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Bill Clinton indicates need  
to protect religious liberty

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Democratic presidential nominee Bill Clinton cited the need for the Religious Freedom Restoration Act during a Sept. 9 address to Jewish leaders in Washington.

The Arkansas governor, a Southern Baptist, told the members of the B'nai B'rith Biennial International Convention that America needs a U.S. Supreme Court that does not hand down "ill-advised rulings" that necessitate congressional intervention with legislation such as RFRA.

RFRA, backed by a 53-member coalition of religious and civil-liberties organizations, would restore the strict "compelling interest" test that the Supreme Court formerly required government to meet before restricting religious practice.

Under the standard, government could restrict religious practice only to protect a state interest of the highest order, such as safety or health, and if the least restrictive means of safeguarding that interest had been used.

The high court virtually abandoned the standard in its 1990 decision in Employment Division vs. Smith

Clinton, a member of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, acknowledged he comes from a different faith perspective than his Jewish hosts but said that "we were both raised in a tradition which champions tolerance and which defends freedom."

"We both have absolute faith in the primacy of each individual's conscience and judgment," Clinton continued. "We believe everyone ought to have the freedom to worship God in his or her own way. We believe in the strength of our country and our churches and synagogues to draw from the constitutional separation between church and state."

The nation needs to become unified and move forward together, Clinton said. America is not just a place but an idea, he said, "an idea cherished and given life by Puritans and Catholics, by Jews and Baptists, by Republicans and Democrats, by women and men, by people of all colors, of all races, of all religions."

A church-state specialist who chairs the Coalition for the Free

Exercise of Religion lauded Clinton's implicit endorsement of RFRA.

Oliver Thomas, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, said: "We hope Mr. (George) Bush will join Mr. Clinton in supporting RFRA. This is a bipartisan effort that deserves the support of both presidential candidates."

The BJC and the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission are among the religious groups supporting RFRA (H.R. 2797, S. 2969).

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-- By Pam Parry

Miami limps toward recovery  
with help from Baptists, others

By Greg Warner

HOMESTEAD, Fla. (ABP) -- A mother sits glassy-eyed in the doorless opening of her home, trying to catch a rare breeze to fend off the 90-degree heat. Two small children play on the stoop of the scarred concrete-block house, which has plywood where windows used to be and only air where a roof once stood.

The yard is littered with debris blown from who knows where, scattered fragments of distant lives that once had order. A car in the driveway bears the mark of Andrew -- a deep two-foot-wide groove across the roof and plastic sheeting over a broken window.

Most of the home's contents -- carpet, clothes, furniture, appliances, toys, trinkets -- lie in a wet heap six feet high at the street waiting to be hauled away.

This for many is life in south Dade County. The scene, or a similar one, is repeated hundreds of times in dozens of neighborhoods ravaged by Hurricane Andrew.

Yet there are other scenes: Neighbors and out-of-town volunteers nailing tarpaper to a tattered roof to keep out more rain. Soldiers playing volleyball with the homeless in a tent city. Retirees in yellow Baptist disaster-relief hats serving free hot meals to waiting storm victims. A caravan of school buses ferrying thousands of volunteers into Homestead and other South Dade communities for a Labor Day clean-up.

It is a mixture of images -- some haunting, some uplifting -- as South Florida limps toward recovery. Two weeks after Andrew unleashed its wrath on Miami and the adjacent communities to the south, some of Andrew's wounds are turning to scars.

The bare essentials of food, water, shelter and clothing are now available to most hurricane victims, though some needs persist. Southern Baptist mass-feeding units, which played such a critical role in the initial days of the post-storm crisis, continue to provide meals in cooperation with the American Red Cross.

They are aided now by about 23,000 soldiers, who have been assigned the yeoman's share of relief responsibilities in the hardest-hit areas. These units include the elite 82nd Airborne, which invaded Panama to capture Manuel Noriega in 1990 but willingly unloaded and guarded food supplies at Baptist feeding stations.

Tent cities, erected by the military but initially ignored by displaced residents, began filling up over the Labor Day weekend as many Red Cross school-based shelters were shut down to make room for returning

school children.

Other residents who initially had remained in their damaged homes sought refuge at the tent camps after they grew weary of coping with life without electricity or without a roof over their heads. Two weeks after the storm, 118,000 homes still were without electricity.

Hurricane Andrew, now ranked as the worst disaster in American history, destroyed or damaged 103,000 houses in South Florida and left 350,000 people homeless. An estimated 80 percent of Homestead's houses are uninhabitable.

