century of communist rule.

On his first trip, Graham carried a note for Kim from former President George Bush.

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SBC missions day camp
provides fun for children

By James Warren

Baptist Press
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ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--While parents are tending to convention business, singing, praying, listening and standing in lines at the Southern Baptist Convention in Orlando, Fla., their children may be involved in action-packed activities at SBC Missions Day Camp.

Missions Day Camp is for boys and girls who will have completed grades one through six this year and whose parents are attending the annual meeting. It is sponsored by the Children/Royal Ambassador department of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission.

Major changes will affect this year's day camp. Tim Seanor, SBC Missions Day Camp coordinator, has restructured the type of events to be done during the day camp and the registration process. Another change for this year is a 300-camper limit has been placed on the number of children who can attend. Because of this change, early pre-registration is essential.

"Children attending this year's day camp," said Seanor, "will be able to visit selected portions of Epcot Center at Walt Disney World Resort. We wanted to let the children experience something unique to the SBC host city. This attraction is known worldwide and is popular with children."

Another feature for this year's day camp will be the continued use of the new coed missions education products, WorldTrek, and Missions MatchFile, produced jointly by the Brotherhood Commission and Woman's Missionary Union. These two products contain missions education drop-in materials that churches may use in a variety of settings beyond ongoing organizations.

This year the process for Missions Day Camp registration has changed. Pre-registration is now required. To pre-register a child, write SBC Missions Day Camp, Brotherhood Commission, SBC, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38104 or call (901) 272-2461, and a registration packet will be mailed to you. Pre-registration must be received by the Brotherhood Commission no later than March 13, 1994.

Parents or guardians of children who attended the day camp in Indianapolis in 1992 or Houston in 1993 will receive registration packets automatically.

A three-day package price of \$62 per child is available. A two-day package is available for \$52 for Tuesday and Wednesday. The individual day cost per child per day is \$35 for Tuesday; \$24 for Wednesday; and \$17 for Thursday.

Missions Day Camp provides a missions education program for children of messengers during all daytime sessions of the convention, Tuesday 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Wednesday 8:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., and Thursday 8:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. or earlier if the convention adjourns early.

Children in the seventh grade and older are eligible to serve as assistant counselors or counselors for the day camp by contacting Tim Seanor in writing at the Brotherhood Commission before March 13.

Day campers should dress comfortably and are required to wear a day camp wristband, day camp T-shirt, soft sole recreation shoes and socks. No short shorts are allowed.

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Southern Seminary will not exhibit, hold meetings at CBF

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Southern Baptist Theological Seminary will not sponsor exhibits or hold alumni gatherings in connection with any event or organization which competes with the Southern Baptist Convention or the Cooperative Program, according to seminary President R. Albert Mohler Jr.

In a Feb. 1 meeting, members of the seminary's trustee executive committee unanimously concurred with that decision, which was made by Mohler and first announced to the seminary's national alumni officers in April 1993. Mohler indicated the policy will include state and national events sponsored by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The seminary policy states: "The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary takes seriously its responsibility to maintain trust and allegiance with the Southern Baptist Convention and to reach out to the diverse constituency of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"As a statement of affirmation and trust with the Southern Baptist Convention, Southern Seminary will not exhibit nor hold meetings in connection with the assembly of any group in competition with the Southern Baptist Convention or the Cooperative Program."

The formal trustee action was in response to a motion made at the 1993 Southern Baptist Convention and referred to trustees of the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries. The motion, presented by Jerry Brown, a layman from Edmond, Okla., asked seminary alumni associations "which have exhibited at Cooperative Baptist Fellowship gatherings be discouraged from doing so, and if they continue to exhibit, the Cooperative Program allocations for those seminaries be withheld and divided among our other seminaries."

Although the trustee statement was adopted in order to report back to the annual meeting of the convention in Orlando in June, the seminary policy actually predates the SBC motion and its referral, Mohler explained.

"The executive committee merely ratified the statement prepared by the president and reported this to the SBC in accordance with its responsibility to respond to SBC referrals," Mohler said.

Richard D. White, pastor of First Baptist Church of Franklin, Tenn., and chairman of the seminary's trustees, emphasized the strong support of trustees for Mohler's policy.

"The officers of the board were in full concurrence with the administration's decision," White said. "It's the right position for the seminary to maintain at this point."

Executive committee chairman John S. Allen, pastor of First Baptist Church in Richton, Miss., agreed with White on the importance of Mohler's leadership on the issue.

"The executive committee unanimously agreed with and adopted the recommendation of Dr. Mohler," Allen said. "I personally support that decision wholeheartedly. It was the right decision to make."

The need for such a policy is due to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's increasing attempts to divert funds from the Cooperative Program, Mohler explained.

"It is untenable to think Southern Seminary would sponsor a meeting or exhibit in connection with a movement that stands in direct and unembarrassed competition with the Southern Baptist Convention and its Cooperative Program," he said. "We stand with Southern Baptists and with faithful Southern Baptist churches in conviction, cooperation and vision. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has made clear its intention to compete with the Cooperative Program for the support of Southern Baptist churches. Southern Seminary has no place in such an assembly."

Mohler emphasized the seminary's policy is not a rejection of any of its alumni, including those connected with the CBF.

