



Nashville, Tennessee
**Associated
Baptist Press**

Editor: Greg Warner
Associate Editor: Bob Allen

Phone: (904) 262-8584
Fax: (904) 262-7745

April 1, 1999

(99-26)

- Baptists join call for cease-fire, attempt to minister in Balkans**
- CBF starts fund, seeks volunteers to minister to Albanian refugees**
- International Mission Board seeking 2,000 volunteers for overseas crusades**
- BJC search committee announces deadlines**
- Friends of New Churches accepts board resignations**
- Supreme Court will decide mandatory student fee dispute**
- Supreme Court declines dispute over prayer deemed 'unacceptable'**
- U.S. Senate confirms Seiple to head religious persecution commission**

Baptists join call for cease-fire, attempt to minister in Balkans

By Bob Allen and Martha Skelton

McLEAN, Va. (ABP) -- Leaders of two Baptist organizations have joined other international Christian leaders in an Easter appeal to cease armed conflict in Kosovo and other parts of the world.

Officials of the Baptist World Alliance and European Baptist Federation joined leaders from worldwide Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist and Anglican communions, as well as the World Council of Churches, in the Easter appeal.

"In this season of Easter, Christians around the world share the profound pain of all those caught up in tragedies such as Kosovo," said the statement. "Our hearts go out to all those who are suffering the terrible consequences of the violence being inflicted on God's children in this region and in many parts of the world."

The statement points out that Kosovo is "but one of many conflicts around the world today" and noted that appeals in recent days by religious leaders around the world to end such acts of violence "have not yet been heard."

"We appeal to Christians around the world these high holy days to join their hearts and spirits in this prayer that the bombings may cease and that the guns may fall silent," the appeal concludes. "May the Spirit descend among us and inspire in us the courage to sacrifice our individual wills in order that the peace of the Risen Christ may prevail."

Officials signing the statement included Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, and Karl Heinz Walter, general secretary of the European Baptist Federation.

Also endorsing the statement were leaders of the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Methodist Council, the Anglican Communication, as well as the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches.

The McLean, Va.,-based Baptist World Alliance earlier sent separate "pastoral" letters to the worldwide Baptist community and to Baptists in the Balkans.

The March letter to Baptists in Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia assured them of support from Baptists around the world, while praying for an end to the NATO bombing and "the slaughter of innocent children, women and men" in Kosovo.

"Too long you have been in pain, too long you have suffered," Lotz wrote. "The BWA stands with you in your suffering and assures you of our prayer and support."

Baptist World Aid, a division of the BWA, issued a special appeal for funds to assist refugees and displaced persons from the current fighting in Kosovo. Relief efforts will be coordinated through BWA member bodies in Yugoslavia, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia and Albania, said officials organizing the "Balkan Appeal."

Baptists on all sides of the Balkan conflict attempted to respond to human needs in the wake of continuing NATO military attacks which started March 24 against Serbian targets in Yugoslavia.

European Baptist Press Service reported that some Baptist churches in Yugoslavia held worship services March 28 and others did not. First Baptist Church in Belgrade met for worship, but only about a third of its members came. Second Baptist Church in the same city canceled services.

Others were driven to worship underground. "When the sirens for warning of air raids start howling madly, we find ourselves stuck in the shelters and basements with those who don't know Christ," reported Teofil Lehotsky of Novi Sad Baptist Church. "They see the peace we have and start asking us questions they wouldn't have otherwise asked."

"Meetings in our regular time and place became difficult to attend, but now we have brand new churches -- our shelters," he added.

Many Yugoslavian Christians said they were surprised by the air attacks and that they served no useful purpose.

"The general feelings of all, including Christians, are that NATO and many Western countries have lost the direction and moral standards," said Dane Vidovic, a member of First Baptist Church in Belgrade.

Miroslav Zivkovic, a Belgrade resident and a student at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in the Czech Republic, was among many living away from Yugoslavia trying to get word of family and friends through sporadic telephone and e-mail access.

"It was a wrong decision," Zivkovic said of the NATO effort, which has resulted in more hatred being directed at ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. During a break in the bombing, one friend wrote him: "The Book of Job is our encouragement. I am sorry for the people who do not know God. I hope they will turn and weep to him. If I die, I know I am going to Christ's arms. They don't have that hope."

Baptists across the border in neighboring countries of Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro, meanwhile, struggled to meet basic human needs of waves of Kosovar Albanians fleeing the conflict.

