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FMB trustees focus on advance
in East Europe, missions vision By Robert O'Brien

Baptist Press
8/18/94

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (BP)--Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board trustees focused on plans for a major advance in missions in Eastern Europe, appointed 35 missionaries and dialogued with board leaders on a future vision for world missions at their Aug. 15-17 meeting.

They also voted to commend the action, first by the Southern Baptist Convention and then by top Foreign Mission Board staff, to decline funds channeled through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Messengers attending the June 14-16 SBC meeting in Orlando, Fla., voted to direct convention agencies and institutions to cease receiving funds through Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The CBF is an organization of Southern Baptist churches that oppose the convention's current conservative direction.

Top Foreign Mission Board leaders quickly followed that vote with a decision to refuse, effective June 16, about \$1.6 million a year designated for SBC foreign missions through the CBF. They will accept funds given directly to the board or through normal SBC channels such as the Cooperative Program and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions.

In another action, trustees also affirmed an SBC resolution voted in Orlando that expressed appreciation for all Southern Baptist trustees and administrators. The resolution urged them to undertake their tasks with diligence, an attitude of love and service and a conciliatory response to divisive issues.

The trustees' Europe committee commended mission board staff for an ambitious strategy for Europe and recommended where to get much-needed funding to accomplish a proposed major thrust into Eastern Europe.

The Eastern Europe emphasis will seek to accelerate evangelism, discipleship training, church planting, theological education and the presence of missionaries and volunteers -- all in a region that's unstable politically and economically but wide open to the gospel message.

"We are facing great challenges in Eastern Europe," said Europe area director John Floyd, who led his staff in developing the strategy.

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"One (of several challenges) is the fact that present openness may not remain long. Indeed, in some areas former communist political leaders have now been re-elected to positions of national leadership. And subtle oppression and even open hostility from the Orthodox Church and others continues."

Trustees approved motions, brought by trustee Paul Pressler, that the board fund Eastern European needs by 1) accepting funds from interested foundations in conversation with FMB leaders, 2) using the first \$5 million received from the Christmas 1995 Lottie Moon Offering over and above the amount to be budgeted for 1996 and 3) using the first \$5 million the board receives over and above the basic national 1994-95 Cooperative Program budget.

In June the Southern Baptist Convention voted a \$150 million national Cooperative Program goal for that year to coincide with the convention's 150th anniversary. The proposed national Cooperative Program budget is \$136.5 million. Contributions above the \$136.5 million figure will be divided among SBC agencies, including more than \$7 million to the Foreign Mission Board if Southern Baptists give the entire \$150 million.

Trustees also voted to list Eastern European needs with the FMB's development office.

FMB President Jerry Rankin presented a challenge for expansion of foreign missions in his charge to 35 new missionaries named at an Aug. 17 service at First Baptist Church in Alexandria, Va., and in his report earlier to trustees.

Rankin outlined missions advances under his three immediate predecessors -- M. Theron Rankin, Baker James Cauthen and R. Keith Parks -- and challenged trustees to help in framing a vision for the future.

He distributed an initial draft of a vision statement and list of core values and asked for trustees' input. He already has sought input from board missionaries and staff. Action on the vision statement and core values will come at a future trustee meeting.

Trustee chairman Leon Hyatt of Pineville, La., reported the board's search committee for a new vice president for communications is "making good progress." The committee didn't give a formal progress report to the board.

Rankin said later the committee hasn't selected a candidate yet but hopes to fill the job by the Dec. 31 retirement of Alan Compton, current communications vice president. Southern Baptists are welcome to submit names of candidates to fill the upcoming vacancy, Rankin said. Members of the search committee are Bill Sutton of McAllen, Texas, chairman; Stephen Davis of Russellville, Ark.; Sam Friend of Bothell, Wash.; Paul Pressler of Houston; Lawson Swearingen of Shreveport, La.; and Hyatt, ex-officio.

"We're trying to survey as broadly as possible the people that fit our (job) profile, to find out whether or not they would be open to be considered," Rankin said.

The committee is working with a consulting firm to expedite the selection process. "In just a short time they have turned out about 40 to 50 contacts that would have taken us months," he said.

The firm is only helping to find the names of qualified Southern Baptists, Rankin added. "After that it's in our hands," he said.

Several guests from the international community in nearby Washington attended the missionary appointment service. They included representatives from the embassies of Argentina, Kuwait and Swaziland and World Bank employees from Hong Kong, Jamaica and Ivory Coast. Special guests also included several staff members from U.S. congressional offices.

