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Americans redefining happiness  
in terms of family, scholar says

AMHERST, Mass. (ABP) -- Americans are redefining happiness, according to a social researcher, and their definition increasingly centers on the family.

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, a research associate at the Institute for American Values, has detected a cultural shift in America away from a preoccupation with individualistic adult needs and toward a greater commitment to family and attention to the needs of children.

"It is a shift away from a calculus of happiness based on individual fulfillment and toward a calculus of happiness based on the well-being of the family as a whole," said Whitehead of Amherst, Mass.

Writing in the summer issue of Family Affairs, a publication of the Institute for American Values, Whitehead said: "Many forces might be contributing to this shift, but I believe one of the most important is the changing life cycle of large numbers of the Baby Boom generation."

During the 1970s and 1980s, many Baby Boomers -- the exceptionally large group of Americans born between 1946 and 1965 -- were in a life stage of "expressive individualism" characterized by "singlehood," individual freedom, career development and self-absorption, said Whitehead, a social historian.

In the 1990s, Baby Boomers are now marrying and becoming parents.

"They're discovering that the values that served them in singlehood no longer serve them in parenthood," wrote Whitehead. "What used to be a tight fit has now become a mismatch."

Whitehead, whose article has attracted national media attention, will be a keynote speaker at a Baptist conference on the family in February. Sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics, the conference -- "Hope, Help and Healing for the American Family" -- will be held February 15-16, 1993 in Nashville, Tenn.

Whitehead identified three distinct cultural periods for the American family during the last 50 years.

The first period was the traditional family, extending from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s. In this period, the family was characterized by married couples with children, high birth rates, high marital stability, low divorce rates, a rising standard of living and an expanding middle class.

The second period was individualism. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, divorce accelerated, birth rates declined, career and work life were idealized, and self-expression increased.

The third period Whitehead calls the "New Familism." With the leveling

off of the divorce rate, the increase in the birth rate and the new shared responsibility for work and home, a new family commitment is emerging in the 1990s.

The "New Familism" means that both parents give up something of their careers to "foster their family lives," said Whitehead. They talk less about individual rights and more about individual responsibility.

Today a majority of Baby Boomers -- 45 million -- are parents, she noted. That experience is altering cultural values. Americans are changing their minds about "staying together for the sake of the children; about the necessity of putting children's needs before their own; about marriage as a lifelong commitment; and about what it means to be unmarried and pregnant," wrote Whitehead.

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Avoid 'slavery' to institutions,  
Sherman urges Kentucky Baptists

By Marv Knox

LEXINGTON, Ky. (ABP) -- Christians must struggle continuously to break free of institutional slavery, Cecil Sherman told participants in a training meeting sponsored by the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship.

About 250 people from across the state attended the Aug. 29 meeting, held at Central Baptist Church in Lexington. In addition to plenary sessions, the meeting featured four sessions during which participants chose from 19 seminars. Topics included ethics, Sunday school curriculum, global missions, the role of the laity and partnership missions.

"The Scripture is a call to freedom," said Sherman, coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a national organization of Southern Baptists disaffected by the conservative direction of their denomination.

The Bible and church history tell an ongoing story of freedom and bondage, Sherman said. For example, the Hebrew people were freed from slavery in Egypt, only to become enslaved by religious law. Then Christians were freed from Jewish law, only to become entrapped in the hierarchy of the medieval Roman Catholic Church.

And although Protestant reformers helped break that institutional bondage, "we've been creating institutions for the last 475 years," Sherman said.

Time and time again in history, Sherman said, Christians have followed "a pattern that begins in freedom and proceeds to enslavement."

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was formed in part to allow Southern Baptists to redirect their financial support away from traditional Southern Baptist institutions they find objectionable.

Sherman read about freedom from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians and said he felt the ancient apostle would send his audience three messages today:

-- "If you're going to sing songs about freedom and say litanies about freedom, why don't you examine free-church principles again?" Sherman asked.

That question forces a focus on two areas of Baptist life, he said.

First, "if you're really going to talk about local (church) autonomy, then you're going to say we don't do theology at national conventions," he illustrated.

In contrast, the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting has focused on doctrinal theology over much of the past decade, from resolutions on women in ministry in 1984 and the priesthood of the believer in 1988 to action this year against two churches because of their stands on homosexuality.

Second, the Baptist understanding of the doctrine of the priesthood of

the individual believer denounces authoritarianism on the part of pastors, he added.

-- "Get in touch with truth-telling," Sherman urged. "These days, we're not eaten up with the desire to tell the truth. In Baptist life today, truth-telling can get you in trouble."

Many Baptists are not committed to "telling the truth about certain parts of the (biblical) text," he said.

For example, different passages provide different accounts of the same event, numbers cited in various texts are inconsistent, and translations differ on the wording of numerous passages, he said.

Consequently, many pastors feel compelled to "protect the Bible."

