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Baptist relief workers find
baby amid Andrew's rubble

By Greg Warner

FLORIDA CITY, Fla. (ABP) -- An infant who survived the destruction of his mobile home by Hurricane Andrew spent almost a week buried under the debris before being rescued by Baptist relief workers Aug. 29.

Almost six days after the hurricane hit Aug. 24, a Baptist work crew found the child amid the wreckage of the Everglades Labor Camp, once a mobile home park for migrant workers in Florida City. The crew, from University Baptist Church in nearby Coral Gables, was delivering food to park residents left homeless by the hurricane.

The workers scoured the area for the baby's parents but to no avail, said Mack Wiggins, who was part of the work crew. Although the infant was presumed to have lived in one of the shattered mobile homes, none of the residents who were left at the camp could offer a clue to the child's identity.

The workers speculate the baby's parents either were killed or assumed their missing child was dead.

The infant, estimated to be about six months old, was immediately turned over to Red Cross nurse Ginny Hammond who accompanied the work crew. The child was taken to a temporary hospital set up at Homestead Middle School, Wiggins said.

Officials of the American Red Cross could not be reached by telephone Sept. 3 to confirm the condition of the child or if its identity had been determined.

The labor camp, one of many in the southernmost reaches of the storm's path, was home to many illegal migrant workers. Fearful of detection by authorities, most did not evacuate before the hurricane. Relief workers counted 512 residents who had weathered the storm, but an undetermined number of dead bodies were pulled from the debris.

"Every trailer was two-foot high," said one Baptist relief worker.

Larry Krezmien, a construction contractor from Fort Lauderdale, was the first outsider to reach the camp. "These people virtually had nothing out there," said Krezmien, a volunteer who shut down his Fort Lauderdale business to spend most of the first week at the camp. "The hurricane came

through and destroyed the fields, the trailers, everything."

Krezmien and other volunteers set up a makeshift kitchen and medical unit and secured the first food and other supplies for residents.

Many of the supplies came from the Baptist workers at University Baptist, which was the distribution center for supplies collected by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Florida.

Wiggins, a commercial printer and member of University Baptist, described the damage, particularly in the area's many mobile home parks, as "mind-boggling." A mobile home owned by his own family was leveled, he said. "I couldn't find the wheels or the chassis."

For shelter, many residents have made lean-tos out of scraps from their homes, using bed sheets as a shield from the sun, he said.

Even four days after the storm, relief workers were finding people living in their wrecked homes, Wiggins said. "And these are not just migrant workers," he said. "These are retired people (too)."

"The people don't have anyplace to go," he said.

Although federal troops have built tent cities to house the homeless, many residents are reluctant to abandon what possessions are left in the rubble of their homes.

Food distribution has been a priority for government and benevolence teams. But residents who have stayed with their homes often are four or five miles from the nearest food and water, Wiggins said. Two weeks after the hurricane, most of the hardest hit communities were still without electricity.

In addition to distributing donated food, the relief teams organized by University Church helped church members and other area residents salvage their belongings and find shelter.

"We had 63 families (in the church) wiped out, and I mean wiped out," said Dan Yeary, pastor of University Baptist.

By Sept. 2 the church had found shelter for almost all of its displaced members, as well as many others left homeless by Andrew. Many church members opened their homes to house the storm's refugees; some in spare bedrooms, others in garages. Realtors in the church have arranged for some vacant houses to be used temporarily by homeless families, Yeary said.

Up to 150 volunteer workers from Florida and beyond were scheduled to arrive for the Labor Day weekend, said Yeary, whose own church was far enough north to escape major damage.

The volunteers would be housed at the church and dispatched in work teams to help area residents salvage possessions and move to temporary housing. Construction crews would begin repairing those homes worth saving.

As news of University's relief effort spread by word of mouth, 24 churches donated relief supplies, construction materials and money, Yeary said. The churches, most affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, came from Florida, Texas, Georgia and Kentucky. Others planned to send work teams for the Labor Day weekend.