Missionaries appointed bring the total overseas force to 4,027. Among the new missionaries are five singles -- two men and three women -- who will fill assignments in evangelism among unreached people groups, church planting, agriculture, nursing and church development.

Preaching from 1 Samuel 12:14, Rankin challenged new missionaries to fear God, serve him and listen to his voice.

"Stand in awe, in fear, of (God) and fear no man," Rankin said. "The worst thing you could do as a missionary is to rely on your own ability and self-sufficiency You're going because God has called you Whatever your assignment, never forget you're there to serve Christ and do it unto him."

Rankin urged the missionaries to seek God's direction throughout their service. "If you don't spend time with the Lord and listen to him every day, you'll not experience the power necessary for effectiveness and service. Listen to God," he said, pledging the prayer support of Southern Baptists.

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Mary E. Speidel contributed to this story.

Baptists open homes, hearts
to children from Belarus

By Shari Schubert

Baptist Press
8/18/94

WEST PLAINS, Mo. (BP)--Ten-year-old Misha Chernov apparently thought the little black-and-white critter he discovered at the Appleton farm was just another kind of kitty. After all, they don't have skunks in his native Belarus. But when he picked it up to pet it, he got a stinky surprise.

The Appletons, members of First Baptist Church of Mountain View, Mo., took the mishap in stride. "Max bathed him in V-8 juice," said Joni Appleton. "We were just so happy he didn't get bit."

Max and Joni Appleton were among 12 families from six churches in Howell Baptist Association who hosted 15 Belarussian children this summer. The youngsters, ranging in age from 10 to 14, were brought to the United States under the auspices of American Belarussian Relief Organization (ABRO).

The volunteer organization was begun last year through the efforts of Ura Tekhovski, a Belarussian Baptist layman, and Southern Baptist home missionaries Richard and Allison Culpepper of South Windsor, Conn. This year the organization brought 101 Belarussian children to the United States for six weeks of rest, accompanied by medical evaluation and treatment. By design, the program includes an even mix of children from Baptist backgrounds and children with no religious affiliation.

An estimated 40 percent of children in the Mogilev region have serious medical problems, many of them stemming from exposure to radiation following the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster. The city of Mogilev is 156 miles north of the reactor site.

Five of the children hosted by the Baptist association were from orphanages, 10 from other family settings.

Churches in the association participated in a love offering to underwrite the approximately \$11,000 cost of bringing the children to Missouri, and some of the association's mission reserve funds also were used.

A number of physicians, dentists and optometrists in West Plains donated their services.

Doctors found no serious medical problems but did observe some of the children had enlarged thyroids -- a common aftermath of exposure to radioactive iodine.

Six of the children needed eyeglasses, which were purchased for them by the association, and several of the children required extensive dental treatment.

Dentist Brad Erney, a member of First Baptist Church in West Plains, treated 14 of the children. Work included fillings, root canals and extractions of some teeth that could not be restored. Erney and his staff also made an effort, speaking through interpreter Gennadi Luzanov, to stress the importance of brushing.

Linda Erney, the dentist's mother and office receptionist, explained follow-up dental services may not be easily accessible to the children in Belarus. But now that the decay has been removed, they may be able to avoid further problems by practicing good dental hygiene.

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Between doctors' appointments, the children had opportunities to swim at a local pool, take in the Whitewater attraction at Branson, try the rides at the Howell County fair, watch Disney videos, visit a dairy farm and do many of the other things American kids tend to take for granted.

"I like everything," said Natasha Luzanova, 12, who was the guest of the Doss and Young families. She explained because of the radiation and industrial pollution at home, people don't do much outdoors.

The benefit of six weeks in a not-so-contaminated environment was evident in the children's healthier-looking skin color and increased energy, said Dale Bruns, director of missions for the association. "They've just blossomed."

Studies suggest six weeks outside the contaminated area will produce a 25 percent decline in the body's residual radiation and give the immune system a chance to recover.

Perhaps more evident than the effects of radiation on the Belarussian children were the effects of an economy in chaos.

Dimitri Mandrikov and Fiodor Tseluiko, guests of Jess and Louise Shockley of Center Grove Baptist Church in Moody, came with only one toothbrush between them.

Shockley said when he took the boys shopping, he observed they were quite price-conscious, often remarking things cost "big money."

When the Appletons took their two guests to get shoes, purchased from a local store by an anonymous donor, 11-year-old Pavel Balabanov picked out a pair in size nine and a half. Noting the boy's size seven feet, they tried to steer him to a smaller pair, but he was insistent. Translator Luzanov intervened and explained, "He wants these for his 16-year-old brother." Later, Pavel wanted a soccer ball for his 4-year-old brother.