Jonathan Steeper, director of the Baptist Center in Tirana, Albania, said March 30 that an estimated 60,000 refugees were across or nearly across the Albanian border from Kosovo. Many come in a traumatized condition, with harrowing personal reports of killings, looting and forced evacuation.

"We had refugees before, but now we have a flood," Steeper said. "The bottom line is we have a real crisis."

CBF starts fund, seeks volunteers to minister to Albanian refugees

By Robert O'Brien

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has established a fund to provide humanitarian aid to thousands of Albanian refugees fleeing Serbian ethnic cleansing and NATO bombing in Kosovo.

Meanwhile, the Fellowship's global-missions office is consulting with missionaries who work with ethnic Albanians about using volunteers and relief funds in the region.

Details are being developed, said Gary Baldrige, associate global-missions coordinator. But he said reports indicate the most pressing needs for now involve medical assistance, shelter and transportation.

Fellowship Coordinator Daniel Vestal urged Baptists to pray, to contact the CBF national office in Atlanta to designate financial gifts for "Albanian Refugee Relief" and to step forward as volunteers.

Vestal said the Fellowship will use 100 percent of the contributions for the relief ministry, cooperate with other organizations such as the Baptist World Alliance, and post updated refugee-relief information on the CBF Web site at www.cbfonline.org.

In other developments, three missionary families assigned to CBF's Albanian team evacuated their homes in neighboring Macedonia, at the suggestion of the U.S. Embassy, for what amounted to a long weekend in Thessaloniki, Greece, before returning on March 31.

The couples are Darrell and Kathy Smith, who have North Carolina, Louisiana and Texas ties; Rick and Martha Shaw, with Virginia, Texas and New Mexico ties; and Arville and Shelia Earl, with Texas, Missouri, Kansas and Louisiana ties.

"They found the situation relatively quiet when they returned from Greece, although tens of thousands of refugees have streamed into Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro," said Global Missions Coordinator Keith Parks. Combined refugee totals are expected to top 450,000.

CBF volunteer and relief efforts, coordinated by its Albanian team, will focus at present on refugees pouring into Albania.

Since 1997, when political chaos and violence forced them out of Albania, CBF's Albanian team has focused on the huge numbers of ethnic Albanians living in other countries, such as Macedonia.

"The Macedonia government allows only NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations) that it recognizes to do big projects," Parks said. "No Christian groups in Macedonia are in that number. The Albanian team doesn't think volunteers can be used at this time in Macedonia" -- a country with a population about 25 percent ethnic Albanian.

But they feel that they and CBF volunteers will be able to work successfully inside Albania to help combat the refugee crisis there.

"We have Christian compassion for both the Serbian people and the Albanian people," Vestal said, "but, given the vast needs of the Albanians, we will focus on them at present."

Re-emphasizing the need for prayer, Vestal said: "Baptist people need to pray that the conflict will cease and that we can find a resolution as soon as possible. Scripture commands us to pray for our enemies. I think this compels us to pray for President Slobodan Milosevic and other Serbian leaders and that they will stop the atrocities in Kosovo.

"We should also pray for the Albanian people and their suffering and that God will give the world's political and military leaders the wisdom to do the right thing at the right time," Vestal said.

A retired Baptist missionary who prays actively for missionaries and global missions urged Christians to remember that "the reason for missions, rather than the physical surroundings, lies at the heart of prayer."

“When you pray, remember why the missionaries are there and that God can use even the most difficult situations to accomplish his purpose,” continued Catherine Walker of Richmond, Va.

“Don’t just pray for safety but that all of the trouble, in some mysterious way, will lead people to want to learn how to know God through Jesus Christ.”

-30-

EDITOR’S NOTE: Contributions for relief of Albanian refugees may be sent, designated for "Albanian Refugee Relief," to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, P.O. Box 450329, Atlanta, GA 31145-0329. Persons wishing to volunteer should contact the CBF global missions office at the above address or by phone: 800-352-8741; fax: 770-220-1680; or email: mmoore@cbfnet.org

International Mission Board seeking 2,000 volunteers for overseas crusades

By Marv Knox

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Two thousand U.S. Baptists are being recruited for nationwide evangelistic campaigns the next two years in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and Korea, reported Dub Jackson, Asia crusade coordinator for the Southern Baptist International Mission Board.

“These aggressive evangelistic partnership campaigns are calling for over 2,000 participants during the next 26 months,” noted Jackson, who recently met with Baptist leaders in the four countries.

The crusades -- in which teams of 10 U.S. Baptist volunteers work with overseas Baptist congregations -- are being held this summer through the spring of 2001, he said.