Meanwhile, similar disaster-relief work was being conducted at other Miami sites under the sponsorship of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood. Brotherhood mobile feeding stations were serving hot meals six hours after Andrew's winds stopped blowing, long before federal troops and assistance arrived.

Brotherhood volunteers from 10 states served an estimated 80,000 meals a day during the height of the crisis, drawing plaudits from the American Red Cross and government relief workers.

Bob Simpkins, on-site coordinator of the 13 Brotherhood feeding operations, said Southern Baptists are making a good impression on Miami, a city where Baptists are few and not well known.

"There's a pretty unanimous agreement among anybody that knows

anything down here that we're carrying the bulk of the load," Simpkins said of the feeding operation. "The Red Cross has stated they could not function without Southern Baptists."

Simpkins, Brotherhood director for the Kentucky Baptist Convention, predicted that the feeding operation would be necessary for another three or four weeks. Meanwhile, more volunteers were moving in to help in reconstruction.

Although the Fellowship and the Southern Baptist Brotherhood are conducting separate relief efforts, there is no conflict, Yearly reported.

"It's like two people trying to save five people who are drowning," Yearly said. "You just save one and go back for another."

"I'm proud of our (church) people, our community and our Baptist brothers," he said.

The primary problem that confronted the Baptist relief effort was "too many people desperately trying to assume leadership," Yearly said. "For a while we had 4,000 chiefs and not enough Indians."

Yearly and the other Baptist workers said the tasks of recovery and rebuilding will continue for a long time. But Yearly said he already can see long-term benefits on the horizon.

"The truth is this is going to be a better community," he said. "People are finding neighbors they didn't know existed. I honestly believe 10 years from now this is going to be one of the strongest possible communities, because there aren't going to be any aliens here."

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Texas leaders call
for Somalia relief

By Orville Scott

DALLAS (ABP) -- Three leaders of the Baptist General Convention of Texas have issued a call for all-out relief efforts to victims of war, famine and AIDS in Somalia.

In a statement, BGCT President Dick Maples of Bryan, BGCT Executive Director William Pinson Jr., and Levi Price Jr. of El Paso, chairman of the 193-member BGCT Executive Board, praised the "concern and humanitarian efforts of the United Nations to bring food to the embattled, hungry people in Bosnia.

"Now we must deal immediately with the even more overwhelming tragedy in Somalia, where an estimated 1.5 million people are in immediate danger of starving to death and 4.5 million ultimately face starvation," the Baptist leaders said.

"We urge our government and the United Nations -- as was done in Bosnia -- to take whatever humanitarian and Christian actions are necessary to relieve the needless suffering of millions of people in Somalia."

Also, the Baptists leaders called on "every concerned Christian to pray and use all available influence to see that food, medicines and materials for shelter will get to those who have the most urgent need."

Somalia is in the most serious condition of any nation in the world, according to the Red Cross. The East African nation has been racked by civil war since 1988 and caught in a state of anarchy since dictator Mohamed Siad Barre was deposed in 1991.

The death toll has reached 2,000 a day, and relief workers say that one-fourth of Somalia's children are already dead.

About 1 million Somalis are refugees. Southern Baptists are

ministering to refugees who manage to flee to Kenya, but have not been allowed to help within Somalia.

Baptist World Aid, the relief arm of Baptist World Alliance, said that, in addition to supporting aid agencies working in Somalia, BWAid is working through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and Canadian Baptists, contributing towards massive feeding and medical programs for Somali refugees in Kenya.

Liboi, the largest refugee camp in Kenya, has about 380,000 refugees, some 320,000 of them Somali.

The United States has sent 145,000 tons of food and transportation worth \$200 million to aid refugees in Kenya, but most of it may not arrive before October, relief workers said.

Joe Haag of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, who coordinates world hunger education for Texas Baptists, said, "Baptists should be encouraged by the relief work being done by their missionaries to aid Somali refugees along the Kenya border.

"They need more financial aid to help relieve suffering there and, very soon we hope and pray, in Somalia itself."