"Everything he has gotten, he has gotten for his family, not for himself," Max Appleton noted.

The Appletons learned Pavel's father is a tank driver for the military. Th family of five has one bicycle, no car.

The average salary in Belarus is the equivalent of \$20 a month, Luzanov said. Families typically manage to eat by raising their own food on dachas -- small plots of property out in the country. "We don't buy food in the shop. Maybe bread, that's all," he said.

Bruns said the children were overwhelmed by the quantity of material things they saw and by the eagerness of the host families to buy things for them.

People in the association donated extra suitcases to enable the children to take home the shoes and clothing, health-care products, cosmetics, school supplies and other gifts that had been given to them.

As the six weeks were nearing an end, the host families also had to come to grips with the fact some of the gifts they would have liked to give the children were not practical. They were told electronic items such as tape players, for instance, would not be compatible with electrical systems in Belarus, and replacement batteries would be prohibitively expensive.

Some host families also wanted to send some money home for the children and their families, even though concerns were expressed about whether it would safely reach its intended destination. Betty Cook, a member of Trinity Baptist Church in Willow Springs, said she was planning to sew it into the children's pockets and hope for the best. "If it gets there, good. If it doesn't, so what?"

Trinity pastor Robert AuBuchon added, "We tried to convey that we were doing things out of love -- our love for God -- and not just because we feel better than them or feel sorry for them."

In addition to physical and material help, the Howell County families sought to share the gospel with the children, some of whom apparently have had little exposure to it. They obtained Russian-language Bibles and gospel tracts. Several of the families said their guests would hardly put the Bibles down.

Carol Young overheard one of her guests, Anna Dolbun, talking to her father when she was allowed to call home. Although she couldn't understand most of the conversation, Young did pick up the word "bibliya" and realized Anna was telling her father about her new Bible.

Greta Pruett of First Baptist in West Plains, said one of her guests, Carina Gribanova, "was very surprised to know that we have classes for children in church."

Despite increased religious freedom in recent years, church participation is not easily accessible to all Belarussians, Luzanov pointed out. There are only two Baptist churches in Mogilev, a city of 450,000 people. Luzanov considers himself a Baptist, but is not a regular church attender. The only way he could get to church, he explained, would be to use public transportation, which is invariably overcrowded. Besides that, his family usually is out of the city on weekends, working on their dacha.

Dee Ripko of First Baptist Church in Mountain View, recalled their guest, Vitali Filonov, asked her husband George about the devil. "He did get a lot of his questions answered," she added.

The Ripkos had an advantage over some of the other families when it came to communication -- George, whose parents are Ukrainian, can speak Russian. Through conversing with Vitali, "I've learned a lot of the language I didn't know," he said.

Despite differences in language and circumstances, the host families quickly learned kids are kids, no matter where they come from.

Both the American and Belarussian children enjoy teasing, noted Young, whose Belarussian guests joined her own daughters, Terri and Erin. The girls discovered how much more fun name-calling can be in two languages instead of one.

Noting how easily the Howell County families seem to have fallen in love with their young guests, Bruns acknowledged he wonders whether they would have been so readily accepted if they had not been "such beautiful children."

Young doesn't think that would have made a difference. "We were prepared to take in kids, regardless," she said.

"We didn't take them in as strangers," Mrs. Appleton added. "We took them in as family."

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Chernobyl just one bleak picture
of former Soviet environment abuse

Baptist Press
8/18/94

By Shari Schubert

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Eight years since the dreadful morning of April 26, 1986, Chernobyl's nuclear leviathan still lives -- more closely guarded, perhaps, than before, but still dangerous. Buried alive in a 24-story shell of concrete and steel near the border of Ukraine and Belarus lie the melted remains of Chernobyl's No. 4 reactor core, belching radiation as they continue to disintegrate.

If an earthquake, high winds or shifting of the radioactive rubble inside were to cause the structure to collapse -- which experts say is not beyond the realm of possibility -- radiation from the Chernobyl accident once again could spew across Ukraine, Belarus and surrounding nations.

The Chernobyl power plant's No. 2 reactor was shut down after a fire in 1991. But reactors No. 1 and 3 continue to operate, even though many experts consider them unsafe, because Ukraine needs the energy. A total of 15 similar reactors still are in use in Ukraine, Russia and Lithuania.

