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Fellowship joins relief effort  
for victims of Hurricane Andrew

LAKELAND, Fla. (ABP) -- At least six trucks loaded with relief supplies headed to hurricane-ravaged South Florida Aug. 27, representing the first-ever relief project sponsored by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The supplies were collected by about 20 Florida Baptist churches with ties to the state's Fellowship chapter. The national Cooperative Baptist Fellowship provided a \$15,000 emergency-relief grant to aid the project, which was organized by Pat Anderson, coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Florida.

Hurricane Andrew, one of the worst hurricanes on record, killed at least 20 people and wreaked damage estimated as high as \$20 billion in South Florida alone before crossing the Gulf of Mexico to deliver a similarly destructive blow to Louisiana. News reports estimated as many as 250,000 South Florida residents were left homeless by the hurricane, while 1.5 million people were reportedly without electricity.

Within 72 hours of the storm's assault, tractor-trailers left five Florida cities -- Daytona Beach, Gainesville, Lakeland, Tallahassee and Tampa -- to carry food, water, clothing, baby supplies and household goods to hurricane victims south of Miami. A sixth smaller truck was scheduled to leave Palatka at the same time.

All were bound for University Baptist Church in Coral Gables, which will serve as the distribution center for the relief project. Coral Gables, a small municipality within the city of Miami, missed the brunt of the storm, which hit hardest a few miles south in communities like Homestead, Perrine and Cutler Ridge.

The Fellowship grant came from a missions contingency fund within the organization's global missions budget. Although the Fellowship has set aside some money for emergency relief, officials said, this was the first time the money has been used.

Anderson, a college professor and member of the Fellowship's Coordinating Council, used the CBF grant money to buy gas-powered electric generators, a truckload of fresh fruit and \$2,000 worth of baby supplies -- food, formula and diapers. The money also paid some shipping costs.

Anderson said he was pleased with the quick response of the Fellowship and its participating churches in Florida. "The response has been incredible,

just incredible."

Most of the churches collected the supplies and arranged to transport them within 24 hours after being contacted, Anderson said.

"I feel good about it. I feel like we've done something. I can't wait to get in the truck and go down," Anderson said Aug. 26 from his home in Lakeland.

Once the supplies are delivered, Anderson said, the Florida Fellowship will begin organizing work crews to pitch in with the rebuilding.

Meanwhile, on Florida's southwest coast, First Baptist Church of Fort Myers was conducting a relief mission to small communities in the Everglades.

With the help of radio stations and other businesses in Fort Myers, the church collected food, bottled water, gas stoves, portable toilets and other supplies for Everglades communities where the church has conducted mission work in the past. Church leaders said they were afraid the remote communities would be overlooked by other relief efforts.

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-- By Greg Warner

Baptist backing of Bush expected  
to draw little criticism from pew

By Greg Warner

DALLAS (ABP) -- The close identification of two Southern Baptist agency leaders with the campaign to re-elect President George Bush may raise a few eyebrows but it's not likely to spark a revolt from Baptists in the pews, say two Baptist college professors.

"This is an illustration of the way in which the Southern Baptist Convention has changed," said church historian Bill Leonard. "I just don't think Southern Baptists will care about this."

Leonard was reacting to news that Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, was part of an evangelical coalition endorsing Bush.

The coalition -- Evangelical Leaders and Laymen for Bush/Quayle '92 -- was unveiled during the National Affairs Briefing Aug. 21-22 in Dallas, a Republican-dominated meeting that featured speeches from Bush and evangelical leaders.

Among the speakers at the briefing, which was organized by Baptist layman and Republican activist Ed McAteer, was Richard Land, executive director of the Christian Life Commission, another Southern Baptist agency.

Patterson said his involvement was as a private citizen only, and Land said his speech was "non-partisan."

But while Baptist involvement in national politics is nothing new, "this seems to take it to another level," said ethics professor David Nelson Duke of William Jewell College in Liberty, Mo. "I can't think of a parallel."

Leonard, chairman of the religion department at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., agreed.