Most residents rode out the storm in their homes. Only those closest to the ocean and considered susceptible to flooding were evacuated; Red Cross shelters took in 84,361 people.

It was not flooding but the 164-mph winds that did the greatest damage. Roofs were peeled back or sent airborne, exposing contents and residents alike to a seemingly endless barrage of rain and debris. In some neighborhoods, exposed roof trusses fell like dominoes and walls collapsed around the residents.

Sherrie Peters lived in one of the neighborhoods most heavily damaged. She and her husband and three children escaped injury even though several walls in their house collapsed. "I thought, this is probably going to crumble around us," said Sherrie, a member of University Baptist Church in Coral Gables. They finally braced themselves in a closet and prayed until the storm passed.

There were fewer deaths reported -- 38 -- than the devastation would suggest. Even two weeks after the storm, however, several thousand people were still missing. Although undoubtedly some of those simply had not returned after evacuating, many residents expect the death toll to rise.

By Labor Day most homes worth saving had been secured. Temporary roof repairs were being made. With some sporadic looting of homes reported, many residents had moved their possessions to drier, safer locations. Most who couldn't stay in their homes found shelter with friends or relatives.

An army of volunteers descended on south Dade County over the Labor Day weekend for, well, labor. They cleaned debris from yards, patched roofs, made other repairs and helped displaced residents settle into temporary shelters.

United Way of Miami estimated 12,000 to 15,000 volunteers took part in their work projects. Many other volunteers worked through churches.

Southern Baptists alone counted about 1,200 workers from as far away as North Dakota who pitched in for clean-up, repair and mass-feeding projects sponsored by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood, a men's organization.

Southern Baptists, who were among the first to respond to the disaster, vowed to stay on. C. A. Easterling, who led a disaster-relief team from Kentucky, said Sept. 5 his group's mass-feeding unit would stay operational at Wayside Baptist Church "till the need is over -- maybe four more weeks."

Meanwhile, at University Baptist Church another 175 volunteers from several states repaired roofs and cleared debris from homes in a relief project coordinated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Florida. In the two weeks since the storm, University completed 223 work orders with crews and supplies from 35 churches. They too will work on.

"You have no idea what the tonic is for the soul that you represent," University Pastor Dan Yeary told the volunteers during a devotional Sept. 6. "Literally years from now, people will come to Christ because of what you are doing."

Noting Baptists are not well known in South Florida, Yeary added, "The term 'Baptist' is scary to them but it won't be anymore."

All told, Andrew inflicted harm estimated at \$20 billion on South Florida, more than Hurricane Hugo and the San Francisco earthquake combined. President George Bush has asked Congress for \$7.6 billion in aid for the region, much of it in the form of loan guarantees, with more aid coming from state agencies.

More than homes were damaged by the storm's onslaught, however. Many businesses have been unable to reopen and others never will. The disaster immediately tripled the number of jobless Dade County residents to 300,000, 31 percent of the population.

But numbers and even pictures fail to convey the scope of the devastation.

It was pervasive. Almost nothing in Andrew's path -- no home, no street, no business, no life -- escaped the onslaught. For 20 miles along the highways that stretch south from Miami, drivers scan a sea of bared plywood, tattered tarpaper and fresh plastic sheeting.

It was indiscriminate, hitting high-priced suburbs and low-income housing alike. In neighborhoods hardly recognizable even to their residents, houses are distinguishable now only by the unique hurricane scars they bear.

Most are spray painted with street numbers and the names of insurance companies to aid adjusters. Such post-disaster graffiti offered residents a kind of spray-paint catharsis, a chance to issue warnings and promises to the watching world: "Nice try, Andrew." "We'll be back." "Thank God we survived." "Whew!" "Looters will be shot!" "For sale...Not!"

Once lofty trees, now stripped bare of every leaf and all but the sturdiest limbs, cast ghostly silhouettes against a sky turned calm and blue. The lush greenery that used to distinguish the region now lies in endless brown mounds along virtually every street.

As difficult as this disaster is to fathom, researchers say it could have been much worse. If Andrew's 20-mile-wide swath had made landfall 20 miles further north, they say, at the center of Miami's business and residential development, damage could have tripled to \$62 billion and 1.6 million of the area's 2 million people could have been left homeless.

Instead, Andrew saved its most brutal blows for those least able to withstand them -- primarily the lower-income communities of Homestead, Goulds and Florida City.

These are Dade's southernmost communities, far from the affluent and middle-class Miami suburbs. Here the many traffic arteries that empty to the south from Miami funnel down to one highway, U.S. 1, which begins the long stretch into the Florida Keys.