In a 1989 book, "The Truth About Chernobyl" (published in the United States in 1991), nuclear physicist Grigori Medvedev offers a stinging indictment of the incompetence, poor judgment and reckless violation of safety rules that led to the accident.

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Medvedev, who was involved in the investigation of the explosion, points out three different government agencies could have vetoed plans to conduct experimental testing of the plant's turbines with the emergency core cooling system switched off. All three agencies failed to do so.

During the testing, the reactor's power level dropped, causing it to become unstable. Leonid Toptunov, the 26-year-old senior reactor control engineer, recognized the situation was dangerous and wanted to shut down the reactor immediately. Shift foreman Aleksandr Akimov concurred. If they had chosen that course, Medvedev maintains, the accident could have been avoided.

But the operators' supervisor, deputy chief engineer Anatoly Dyatlov, called Toptunov a lying idiot and insisted they attempt to raise the power. Young and still somewhat inexperienced, Toptunov yielded to Dyatlov's bullying instead of his own sense of caution.

When instrument readings showed the reactor was totally out of control, Akimov activated the emergency power reduction system, intending to lower the absorber rods into the core and halt the reaction. Instead, a flaw in the design of the rods caused a power surge, triggering an explosion that released 50 tons of nuclear particles into the atmosphere -- 10 times as much radiation as was released by the bomb dropped on Hiroshima during World War II.

Two power plant workers were killed instantly and 30 more, including Toptunov and Akimov, died in the next few days from radiation exposure. No one really knows how many people have died or will die from the long-term effects. The World Health Organization estimates 4.9 million people in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia have been affected.

Gennadi Luzanov, the translator who accompanied a group of Belarussian children to Missouri recently, recalled first hearing about the April 26 Chernobyl accident on May 1, after returning from a trip. Practically all information was kept secret, he said. Reports said there had been a minor accident, that there was no danger. "People didn't take any precautions," Luzanov said.

Timely and truthful information, Medvedev wrote, "would have saved tens of thousands of people from high doses of radiation." But hours after the accident, even though they could see the asphalt around the plant was littered with chunks of graphite from the reactor core, officials continued to tell themselves and report to others the reactor was intact. As a result of the denial, time and effort were wasted on useless measures to pump in cooling water and "save" the reactor.

But the standard pattern in the former Soviet Union, Medvedev noted, was to conceal information about nuclear accidents, not only from the general public but from nuclear industry personnel. Medvedev lists nearly two dozen nuclear power industry accidents that occurred in the United States and the Soviet Union between 1951 and 1986 -- including one at Balakovo in the U.S.S.R. where a relief valve burst, allowing steam at 572 degrees Fahrenheit to enter a room where people were working, scalding 14 people to death.

Soviet plant operators were never told about such accidents. Led to believe nuclear power plants were safe and foolproof, they became overconfident.

The Soviet Union's mismanagement of its nuclear industry left a crippling legacy for the nations that remained after its breakup. Fifteen percent of Ukraine's budget has been spent on the aftermath of Chernobyl, more than has been spent on education, medical care and culture combined, Luzanov noted.

About 70 percent of the contamination from the Chernobyl accident -- radionuclides such as cesium-137 and iodine-131 and strontium-90 -- drifted into the southern region of Belarus. Since then:

- Premature birth rates have risen and genetic abnormalities have been seen in one-third of recently studied pregnancies.

- Thyroid cancer in children, once rare, now totals more than 300 cases in Belarus, Ukraine and Russia.

- There has been an increase in leukemia, aplastic anemia and cancer of the eye. Estimates of the future number of cancer cases range from 5,000 to 100,000.

-- Immune systems have become severely impaired or virtually non-functional, resulting in an increase of even common illnesses.

Add to that an increase in stress-related illness caused by living in such a place.

Chernobyl's aftermath is only one picture in a montage of environmental contamination reaching 6,000 miles across the former Soviet Union. That "Lethal Legacy" of industrial expansion at any cost is exposed in grim, graphic detail by Mike Edwards, associate editor of "National Geographic," in the magazine's August 1994 issue. Among stops on his tour of destruction:

-- Murmansk, where environmental abuses include 14 reactors dumped, four with fuel; a disabled submarine with a fueled reactor and 17 other contaminated vessels sunk; and thousands of barrels of solid waste tossed into Arctic waters.

-- Astrakhan, where the world's largest sulfur works, producing 4 million tons a year, releases gaseous by-products such as sulfur dioxide and deadly hydrogen sulfide into surrounding villages.