"If Roy Honeycutt had come out for Michael Dukakis, I think it would have been a whole different thing altogether," Leonard said, referring to the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Democratic presidential candidate in 1988.

"But the whole climate has changed and this is now normative," Leonard continued. "This is part of what it means to be a conservative Southern Baptist."

"The (Southern Baptist) moderates could never have done this," he said. "But fundamentalists can, because that's part of their agenda and identity." The two professors, contacted by Associated Baptist Press, said they don't expect much reaction from average Southern Baptists.

"I think many of them will say it's OK because they agree," Leonard said.

"If Southern Baptists were going to be upset by this," Duke said, "they would have been upset several years ago.... This has been going on for a while."

Land said he decided to speak at the National Affairs Briefing because his job requires him to address "moral, social and public-policy issues" and to encourage involvement in the political process.

"I'm saying that I'm doing precisely what Southern Baptists and the Christian Life Commission have engaged me to do," Land told Baptist Press. "I gave a non-partisan speech in the best sense of the term. I didn't mention either presidential candidate or either party. I talked about principles, issues and values, and I called upon Christians to vote their convictions."

Patterson told Baptist Press he was surprised to see his name included on the published list of leaders for the evangelical coalition. He said as a private citizen he intends to vote for the Bush/Quayle ticket.

Herb Ellingwood, a national co-chair of the evangelical coalition, said the Bush/Quayle campaign is making no attempt to enlist endorsements from institutions like Patterson's. "Any person, whether it's Adrian Rogers or Pat Robertson, is endorsing the president as a citizen," he said.

Robertson, a former Republican presidential candidate, and Rogers, a Memphis pastor and three-time Southern Baptist Convention president, both spoke to the Dallas briefing.

One church-state expert said denominational leaders and pastors who endorse candidates should be able to avoid any legal problems, such as loss of their organization's tax-exempt status, as long as the person -- and not the institution or congregation -- is doing the endorsing.

But, added Baptist Joint Committee attorney Brent Walker, "There might be other reasons why you don't do it, in terms of appearances."

Dan McGee, professor of ethics at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, also offered a word of caution. For Baptist leaders to ask the public to distinguish between their personal endorsements of candidates and their denominational roles is probably asking too much, McGee said.

"It would be difficult for the average citizen or the average Southern Baptist to view such participation as anything other than both a personal political preference and the use of that office in behalf of that particular political agenda," said McGee.

The only reason religious leaders are asked to sign on with political campaigns is because that endorsement suggests the endorsement or approval of the leader's institution, McGee said.

"The most important thing to be protected here," McGee said, "is the integrity of our faith, that we not...merge any political cause with the cause of the Kingdom in any way that makes it hard to distinguish them."

McGee noted that the history of Baptists includes periods of persecution at the hands of such religio-political alliances. "Because of our Baptist heritage, we should be among the first to recognize the dangers here," he said.

Leonard also offered advice from history.

"Some of the biggest mistakes the church of Jesus Christ has made in history have come when it has identified too closely with the powers that be," Leonard said. "Almost all Protestants and Catholics who have played with that fire have gotten burned."

Leonard said he was hopeful that such questions about the interplay of religion and politics would be examined honestly by current Baptist leaders.

But Duke, chairman of William Jewell's religion department, held out little hope for any such examination because, he said, many of those Baptists most fervently involved in the political arena see themselves enrolled in "a holy cause."

"Holy crusaders rarely engage in self-critical analysis," he said. "If God's on your side, you don't have to ask anybody for permission because you already have the ultimate permission."

The battle for Baptist votes has intensified since Democratic candidate Bill Clinton, a Southern Baptist, tapped fellow Southern Baptist Al Gore as his running mate.

Many Southern Baptist leaders differ with Clinton and Gore over abortion and homosexual rights. Land, in his briefing address, urged voters to ignore factors such as denominational affiliation when deciding how to vote. "Vote your values," he said.

Meanwhile, the evangelical coalition for Bush/Quayle is soliciting more help from Southern Baptists. The organization conducted a mass mailing to 125,000 churches in late August, including many Southern Baptist congregations.

