

In February 1973, the church was organized. The executive secretary of the Foreign Mission Board, Baker James Cauthen, was present for the constitution of the church and its worship service of dedication. Dr. Cauthen said: "The excellent attendance gave indication of the wide interest in the church, and the presence of representatives of many other Christian groups spoke eloquently of the good relationships which have been established from the very beginning."

George McClelland, a retired pastor, came to serve as interim pastor, on invitation of the Foreign Mission Board.

In August 1973, James Kirkendall and his family came. He was associate pastor at first; he then became interim pastor. The church grew rapidly. During the first six weeks of Dr. Kirkendall's ministry, fifty people joined the fellowship. In October 1973, Loren Turnage became pastor. He and his family came to serve in Iran after having served for two terms in Colombia, South America.

The Baptist Church in Teheran is made up largely of military personnel on training missions in Iran, diplomats, business people, and oil people. The group meets in the building of the Iranian Evangelical Congregation.

Because Iran's dominant religion is Islam, weekends are Thursday and Friday. So Bible study takes place on Friday morning at 8:15 with a worship service at 9:15. The group must be out of the building by 10:15 so the Iranian Evangelical Congregation can meet for worship at 10:30. An afternoon-evening meeting is held for youth on Friday. There is no evening service due to the overwhelming amounts of traffic on Friday evenings, but a prayer meeting is held on Sunday evening.

The church uses five or six buses to pick people up for services on

Friday morning and Sunday evening prayer meeting. This service is needed because the congregation is made up of Americans, and many Americans in Iran do not own cars. Some companies prohibit their employees from having cars. Some do not want cars because of the traffic problems.

The women of the church meet for discussion groups and are now organized into a Woman's Missionary Union. The men meet occasionally for a Thursday morning breakfast.

One of the most important elements in the life of the Baptist church in Teheran is the ministry of fellowship. Living in a land where most of the people are of a different culture and religion, the Baptists feel a great need for Christian fellowship.

A monthly fellowship dinner is held. Sometimes it is a finger-food supper, and sometimes a potluck meal. Sometimes members prepare specialties from the part of America from which they have come.

Baptist Work in Shiraz

Baptist work in Shiraz [shih-RAHZ] was begun by a group of Christians who had been living in Teheran and were transferred to Shiraz. Known as the city of roses, nightingales, and poetry, Shiraz is the romantic capital of Iran.

When the group of Christians moved from Teheran to Shiraz, a British Anglican priest was leading a group of Christians there (the Anglicans are similar to Episcopalians in belief and practice). He came to James Kirkendall and Loren Turnage to ask for a pastor for the Americans in Shiraz. Now there are two English-speaking groups; one meets in a home and the other in a church building. L. L. Richardson—a retired pastor from Texas—came, at the request of the Foreign Mission Board, to lead in this English-language work.

Baptist Work in Ahwaz

The main oil production area in Iran is at Ahwaz. In the spring of 1975, Loren Turnage and James Kirkendall were invited by the Anglican priest to attend a Bible study in Ahwaz. According to Mr. Kirkendall, the Anglicans in Iran have been converted through a new-birth experience and have had to suffer severely for their faith. Recently an Anglican priest in Teheran asked Mr. Kirkendall for information on how to build a baptistry. Kirkendall sent right away to the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville for plans. A good relationship exists between the Anglicans and the Baptists in Iran.

The first leaders in the new Baptist work in Ahwaz were a retired couple from Arkansas. James Kirkendall discovered this couple when they were living and working with an oil company in Kuwait, a neighboring country. Then they became an active part of the beginnings of Baptist work in Ahwaz.

Another couple has just arrived to assume leadership of this work. Durward and June Davis were appointed by the Foreign Mission Board to serve in Munich, Germany. They had lived in Germany previously and were anxious to return. But after hearing J. D. Hughey, area secretary for Europe and the Middle East, tell of the great need in Ahwaz, the Davises felt led of God to Iran. They finished missionary orientation in April 1976 and left for Ahwaz in June.

Reaching Iranians

James Kirkendall shares the urgent request for two missionary couples to learn the language and customs of the Iranian people and to come to begin a Baptist ministry among them. The people of the Middle East are a hospitable, not hostile, people and the response of Iranians to Americans is cordial. But it must be understood that Iran