

Baptist Briefs

November 4, 2009

Uzbek judge finds Baptists guilty. A judge in Uzbekistan has found three Baptist leaders guilty of tax evasion and involving children in religious activities without their parents' permission, ending a high-profile trial in the Uzbek capital city of Tashkent. Judge Nodyr Akbarov of Yakkasaray District Criminal Court ordered Pavel Peichev, president of the Baptist Union of Uzbekistan, and two colleagues to pay fines equivalent to \$5,760—more than nine times the average annual wage in Uzbekistan. The judge also ruled the Baptist union owes \$2,380 in unpaid taxes on the camp. The court banned Peichev and two other defendants—Baptist union accountant Yelena Kurbatova and Dimitry Pitirimov, director of a Baptist-sponsored summer youth camp—from administrative and financial activity for three years. Peichev, Kurbatova and Pitirimov indicated they plan to appeal the verdict. The Uzbekistan Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the separation of church and state, but a religion law in 1998 restricts many rights only to registered religious groups and limits which groups may register. Of 180 registered minority religious groups, 23 are Baptist. No Baptist church successfully has registered in the country since 1999, although some have tried to register several times.

Task force meets with state executives. Twenty-two executive directors of Baptist state conventions met with the Southern Baptist Convention's Great Commission Resurgence Task Force Oct. 27 at a hotel near Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. After the meeting, task force Chairman Ronnie Floyd, pastor of First Baptist Church in Springdale, Ark., issued a statement clarifying several issues. He stressed the task force is not considering abandoning the Cooperative Program; is not considering any recommendation that Southern Baptists partner with any parachurch or non-Southern Baptist ministry; is not trying to determine the work of

search committees and trustees currently seeking new leaders for the North American Mission Board, International Mission Board and the SBC Executive Committee; is not seeking to diminish the work of either state conventions or local Baptist associations; and is not devoting its time or energies to a discussion about specific theological issues discussed within the Southern Baptist Convention. Rather than waiting until the Orlando annual meeting, the task force plans to bring “as much as we can” to the February meeting of the SBC Executive Committee.

Archives receives Woolley Award. The Southern Baptist Historical Library & Archives has received the Davis C. Woolley Award from the Baptist History & Heritage Society. The award is given annually to a Baptist historical collection or organization for outstanding achievement in assessing and preserving Baptist history. The award recognizes that the Historical Library & Archives added to its collection 1,070 books and pamphlets in 2008, along with 43 archival and manuscript collections, 2,940 periodicals and 667 reels of microfilm. The award was based on the archives’ 2007-2008 annual report, which also noted the acquisition of the library of Baptist historian Albert Wardin and 400 linear feet of records and media from the former Southern Baptist Radio & Television Commission.