The letter, signed by Ellingwood, invites pastors to join the coalition "to make sure we continue this battle to bring faith and family forward in American life." Those who join can participate in a live teleconference with Bush to discuss "the most important issues facing us," namely abortion, government funding for religious schools, tax relief for families, and school prayer, the letter said.

"We must not be deceived by Gov. Clinton's rhetoric," wrote Ellingwood. "I believe his views on our bedrock issues are contrary to our values."

Ellingwood, a California lawyer who helps run the evangelical coalition from an office at Bush/Quayle headquarters in Washington, told ABP a date for the teleconference has not been set.

He said the coalition also is scheduling meetings "all across the United States," including one hosted by California pastor Jess Moody, who was a candidate for SBC president this year. Moody, like Patterson, is listed as a leader of the coalition.

Ellingwood said the objective of the coalition is "to register people to vote, feed them information on the (parties') platforms and issues that are in vogue..., and encourage them to vote their consciences."

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Leaders decry misuse  
of religion in campaign

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Religion has been abused as a issue in the presidential campaign, according to a statement issued Aug. 28 by a diverse group of U.S. religious leaders.

"Faith in God should unite us, not divide us," said the statement, which was signed by more than 50 persons, including 17 Baptists.

The statement was prompted in part by President George Bush's recent remark to an evangelical audience that the Democrats had left God out of their party platform.

"We begin," the statement said, "with the proposition that God is neither Democrat nor Republican nor, for that matter, American. God transcends all national and political affiliations. God's precinct is the

universe.

"Identifying the kingdom of God with any political party or candidate is presumptuous. None has a monopoly on the truth. All are subject to the faults and frailties of the human condition."

Noting the framers of the Constitution provided that there would be no religious test for public officials, the group also called upon the candidates "to honor both the spirit and letter of Article VI by refraining from further attacks based on religion."

The signers include two former U.S. congressmen, the general secretary for the National Council of Churches, the president of Habitat for Humanity, the founder of Bread for the World, the executive director of Evangelicals for Social Action, college and seminary professors, and pastors and denominational leaders from most religious groups in America.

The statement emerged as an effort among several individuals when religion became a weapon in the 1992 political campaign, said Baptist Joint Committee Executive Director James Dunn, a signer who helped to coordinate the effort.

Dunn said religious rhetoric was prominent at both national political party conventions, but comments made by Bush Aug. 22 at the National Affairs Briefing in Dallas triggered the statement.

Dunn was referring to the religious implications of Bush's charge that Democrats "left out three simple letters: G-O-D" from their party platform. Bush said the Republican platform "is different. We are proud to celebrate our country's Judeo-Christian heritage, unrivaled in the world."

"There is a pervasive temptation for politicians to claim God as their party mascot," Dunn said. "I agree with the Aug. 26 editorial in The New York Times that said faith should not be used as a 'cudgel.'"

All persons signed the statement as individuals, not representatives of their organization, because of their commitment to the prophetic role of religion in public life and church-state separation, Dunn added.

Other Baptist signers were Charles Adams, president, Progressive National Baptist Convention; Jimmy Allen, former SBC president; Joan Campbell, NCC general secretary; Tony Campolo, professor of sociology, Eastern College, St. David's, Pa.; Grady Cothen, former president, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board; Carolyn Crumpler, retired executive director, Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union; Everett Goodwin, pastor, First Baptist Church of the City of Washington, D.C.; Stan Haste, executive director, Alliance of Baptists;

Darold Morgan, former president, Southern Baptist Annuity Board; Tyrone Pitts, general secretary, Progressive National Baptist Convention; Fred Schwengel, a former congressman and now president of the Republican Heritage Foundation; James Scott, president, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.; Ken Sehested, executive director, Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America; Gardner Taylor, pastor emeritus, Concord Baptist Church, Brooklyn; Foy Valentine, former executive director, SBC Christian Life Commission; and Daniel Weiss, general secretary, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

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-- By Pam Parry

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