Korea alone has asked for 1,000 team members and 100 churches to join with them in crusades, he added. “They are praying for a new spark of real revival that will return them to the growing church they used to be.”

The Korean Baptist Convention has stopped growing in recent years, Jackson said, quoting a Baptist official there who said Korean Baptists are hoping the major partnership will “return us to the aggressive church we were in the 1970s.”

Jackson, whose office is located at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, said the partnerships have two goals. “We are praying for nationwide revival for the country where we are serving and praying that as our teams return to the U.S.A., we will bring back the spark for nationwide revival in our own country,” he said.

After the overseas crusades, Baptists in the United States should “humbly open the doors of our churches to 1,000 team members from Korea and another 1,000 team members from Asia and aggressively seek revival for America now,” Jackson said.

-30-

BJC search committee announces deadlines

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A committee seeking a new executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee has announced it will accept applications until June 7.

The search committee also set a May 7 deadline to receive nominations, allowing the committee a month to contact nominees and request application materials from them.

The new director will succeed James Dunn, who has headed the religious-liberty agency for 18 years. In September, Dunn will begin teaching at the new Wake Forest Divinity School in Winston-Salem, N.C. He will also continue part-time with the BJC as head of the newly created Baptist Joint Committee Foundation.

The search committee, which held its first meeting March 2, also developed a list of qualities it will seek in a new leader, according to a statement released by the committee's chairman, Aidsand Wright-Riggins.

The new BJC head should have a commitment to church-state separation and ecumenical and interfaith work and be able to work with the mass media, said Wright-Riggins, executive director of National Ministries, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. The candidate also must have a graduate degree in a field related to the work of the BJC, such as public policy, governmental relations, Baptist polity or history, theology or law.

Barbara Williams at the ABC/USA headquarters in Valley Forge, Pa., will accept nominations for the post, according to the search-committee statement.

-30-

-- EDITOR'S NOTE: Nominations and applications for the Baptist Joint Committee executive director should be sent to Barbara Williams, Baptist Joint Committee Search Committee, c/o American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., P.O. Box 851, Valley Forge, Pa. 19482-0851 or by fax at 610-768-2150.

Friends of New Churches accepts board resignations

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Friends of New Churches accepted resignations of four members of its board of directors March 26 and filled two officer vacancies created by turmoil late last year within the moderate Baptist church-starting network.

The four, including the vice chairman and secretary, signed an open letter in December indicating they planned to resign from the 4-year-old organization's board after a failed attempt to fire its executive director, Will Carter.

The Friends of New Churches board met in its regular semi-annual meeting March 26 in Knoxville, Tenn., the first meeting of the full board since the called meeting to consider Carter's termination Dec. 3. At the March meeting, the board elected Dale Meredith, a university professor and interim pastor in Buffalo, N.Y., as the new vice chairman, and Elaine Onley of Dothan, Ala., the new secretary.

According to a press release, a report by auditor Van Elkins discovered no misuse of funds, addressing issues raised by a former board member.

Five of the board's 14 members stepped down after supporting an effort to dismiss Carter, charging him with "ineffective execution" of the duties of his office and "a pattern of failure to respond to directives of the board." In addition, the organization's No. 2 staff member resigned, citing similar reasons.

Carter and the board's chairman dismissed those allegations and described the split as a difference of philosophy.

The press release said members and guests left the Knoxville meeting "with a great deal of hope and enthusiasm about the future" and "a renewed commitment to the mission of FNC."

A Cooperative Baptist Fellowship subcommittee is studying that group's relationship with Friends of New Churches in light of the internal dispute. The subcommittee plans to bring a recommendation concerning CBF funding of Friends of New Churches in June.

The Atlanta-based Fellowship is contributing about \$220,000 to Friends of New Churches this year, according to a CBF spokesman.

-30-

-- By Bob Allen

Supreme Court will decide mandatory student fee dispute

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to review a lower court's ruling in favor of students who objected to university fees being used for political and ideological groups with which they disagree.

The 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals held that the University of Wisconsin-Madison places a burden on the free-speech rights of objecting students when it uses their mandatory activity fees to fund such groups. A three-judge panel of the appeals court said in 1998 that requiring the objecting students to pay the fees "does engender a crisis of conscience."

The Supreme Court accepted the case March 29.

During the 1995-96 academic year, University of Wisconsin-Madison students were required to pay \$166 a semester in student fees, without which they cannot receive their grades or graduate.