"We will reach out to all our alumni and all SBC churches, but we will also encourage them to support the Cooperative Program."

Calif. pastor's post-quake
comment is 'Just say, Wow'

By Sarah Zimmerman

LA PALMA, Calif. (BP)--A layman's vision became a church's ministry following the Jan. 17 earthquake in Southern California.

Last year, while working as a contractor near a Los Angeles courthouse, Clyde Miller had to walk past homeless people to get to his job. Burdened by their plight, Miller began going to work early to feed them breakfast.

His wife, Linda, and their Sunday school class at Cerritos Valley Baptist Church in La Palma, Calif., shared his burden and began Tailgate Ministries last fall. The name comes from their use of a pick-up truck and a portable grill to take hot meals to homeless people.

After the earthquake, the need for hot meals escalated.

"We served 105 homeless people on New Year's Day and thought that was pretty good," said pastor Herb Carson. Two days after the earthquake, they served 1,597 meals.

Carson marveled at the way resources and people have come together to fill the needs. "God's timing is so evident, you just say, 'Wow.'"

The church's 200 members rallied behind the feeding effort after the earthquake, Carson said. One night, 35 volunteers were at the church until midnight, fixing peanut butter sandwiches to be distributed the next day.

"The excitement level has increased because they're doing something," said Carson, who has been pastor there 24 years. "This has always been a sweet fellowship, but this has changed the demeanor to a sweet, excited fellowship."

Russ Grelling, home missionary working in church and community ministries, helped the church find additional resources. He refers churches in two Los Angeles associations to Tailgate Ministries if they want to help in earthquake relief.

Enough food and clothing is being donated, Carson said, that his church supplies items to other churches with needs.

"This is going to be an ongoing and long-lasting ministry," Grelling said. While continuing to take food to people in need, plans include opening a weekly food pantry at the church building, taking toys to children hospitalized for cancer and helping prisoners' families.

The demand for meals kept volunteers so busy they did not have time to address spiritual concerns, Carson said. As the ministry expands, people will be trained to witness as they work. "We're not here just to meet physical needs," Carson said.

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Habitat teams up with NFL
to 'Blitz Build' 4 homes

By John D. Pierce

Baptist Press
2/4/94

ATLANTA (BP)--Habitat for Humanity, the ever-expanding Christian housing ministry, received a publicity boost from its Super Bowl-related "Blitz Build" of four new homes in inner-city Atlanta. Working in partnership with the National Football League and two sports merchandise corporations, Habitat volunteers erected the houses in the 10 days prior to the Super Bowl game.

The greatest benefactors of the project, however, are the four selected families who now occupy and eventually will own the homes in the shadow of the Georgia Dome, site of Super Bowl XXVIII.

Numerous celebrities, most in town for the football festivities, stopped by the busy work site to lend support. Demonstrating varying degrees of construction expertise were several well-known professional football players, as well as Miss America Kimberly Aikin and former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Jack Kemp. Cast members of TV's "Home Improvement" also were on site to film an upcoming episode, which will conclude with congratulations from former President Jimmy Carter.

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The real heroes, however, are the volunteers who, working alongside the prospective homeowners, completed the simple, well-constructed houses. The workers came from local churches, civic groups, industries and college campuses. Building materials and services, as well as food for the workers, were provided by local businesses.

Ever present at the work site and always smiling, Ida Blackwell anxiously awaited the moment she and her two sons would move into their new home. They previously lived in a small apartment nearby. Blackwell learned of the Habitat program through her job at a local Head Start program. Like all Habitat homeowners, she has put in more than 150 hours, called "sweat equity," on her house and others. Blackwell will purchase her home from Habitat at their standard policy of no profit and no interest.

After 10 hectic days involving hundreds of volunteers, the completed houses were dedicated during a worship celebration at which the homeowners received a Bible and then were given opportunity to voice gratitude for those who had helped fulfill their dreams.

The Habitat movement was founded by Millard and Linda Fuller in 1976 after testing the concept in the African nation of Zaire.

Though the movement is a widely ecumenical Christian ministry, Fuller points out the significant contributions of Southern Baptists. "The inspiration for this ministry came from a Baptist (the late Clarence Jordan, author of the 'Cotton Patch' versions of the gospels); the organization's president is a Baptist (himself); and our most famous volunteer is a Baptist (Jimmy Carter)." Both Fuller and Carter are members of Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains.

Fuller also noted many Baptist churches and individuals, including Home Mission Board staff members, have been, or are, involved in building Habitat houses.

"I just returned from Brunswick, Ga.," Fuller said, "where we dedicated a home just completed by the First Baptist Church there." Other examples could be cited across the nation, he said.

Following his term as U.S. president, Jimmy Carter returned to Georgia and with his wife, Rosalynn, became involved with Habitat for Humanity. Their high profiles gave the ministry tremendous public exposure and the annual "Jimmy Carter Work Projects" continue to draw media attention, as well as to provide dozens of new homes.

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Pierce is the Southern Baptist campus minister at Georgia Tech in Atlanta. (BP) photos (black and white and color) are available upon request from Georgia Baptists' The Christian Index.

CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Murdered BSU leader leaves legacy of genuine faith" dated 2/3/94, the second paragraph should read as follows:

Kevin Campbell, a former officer of the BSU, was one of the four killed Jan. 30.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

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