-- Chelyabinsk, where wastes from a plutonium weapons complex were released into the Techa River, which was the drinking water source for nearby villages. Scientists studied the villagers like guinea pigs for years, Edwards notes, but told them nothing.

The list of environmental problems goes on: smelter exhausts, dioxin, PCBs, DDT, oil spills. ... Almost any environmental problem you can think of, you can find a model of it in the former Soviet Union, said Baptist layman Rick Irvin, associate professor of environmental studies at Louisiana State University.

Even if the former Soviet countries had the kind of technology, equipment, personnel and money that are available in the United States -- and they don't -- it could easily take 50 to 80 years to clean up their environment, Irvin said.

Loren Homer, an attorney who works with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and other Christian groups on projects in the former Soviet Union, pointed out "all of these problems are very complicated" and cautioned against judgmental attitudes toward the governments that are now trying to deal with them.

Ukraine would like to shut down Chernobyl, she pointed out. But without adequate oil and gas resources, there are few viable options. Even with the Chernobyl reactors on line, many buildings in Ukraine are unheated and some enterprises have to be closed in the winter because there is not enough electricity.

Helping through various relief efforts "and lots of prayer" seem to be the only answers right now, Homer said.

For the future, Irvin believes American Christians could have a significant influence on the development of former Soviet countries -- economically and spiritually -- by finding ways to use their professional skills and interests to build long-term relationships with people there.

Homer compared the situation in the former Soviet Union to Rwanda. In both cases, she said, governments have "fallen into the hands of Satan, literally."

But when Christians go into those countries to work with the people or open their homes to them in the United States, she said, "something happens that is more powerful than the provision of aid." People see a difference. They want what Christians have.

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Book-Link ministry
faces financial crunch

By Tim Yarbrough

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MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Book-Link, a ministry of the National Fellowship of Baptist Educators that has supplied missionaries with thousands of books since 1988, is facing a "desperate" financial crisis, according to its executive director.

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During the organization's executive committee meeting at the Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center, Olin Williams said Book-Link has been unable to fill 99 of the requests it currently has due to a lack of postage to mail books.

"Book-Link is in desperate need of funds," he said. "Book-Link has the books to fill these requests, but not the funds for postage."

Williams said it costs 72 cents per pound to ship materials to a foreign country. Unfortunately, the donation of funds to mail books does not keep pace with the number of books donated.

As an emergency measure, the committee voted unanimously to make \$1,000 in funds available to start to fill outstanding requests for books.

Requests made by Southern Baptist foreign missionaries continue to be filled, Williams said, but others, such as requests from Baptist nationals, are on hold because of the lack of funding.

Since the organization started in 1988, Williams said Book-Link has shipped 89,467 books to 60 countries around the world. Postage costs for shipping the books totaled \$25,231. Williams estimates the value of the books distributed at \$226,842.

Donations of Christian materials and monetary donations to pay for postage of books may be mailed to Book-Link, National Fellowship of Baptist Educators, Brotherhood Commission, SBC, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38125. More information on Book-Link may be obtained by calling Williams at (606) 379-2140.

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Leader outlines trends affecting
student ministry in the 1990s

By Chip Alford

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--George Louterback has three words to describe the heart of Southern Baptist student ministry in the 1990s: adaptability, flexibility and cooperation.

"We are in an era of change whether we like it or not and it will affect everything we do from the paradigms we operate by to funding, even the students we relate to," said Louterback, a 28-year student ministry veteran who recently completed a special project for the Baptist General Convention of Texas' Christian education coordinating board.

Through the use of written surveys, telephone interviews and personal visits, he and 19 co-workers conducted a statewide survey of more than 500 pastors, directors of missions, student ministers, college students and denominational workers to determine the status of student ministry in the state and future needs.

What the group came up with was more than 400 pages of material that pointed to a variety of future trends which, Louterback believes, will impact student ministry not only in Texas, but across the country. He shared some of the report's findings with state student directors, campus directors and church ministers to college students attending Student Week 1994 Aug. 13-18 at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Conference Center.

Downsizing "will still be the name of the game in corporate America" for the rest of the '90s, Louterback said. "That means more and more students will be coming to school with parents who are out of work and they'll be concerned about how they are going to finance their education. Many will take part-time or full-time jobs to pay their way through school. And it may take some longer to finish because they take time off to work."

Some researchers already are predicting the current generation of college students "will be the first that will not do as well financially as their parents did" and will have a minimum of three and a maximum of five career changes in their lifetimes, he said.

"It's going to affect the whole concept of education," he said, with students focusing on a broader-based education to prepare for a constantly changing job market.