Gifts can be designated to Somalia relief by sending checks directly to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Haag added. "As always, 100 percent of hunger funds are used in direct ministry."

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D.C. church severs ties
to SBC over homosexuality

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A second congregation has severed ties with the Southern Baptist Convention since that body adopted strict positions against churches that affirm homosexuality.

In a virtually unanimous vote Aug. 30, Riverside Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., adopted a statement saying "it is time to rend our relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention...."

The 125-member congregation has been aligned with both the Southern Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., as are all churches in the District of Columbia Baptist Convention. The church's statement affirmed its continuing relationship with American Baptists, as well as with the Progressive National Baptist Convention and the Baptist World Alliance.

Earlier in August, Covenant Baptist Church in Houston voted to withdraw from the SBC after messengers to the denomination's annual convention in Indianapolis expelled two North Carolina churches for affirming homosexual conduct. The convention also took the first step toward revising the SBC constitution to exclude from SBC affairs all congregations that "affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior."

Critics within the SBC charged that the convention's actions would change the way traditionally autonomous congregations relate to the denomination and open the door for exclusion of churches over a variety of moral issues.

While the SBC's hard-line stance toward homosexuality was a precipitating factor in Riverside's decision, recent SBC positions on issues such as the "priesthood of the believer" also weighed heavily, according to Michael Bledsoe, pastor of the congregation.

"I'd say the continued erosion of the historic Baptist principles and

the recent action by the Southern Baptist Convention in Indianapolis left us with no choice," Bledsoe said, adding that the congregation has been struggling for 10 years with its relationship with the SBC.

"We had to get out of the Southern Baptist Convention so we could remain Baptist," Bledsoe said.

Bledsoe said the church has not sent messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention and not contributed financially to Southern Baptist work for several years.

Riverside's statement, approved on a 25-to-0 vote with one abstention, lamented that "so much of the past decade in the Southern Baptist Convention has been spent erecting walls.

"How is it that our generation has been graced to see the Iron Curtain collapse and people around the globe demand their freedom but within this Baptist convention, we have witnessed the brutal separation of people along the lines of gender, race and orientation?"

The statement emphasized Riverside's commitment to being inclusive.

"We draw the circle of redemption as large as we can. We do not believe we are a white church, a black church, a male church, a female church, a heterosexual church or a homosexual church. We want to be the church of Jesus Christ," the statement declares.

Bledsoe also expressed concern about the effect of the SBC action on individuals.

"When people who are gay come into my office, I have consistently found them to be spiritually thirsty and hungering to serve Christ and wounded," he said. "And the action by the SBC to weigh in against a group of people seems reprehensible.

"What conventions forget is that a lot of people who are gay and lesbian are truly conservative and believe their pastor and leaders, and when they weigh in saying, 'You are a terrible person,' they believe it."

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Violence concerns Americans most about TV programming

GLENDALE, Calif. (ABP) -- Too much violence is the No. 1 concern Americans have about television programming, according to a new study by the Barna Research Group.

In the nationwide study of American adults, the Barna group found viewers more concerned about violence than sexual content, profanity and "non-traditional or liberal values."

However, viewers who expressed distaste for television content were less likely to say they would support boycotts of the sponsors of offensive programming.

Only about one-fourth of Americans would support such a boycott for any of the issues mentioned above, even though anywhere from 43 percent to 73 percent are upset by the issues.

Seventy-two percent of those surveyed said there is too much violence on TV, and 76 percent said they think there is more violence on TV today than five years ago.

But only 28 percent said they would be likely to boycott sponsors of a program with "very high levels" of violence.

Americans' second concern about TV is the amount of sexual activity it presents. While 84 percent of those surveyed said sexual content has increased on TV in the past five years, only 65 percent said there is "too

much sexual activity" on TV currently.

However, this issue generated the highest percentage of people willing to support a boycott of advertisers. Such a boycott likely would be supported by 30 percent of respondents.

The third most common concern registered was about profanity, with 57 percent saying they are concerned about the language used on TV.