"You've got lots of Baptist pastors who know more truth than they're telling," Sherman said, "for if they do tell the truth, they'll get fired."

Honest Christians should stop saying they believe in an "inerrant Bible," he stressed. "Protestant scholastics say they believe in an inerrant Bible -- with eight exceptions. What if I said I had been faithful to my wife -- with eight exceptions?"

Sherman also called for truth-telling within the denomination, not the "spin-doctoring" of Baptist news.

When the chairman of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board called him to set up a meeting between board and Fellowship leaders, Sherman said, the FMB chairman claimed, "Nothing's changed at the Foreign Mission Board."

That call and the "no changes" message were not aimed at Sherman or the Fellowship, but rather at Southern Baptists who would read a news story about the conversation sent out by the board, Sherman said.

-- "Determine to be free," Sherman urged.

That decision is more difficult than it sounds, he claimed, noting the quest for freedom often conflicts with the desire for security and personal ambition.

"The most baffling thing in this is where freedom and fear collide," he added. "At our seminaries, (fear of) what might happen has shut up more people than what actually will happen.

"Where are the people who can't be intimidated?" he asked.

"Do you answer to people or to God? In a sense, both, but there is an ordering principle that puts one over the other."

In another worship service, Harrodsburg pastor Robert DeFoor urged participants to seek God's approval, not the approval of other people.

"Lurking at every corner is the temptation just to be seen by others," said DeFoor, pastor of Harrodsburg Baptist Church. "On the flip side is the temptation not to do something in order not to be seen by others."

He quoted the Apostle Paul's admonition to Timothy, "Study to show thyself approved unto God...."

"The main idea is to be approved of God," DeFoor said. "That concept...is one of the most liberating concepts of Scripture. It frees us from other people's opinion."

Kentucky Baptist Fellowship president Jim Holladay said the organization will host a laity luncheon Nov. 11, during the Kentucky Baptist Convention annual meeting in Louisville. The state Fellowship also plans to sponsor a booth at the fall convention, a statewide meeting next spring and regional meetings in the eastern, south central and western regions of the state.

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CORRECTION: In the Aug. 27 ABP story "Baptist backing of Bush...", it was incorrectly stated that Pat Robertson spoke to the National Affairs Briefing in Dallas (paragraph 19). We regret the error.  
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Baptists respond after Andrew  
rakes southern Louisiana

NEW IBERIA, La. (ABP) -- Everyone agrees Louisiana was lucky. It's not as if Hurricane Andrew was in any way kind to the Bayou State, but it could have been worse.

As it was, Andrew caused millions of dollars in damage to homes, businesses, crops and coastal wildlife and marshes in Louisiana.

But the real tragedy of the storm was measured in personal terms. One man was killed in a hurricane-spawned tornado, while dozens of others were injured by the hurricane or tornado. Scores of families were left homeless; as one report noted, there were "thousands of sad homecomings."

But Andrew did not devastate Louisiana as it did South Florida. After skirting the coast of the Bayou State for a time Aug. 26, the storm moved inland over a less-populated basin area between New Iberia and Morgan City. A direct hit in another area would have caused even more damage and perhaps more casualties.

In addition, Louisiana was aided by the fact that thousands of people fled from the path of the storm. Some 50,000 persons were reported in Red Cross shelters throughout the state. Thousands of others took refuge in homes, motels and impromptu sites across Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas and Mississippi.

Louisiana Baptists played a key role in the evacuation effort. Churches throughout the state opened their doors for evacuees.

About 300 people found refuge at North Monroe Baptist Church in Monroe, while another 100 sought shelter in the homes of the church's members. Members of Temple Baptist Church in Monroe, hearing that North Monroe Church was full, opened their facility to evacuees.

In Ruston, Baptist churches assisted in housing 1,000 persons at the local civic center. Temple Baptist Church used vans to shuttle evacuees to use showers at the church, and church youth presented puppet shows for the children.

In Shreveport, more than 300 persons sought shelter at Calvary Baptist Church. Louisiana College in Pineville, a Baptist school, and Tall Timbers Baptist Conference Center in Woodworth also housed evacuees.

The outpouring of compassion did not stop with the evacuation. Some Louisiana Baptists followed the evacuees home to aid in relief and clean-up efforts. More work teams are being formed.

The state convention's disaster-relief van served meals in Franklin, while relief vans from other states were scattered across the lower portion of Louisiana. Meanwhile, Baptists throughout the state were assembling goods and volunteers to assist in the recovery.

Several churches in the south Louisiana reported wind and water damage. First Baptist Church of Morgan City suffered extensive damage to one end of its education building. Bayou Vista Baptist Church lost part of its building. Amelia Baptist Church reportedly sustained extensive damage. First Baptist Church of Grand Isle lost its roof. Various other churches sustained some roof damage. Reports from other areas were slow to come in.

-- By Lacy Thompson

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