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Loutherback said the Texas survey showed a continuing decay of denominational loyalty among college students.

"Students in this generation will go to a church where their needs are met regardless of the label it has. Students respond when they are offered something meaningful."

Today's students also are characterized by "a tremendous lack of trust" in people and institutions, Loutherback said.

"Part of the problem is we haven't been very good role models. We've got students who are crying out, 'Don't tell me I need to grow spiritually, 'Show me.'"

Loutherback said commitments are largely non-binding for the current generation of students. "About 60 percent believe that marriage is forever, but only 30 percent feel they will be married forever," he said.

Beset by increasingly troubling social and family problems, many students are hurting emotionally, he added. In 1992 alone, 5,000 college-age students committed suicide in the United States.

"One thing student directors need is some training in counseling. You can refer, but there are times you are caught and you have to deal with an issue right then and there. We need to be prayed up, equipped and available to help, and we need to be role models of integrity for these students."

The continual "leveling off" of Cooperative Program giving in many states is creating another challenge for student ministers, Loutherback said.

"What that means is there is more competition for the dollar than ever before. Everybody wants a piece of the pie, but with rising health care costs and cost-of-living increases, you've got more needs for the dollars, but less dollars to choose from."

To effectively compete for budget dollars, student ministers must make communicating their story a priority, he said.

"I've heard this for years and I think it's true: Student ministry may be the best-kept secret in the Southern Baptist Convention. Somewhere we've got to get more serious about communicating what's going on in our ministry or we are going to come out on the short end of the stick."

Loutherback said student ministers may be forced to explore other sources of funding their work, such as endowments and alumni support.

He also encouraged student ministers to make building relationships with pastors, DOMs and other church leaders in their area a priority in their ministry.

"What I've seen is that BSU directors who have visibility in their association receive high marks from pastors and the DOM. But some people are not paying the price relationally to make sure this voice is heard," he said. "No time spent in (associational) meetings is wasted time. ... These are people who will be making decisions about your work and your budget.

"Learn to be a team player in your area. Talk about what God is doing on your campus. Work at making your story the most positive, effective story that can be told."

Loutherback encouraged student ministers and workers to continually explore student ministry resources and books which deal with trends related to the current generation of college students.

"If you're going to be successful in student ministry, always be a student of student work," he said, quoting a line from one of his student ministry mentors, W.F. Howard, now adjunct professor of student work at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. "I need to be aware of what is going on in the lives of students if I am going to be able to minister to them," he said.

Loutherback said one of the best resources student ministers have is other student ministers.

"Nobody really understands what you're doing except other people who are doing the same thing. Don't forget, we have each other."

**Student ministers must prepare
for complex counseling situations** By Chip Alford

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Sexual abuse and suicidal tendencies are only two of the complex issues today's campus and church ministers are likely to face in counseling situations with college students, according to Nashville-based marriage and family counselor Barnard Self.

"All of you are going to have situations where people are going to need more from you than 'Let's pray about it,' or 'I care,' although that's very important," Self told a group of campus and church ministers to students attending Student Week 1994 at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Conference Center Aug. 13-18. Self led the seminar, "Advanced Counseling with Difficult Issues."

Sexual abuse, Self said, "is such a major issue because our whole world is warped and does not generate health in families." Some studies have shown as many as one in three women were abused as children, he said.

Victims deal "with incredible amounts of pain" including shame, guilt and disgust, he said, adding some block out hurtful memories, only to recall them in flashbacks later in life.

"The body can't contain that pain forever. It will come out somewhere," he said.

Ministers shouldn't kid themselves when it comes to Christian families and abuse, Self said.

"I have counseled with incredibly large numbers of children of deacons who were supposedly 'above reproach,'" he said.

While some stories of abuse may be inaccurate, Self said it "is better to err on the side of believing them." He urged ministers to help victims see they were "powerless" in the situation and that God is the source of power and healing for their lives.

When dealing with a student who may be contemplating suicide, Self said ministers should first ask the student directly if he is planning to take his own life.

"If he answers 'yes,' then find out if he has a plan," he said. "The more defined the plan, the more serious the threat."

Other steps, Self said, should include trying to get rid of the means by which the person plans to take his life (e.g. pills, a gun); making sure the person has a telephone number of a local crisis center and the minister's own telephone number; obtaining a verbal and written agreement from the person not to commit suicide; helping him identify and eliminate stressors that are causing his suicidal thoughts; requiring someone be with the person 24 hours a day if possible; and encouraging the person to seek professional help.