The issue of "non-traditional" and "liberal" values portrayed on TV -- a hot topic in the current presidential election year -- concerns fewer Americans than the violence, sexuality and profanity issues.

Only 43 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, "There are too many non-traditional or liberal values on TV." However, a majority of 57 percent believe the portrayal of such values has increased in the last five years.

Overall, this year's television programming was labeled "excellent" by only 3 percent of respondents. Another 26 percent described it as "good," 36 percent said it is "fair," 13 percent said it is "not too good" and 19 percent said it is "poor."

Attitudes expressed on all these issues varied significantly by age groups. In every case, there was a 20-to-30 percentage point spread between the views of 18-to-34-year-olds and those older than 65. Respondents in the 35-to-64-year-old category fell at various points in between the two other groups.

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-- By Mark Wingfield

Child-care regulations pose
church-state threat, BJC says

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Newly imposed regulations implementing two child-care programs would allow government money to be used for religious instruction and activities, according to the Baptist Joint Committee.

The Department of Health and Human Services recently issued its final rule on two programs designed to help low-income families with child-care needs. The department issued an interim final rule a year ago, and the BJC was among those who filed public comments pointing out church-state problems with the rule.

"Although the BJC comments were noted in the final rule, the department mostly ignored our criticisms," said Brent Walker, BJC associate general counsel.

While the BJC applauds efforts to help low-income families, Walker said, it opposes government money supporting religious activities of church child-care centers.

Religious organizations provide about one-third of the nation's child care.

The final rule for the first program, Child Care and Development Block Grants, provides both direct grants to child-care providers and vouchers for parents to use to purchase services from a variety of providers, including church child-care centers.

Walker said the act and the regulations generally disallow religious activities when providers receive direct government aid, but religious instruction is allowed when providers receive vouchers. The rule suggests, however, that a provider receiving direct grant money could still engage in religious activities if those dollars were not used to support those activities.

For example, a child-care center operating out of a church basement arguably could invite a minister to provide religious instruction to the children in the sanctuary as long as the minister was not compensated with grant money, the BJC said.

"The BJC objected that where funds are received by a sectarian organization the prohibition on religious activities should run throughout the operation," Walker said.

The final rule for the second program, Aid to Families With Dependent Children At-Risk Care, had no church-state language limiting activities that sectarian providers could engage in with public funds, he added.

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-- By Pam Parry

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Richard Land, executive director of the SBC Christian Life Commission, has objected to the Aug. 28 ABP story "Baptist backing of Bush..." in which he is described as having "close identification...with the campaign to re-elect President George Bush...."

The story reported the fact that Land was a speaker at the National Affairs Briefing in Dallas. The briefing was held on the heels of the Republican National Convention and described by most political observers as playing a key role in the effort to solicit evangelical support for the Bush/Quayle ticket.

The Republican-dominated program, which was organized by Republican strategist Ed McAteer, featured speeches by Bush, other Republican political figures and evangelical leaders. The story also noted evangelical leaders used the occasion to unveil a coalition of evangelicals endorsing Bush, although Land was not one of them.

Land maintains his speaking at the National Affairs Briefing did not constitute identification with the campaign to re-elect Bush. He said he delivered a non-partisan speech, which was noted in the story. He also wished to emphasize the distinction between the endorsement of Bush by SBC seminary president Paige Patterson, which was mentioned in the story, and Land's participation in the briefing, which he said did not constitute endorsement or identification.

ABP stands by the story. However, in the interest of fairness, we wanted to alert you to Land's objection and to provide you with the following quote from him regarding the story.

"It's both unfair and inaccurate to say that there is 'close identification' between the Christian Life Commission or Richard Land and 'the campaign to re-elect President George Bush.' The CLC has scrupulously avoided talking about campaigns and giving the appearance of endorsement of candidates. We have dealt with, and continue to deal with, issues."

The preceding comes from a statement issued by Land at the request of ABP. The CLC asked that the entire statement be carried in its entirety. However, it would be against ABP policy to reproduce the remainder of the statement, which already has been reported in other forms. The entire statement is available from the CLC.

Thank you.

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