While the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System controls the distribution of a certain portion of the fees to student organizations, representatives of the student body have virtually complete authority over distributing the "allocable" portion of the fees.

In a lawsuit filed during the 1995-96 academic year, students presented evidence of 18 organizations that receive allocable student fees and engage in political and ideological activities. Those groups included the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Campus Center, Campus Women's Center, Madison AIDS Support Network, Students of National Organization for Women and others.

The students' lawsuit claimed that the school's policy violated their rights of free speech and association, the Free Exercise Clause of the Constitution, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and various state laws. The RFRA claim was discarded when the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional in 1997.

After a district court granted summary judgment in favor of the students on their free-speech and free-association rights, the 7th Circuit considered the First Amendment claims.

The university's regents do not dispute that some of the student organizations engage in political and ideological speech, the appeals court noted. "Instead, the Regents argue that the First Amendment protects the rights of these organizations to engage in such speech."

"Of course it does," the court opined. "But the students do not ask that we restrict the speech of any student organization; they merely ask that they not be forced to financially subsidize speech with which they disagree."

Among other things, the appeals court said funding of the political and ideological groups was not "germane" to the educational mission of the university. It also ruled that the burden placed on the students' "First Amendment right to 'freedom of belief'" outweighs any governmental interest.

The appeals court also ruled that the board of regents cannot earmark the objecting students' activity fees to fund nonpolitical organizations and then continue to distribute the same amount of funding to the opposed political and ideological groups.

"This too is merely a bookkeeping matter, with the end result being that the objecting student subsidizes the political and ideological activities of the organizations. The dollars are fungible and splitting the same amount in two directions does not cure the obvious subsidy," the appeals court noted.

-30-

Supreme Court declines dispute over prayer deemed 'unacceptable'

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U. S. Supreme Court has refused to hear an appeal from a Utah man who was not allowed to recite a prayer at a city council meeting because an attorney deemed its text "unacceptable."

Left intact was a ruling by the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that officials in Murray City, Utah, did not violate the Constitution in rejecting the prayer. The city has the power to open its meetings with a style of prayer that over the years has come to be seen as "tolerable" in legislative settings, the appeals court said.

The Utah Supreme Court held in 1993 that the state's constitution does not prohibit a city council from opening its meetings with prayer. In protest of that decision and the resumption of legislative prayers, Utah resident Tom Snyder drafted a prayer asking that officials "will never again perform demeaning religious ceremonies as part of official government functions."

The prayer started in part: "Our Mother, who art in heaven (if, indeed there is a heaven and if there is a god that takes a woman's form)."

"We pray that you prevent self-righteous politicians from misusing the name of God in conducting government meetings," the prayer continued, "and that you lead them away from the hypocritical and blasphemous deception of the public; attempting to make the people believe that bureaucrats' decisions and activities have the stamp of approval if prayers are offered at the beginning of government meetings."

The prayer was offered, "in the name of thy son (if in fact you had a son that visited Earth)." Snyder considers himself "deeply religious," the appeals court said, "but is not yet sure what his beliefs are and leans toward agnosticism."

Snyder asked the city council in Salt Lake City if he could recite the prayer. Rather than allow it, Salt Lake City officials decided to discontinue the practice of opening council meetings with prayer.

In 1994, Snyder asked officials in Murray City for permission to recite a prayer and about the guidelines for prayers. City attorney Craig Hall responded that the prayer "is not a time to express political views, attack city policies or practices or mock city practices or policies" though he pointed out that Snyder could make such comments during the "citizen comment" portion of the meeting.

In response to correspondence that included a copy of the text of Snyder's prayer, Hall said, "The text of the proposed prayer is unacceptable" and did not follow guidelines set forth in previous letters to Snyder.

Snyder filed a complaint the day he received the denial. A split three-judge panel of the 10th Circuit rejected Snyder's claims, but the full 10th Circuit agreed to rehear part of the claim that the refusal violated the First Amendment's Establishment Clause.

The appeals court said Snyder's prayer could be characterized as "political harangue," but reserved "for another day the very difficult issue of attempting to discern the line between prayer and secular speech masquerading as prayer."

Opening legislative sessions with prayer is "deeply embedded in the history and tradition of this country," the appeals court said.

"To invoke divine guidance on a public body entrusted with making the laws is not, in these circumstances, an 'establishment' of religion or a step toward establishment; it is simply a tolerable acknowledgment of beliefs widely held among the people of this country," the court said.