In any complex counseling situation, Self said it is vital for ministers "to know your own training and educational background. Ask yourself, 'Do I really know how to deal with this issue?' If the answer is 'no,' then you need to refer to a professional."

He urged ministers to familiarize themselves with Christian counseling resources in their area and, if none are available, to encourage local churches to pool their resources and hire a counselor for the community.

In all counseling situations, Self also encouraged ministers to:

-- Hear people's pain. "It may be awkward and uncomfortable for us, but it is a way to connect with students."

-- Be sensitive to the person's pain and where they are in their struggle.

-- Communicate caring. "It matters how they are doing, what they've experienced and how their life goes."

-- Don't let the feelings overwhelm you. "If you get overwhelmed, you won't be able to help them. Try to keep some distance while helping them realize God's grace is sufficient to meet all their needs."

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-- Struggle not to be seduced by their point of view. "Realize the person will never give the whole picture. Help him think about what role he might have had in his situation or problem or in continuing the problem."

-- Find out the missing pieces of the picture by asking questions. -- Offer hope. "Let them know that God can help them find healing, no matter how horrific and serious the issue may be."

-- Don't give advice. "Two things can happen and both are bad. One is they'll do what you tell them, it will blow up in their face and they'll blame you for it. Or they'll do half of what you said and the same thing will happen."

-- Guide them in making sound choices after weighing options.

-- Remind them of their place in God's kingdom or help them realize they can have a place in God's kingdom. "They need to understand that God does not hate them. God sees them as a wonderful person who sent his Son to die for them."

Student Week 1994 was sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board's National Student Ministry.

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Media resources often can help
witness to people in crises

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
8/18/94

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Crises affect lives of church members every day, yet even the most compassionate Christian may be at a loss for words or advice to help a family member or friend in some circumstances.

Myra Reese knows full well the feeling of inadequacy, both as one who has tried to give support and as one who has received attempts at comfort during a crisis.

Reese, a media library consultant for the Baptist General Convention of Texas and associate director of media services for First Baptist Church of Carrollton, Texas, said media libraries can provide support through such times by supplying resources for a range of crisis needs.

Speaking to participants in Church Media Library Leadership Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center, Aug. 13-19, she observed Christians "have the same inner feelings and are affected in the same ways as other persons."

In more than 25 years of media library work, Reese said she has observed being a Christian does not make a person experiencing a crisis "less human. God created me with emotions, and they help me deal with problems. It's OK for Christians to cry. We just have to be honest."

Reese, who has experienced four episodes of partial paralysis as well as the death of an adult child, said she knows the value of friends who may come to visit and just sit, saying only that they care. She also knows the damage that can be done when well-meaning persons offer empty words, such as "God will take care of this."

Christians know God will take care of them in crises, she observed, but said she believes unless a person offering words of help has experienced the same problem, words that simply sound nice but have no basis in personal experience are not comforting to the person in pain.

On the other hand, Reese said she believes people who have experienced similar problems can provide a positive Christian witness by offering, at a carefully chosen time, to share their experience and to tell specifically how God helped them through that crisis.

Churches can offer people in crises and others who struggle to help resources in well-chosen books and tapes that address a wide range of needs, Reese said. A variety of Christian-oriented media address such topics as death, grief, suicide, AIDS, troubled marriages, alcoholism, cancer, child rearing issues, facing the changes of retirement and divorce.

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And while a professionally prepared resource may seem the perfect way to help a troubled family member or friend, Reese cautions to be sure the person in crisis is ready for what is in the book or tape and that the person offering the resource is aware of the content of the resource before recommending it.

Not only are resources available for those in crisis, but there are materials for people who need to understand what their friends or family may be experiencing, Reese said. As an example, she cited the need for some children to understand what their friends may be feeling during the divorce of parents. Helping a child understand the pain of a friend may prevent hurtful remarks, such as "You don't have a daddy anymore."

The stages of grief in any crisis situation are almost the same as the stages of grief in the aftermath of a death, Reese advised.

"Give the person time; let them work through grief," she said. "We do have an opportunity to share Christ with someone else and to tell them how he has helped us through a crisis.

"When crises come, it isn't easy to wait on the Lord, even though we know as Christians we have to do that," she noted. "It isn't our basic nature to wait. We want to take care of it (the problem). But you don't always need to give advice or offer a media library resource the first time you talk with a person in crisis. Every situation is totally different. Take time to hear the person and to know when the time is right to share a witness."

Church Media Library Leadership Conference was sponsored by the church services department of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

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Christian drama team
is 'taking back the arts'

By Chase Peeples

Baptist Press
8/18/94

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Humor breaks down barriers and opens doors. Once people are able to laugh at themselves, they are more receptive to something serious, Charlotte, N.C.,-based actor Denny Brownlee believes.

Breaking down barriers and opening doors through humor is exactly what Brownlee and his wife, Sandy, have been doing since they began their drama ministry in 1987. The couple has performed at Christian retreats and conferences across the country, most recently providing theme interpretations for Student Week 1994 at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Conference Center.

Whether it was acting like a talking Bible that has a shouting match with a copy of "Moby Dick" or a couple of misguided hosts of an evangelical shopping network, the Brownlees kept the audience of students laughing while bringing depth to the week's theme, "Empowered to Proclaim ... Hope."

"I think all of the arts belong to God. God is the creator and we are created in his image. We are all little 'creators,'" Sandy said. "Unfortunately, the world has taken this medium and perverted it. You see it every day in areas like the movies and television. Because of this, Christians have shied away from the arts. It's time for us to take back what is ours."

The Brownlees met while working on a play in a community theater in Charlotte. In the production, their characters fell in love, a scenario that soon played out in real life.

After they married, the couple began attending Calvary Baptist Church in Charlotte. They began participating in its drama ministry and discovered the joy of using drama to share the gospel.

"We began writing a little bit and soon we began writing all of our material. Before we knew it, we were leading conferences and retreats," Denny said.

The Brownlees' ministry isn't always easy. They've suffered through their share of forgotten lines and bad sound systems. But the times their ministry makes a difference in the lives of people makes everything worthwhile.

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For example, one night the Brownlees gave a performance at their church's dinner theater that dealt with the legalism of many Christians. The audience was so moved that their pastor decided not to preach the following Sunday. Instead, he asked the Brownlees to perform the skit again. Afterward, the altar was filled with people repenting and forgiving each other.

God also worked through the Brownlees' ministry during a comedy show they performed at church. In attendance was a fellow church member's 20-year-old son who wanted nothing to do with Christians because he thought they were boring and never had any fun.

"The performance was almost totally comedy," Denny remembered. "We did it mainly for the sake of entertainment. Yet, because that young man saw Christians actually having fun together, he came forward to accept Christ in the following Sunday's worship service."

The Brownlees credit the effectiveness of their ministry to the visual nature and short attention span of today's society.

"The church needs to be using drama," Denny said. "It is a great tool for getting people to listen."

"(The audience) can identify because the message comes to life in a person," Sandy added.

The couple's goal of bringing Christian messages to life is summed up in their vision statement: "Our creativity comes from our Creator. We seek to glorify him by bringing laughter and healing to his church."

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Peebles is an editorial intern for the National Student Ministry department.

**Award recipients show
diversity of volunteers**

By Martin King

**Baptist Press
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ATLANTA (BP)--Recipients of the 1994 Mission Service Corps Volunteer of the Year awards show the diversity of service of Southern Baptists' 1,900 MSC volunteers.

James and Bootsie Griffin work with seminary students at Southwestern and New Orleans Baptist theological seminaries. Frank and Mary Alexander are based in Sturgis, S.D., and they serve in North and South Dakota, Montana and Wyoming.

The couples were honored by the Home Mission Board during an MSC awards banquet held at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center in August.

The Griffins were assigned as seminary consultants in 1991 to recruit and place students in volunteer missions positions.

"Many seminary graduates who are not called to fully funded positions of service are redeemed back into active ministry because of James and Bootsie Griffin," said Carl Barrington, MSC associate director. Many of those positions are as tentmakers -- people who earn their support from secular employment while serving as a volunteer.

James retired as director of missions for the Kansas City (Kan.) Baptist Association in 1988. He and his wife are now members of First Baptist Church in Kilgore, Texas.

They are "10 years into a two-year commitment," Alexander said. They have served as church strengtheners since assignment as MSC volunteers in 1985.

"Frank and Mary Alexander share not only the gospel but also their lives," said Mike Riggins, MSC associate director. "They have been true to the test of faithfulness."

The Alexanders serve as lay renewal team leaders and have an active puppet ministry throughout the region. They are active in First Baptist Church of Sturgis, where Frank is associate pastor and worship leader, and Mary works in resort ministries. They moved to South Dakota from Knoxville, Tenn., where they were members of Central Bearden Baptist Church.

Mission Service Corps enlists and assigns adult volunteers who provide for their own expenses and serve full time for four months or longer. For more information on MSC opportunities, call the Home Mission Board at 1-800-HMB-VOLS.

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