The genre of legislative prayers approved by the Supreme Court "is a kind of ecumenical activity that seeks to bind peoples of varying faiths together in a common purpose," the appeals court said. While "often taking forms of invocations that reflect a Judeo-Christian ethic," such prayers typically involve "nonsectarian requests for wisdom and solemnity, as well as calls for divine blessing on the work of the legislative body."

The Constitution does not permit, however, the appeals court said, the kind of legislative prayer "that proselytizes a particular religious tenet or belief, or that aggressively advocates a specific religious creed, or that derogates another religious faith or doctrine."

Snyder's prayer falls outside the genre of legislative prayer approved by the Supreme Court, the appeals court said. "Not only does Snyder's prayer explicitly attack the genre itself, it also disparages those who believe that legislative prayer is appropriate," the appeals court continued.

In a dissenting opinion, a 10th Circuit judge said the city violated the Establishment Clause "by rejecting Snyder's request to speak based on its distaste for the content of his tendered prayer."

The dissenting opinion noted that Murray City has allowed prayers from Zen Buddhists, Native Americans and a cross-section of Judeo-Christian congregations without restricting those messages.

"The city cannot have it both ways," said the dissent. "It cannot purport to open the reverence period to a broad cross-section of the community without restrictions, while at the same time limiting a particular speaker's access to the reverence period because of its distaste for the speaker's proposed message."

U.S. Senate confirms Seiple to head religious persecution commission

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Senate has confirmed Robert Seiple, former president of World Vision Inc., as ambassador at large of the newly established Office on International Religious Freedom at the State Department.

Seiple, who has been at the State Department since August 1998 as special representative of the secretary of state for religious liberty, spoke to Associated Baptist Press after his March 24 confirmation.

"My portfolio that was given to me when I came in August hasn't changed," he said "The passage of the International Religious Freedom Act institutionalized it. We have and will continue to work for the promotion of religious liberty everywhere in the world."

The Office of International Religious Freedom was established under the religious-freedom act signed into law last year. Seiple, who was nominated to the post by President Clinton, will also act as a nonvoting member of the Commission on International Religious Freedom -- a second body established under the law that will evaluate religious persecution abroad annually and recommend penalties against countries that permit persecution.

Under the law, the president can take the recommendations of the commission, choose from a list of options detailed in the act or use the law's broad waiver authority to refrain from imposing penalties at all.

At his March 17 confirmation hearing in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Seiple said the sanctions in the bill are designed to "first do no harm." The sanctions "are the most nuanced and sophisticated that we have anywhere," he added.

The religious-freedom bill went through several revisions before becoming law. Sen. Rod Grams, R-Minn., said that he and others worked to "craft a compromise that I believe will actually allow us to achieve some progress toward religious freedom rather than earlier versions which in my judgment were counterproductive."

Grams, a member of the foreign relations committee, asked Seiple about how to work with countries to avoid imposing penalties.

Seiple, former president of Eastern College and Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, said the legislation "was written to promote religious freedom, not necessarily to target a particular country or region or certainly not a particular faith."

Seiple said that when he travels to countries, he assures officials that the "bill was not written for them, although many of the countries feel it was." He said the most persistent questions coming from other countries is, "Why do you think that you're the moral cop, the international standard for morality -- coming into our country and essentially meddling with a domestic agenda?"

"To that I would reply," Seiple said, "that first of all, human rights and specifically this particular right of religious freedom is a universal right. It does not stop at our borders. We did not invent it."

Six of the nine voting members of the advisory commission have been named. The bill is designed to ensure that five of the nine members are appointed by the party of the president at the time. Republican congressional leaders nominated former U.S. Sen. Bill Armstrong of Colorado; John Bolton, a former assistant secretary of state; Nina Shea, director of Freedom House's Program of Religious Freedom; and Elliot Abrams, a former secretary of state.

Named by Democratic congressional leaders are Archbishop Theodore McCarrick of Newark, N.J., and Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. President Clinton is expected to make three remaining nominations to the commission shortly.

Seiple, who flew 300 combat missions in the Vietnam War, later became an outspoken advocate for the healing of Vietnam's relations with the United States.

During testimony before the Senate committee, Seiple said that during Vietnam and its aftermath, "I was allowed to see faces emerge -- faces scarred by division, both home and abroad, faces scarred by the lack of will, the loss of truth, insufficient trust and anger unresolved. These are the same villains that we will need to confront in the administration of international religious freedom."

He said, "Religious freedom violations flow out of an inability for humanity to live with its deepest differences," and "at their worst, they're caused by the hatred of a relative few, generating fear in many, obsessively implemented along religious lines."

-30-

END