Many of the area's families, particularly the many migrants and other agricultural workers, lived with economic hardship before the hurricane. For them the aftermath of Andrew presents a challenge not so much to recover but to survive.

A concentration of mobile homes in the area made Andrew's wrath even more severe. Many were stripped down to the floor by the wind, scattering the contents in all directions with a force typical of tornadoes.

One retired Florida City couple, who were visiting out of state when the hurricane hit, returned to inspect the remains of their mobile home -- their only residence -- which was completely demolished. "We've lost everything," the man said. "But at least we're alive. I'm just glad everyone got out."

Restoring homes is only one of the tasks facing South Florida residents. Restoring lives may prove more difficult.

Amid the bustle of repair and recovery, a few people are seen in search of something normal: A woman mows the grass around her battered house. A man sweeps dirt from his driveway while his yard is laden with

tree limbs and house parts. A golfer lines up a shot on a windblown golf course, although the hole he targets has no flagstick left.

Some churches and agencies are offering counseling to help families, and particularly children, address the emotional wounds left by Hurricane Andrew. Billy Graham and Jesse Jackson visited Florida City and Homestead over the Labor Day weekend to encourage storm victims.

Many damaged churches held services Sunday, Sept. 6. At First Baptist Church of Cutler Ridge, which has housed a major relief operation, Pastor Charles Koch addressed a crowd of about 300 local residents and relief workers who assembled outside the church's badly damaged sanctuary. Preaching in shirt sleeves and tennis shoes, he invited storm sufferers to talk to trauma counselors working at the church.

Koch told worshipers they can count on God's presence. "He comes when he is invited," Koch said, while in the background volunteers continued to repair the roof of an educational building. "In the midst of the trials, in the midst of the difficulties, he will be there."

At First Baptist of Perrine, where the roof fell in on the sanctuary, 1,000 people worshiped in two services in the fellowship hall. Pastor Tommy Watson told church members "God has given us a wonderful opportunity" to reach people in need.

Like Cutler Ridge, the Perrine church hosted a massive relief effort, with donated food and clothing being dispensed from beneath the church's covered walkways.

"The happiest people in the world are those who are trying to make other people happy," Watson told church members, many of whom were both hurricane victims and volunteers.

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Profanity use on increase  
among young school children

By Kathy Palen

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- When one of Peggy George's kindergarten students lets loose with a four-letter word, George tries to explain calmly that such language is inappropriate at school. If her little chat fails to convince the child, George has that child call his or her father on the telephone and repeat the newly employed word.

"Usually that takes care of it," says George, a Southern Baptist who teaches at Nashville's Julia Green Elementary School.

George, who returned to teaching several years ago after an 18-year absence from the public school classroom, said she has seen a vast difference in the amount of profanity that children use.

"When I returned to teaching, I was at a school in a low-income area of Nashville, where the students often struggled just to survive," she said. "I was shocked by some of the language that was used by the students. But I was more shocked that the same language was being used by my students at Julia Green. I would estimate that two-thirds of my students are from homes in which both parents have a college education."

George, a member of Immanuel Baptist Church in Nashville, notes that all children experiment with language, especially language that evokes emotion or shock. But, she adds, the increased use of profanity by children reflects more than just experimentation.

George cited several factors that may be contributing to the upswing in children's use of profanity. First, she said, as families face more and

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more pressures, parents' frustrations may come out in the use of certain language in front of their children. Children also may be hearing and learning inappropriate language from other children in such settings as day-care centers, she said.

"It also alarms me that American families are not spending enough time with their children," George added. "I think families from other countries often do better with the responsibility of parenting, including helping children to develop language and all kinds of behavior."

"In recent years, I've had Japanese students in my kindergarten classes who began the year speaking no English. By the end of the school year, the children were not only speaking English, but reading English. Often in these kinds of homes, a high priority is given to the child, with parents teaching, reading and modeling good behavior."

George is not alone in noticing an increase in the use of profanity among school children.

Profanity has become a way of communicating among students, said Lynn Yeager, an eighth-grade counselor at a middle school in Birmingham, Ala. Yeager said she has seen a definite increase in the use of profanity during her 15 years in public education.

The use of such language in schools disrupts the learning process, Yeager said. "Because the language is unacceptable to the teacher and to other students, the teacher can't let it go without correction," she explained. "That takes time away from instructional time. It also imposes embarrassment on the children."

There are several ways parents can help teachers in dealing with the problem of profanity, said Yeager, a member of Riverchase Baptist Church in Birmingham. First, she said, parents can support teachers in trying to control children's use of profanity rather than being in a state of denial.

"Parents can make the child responsible for his or her behavior," she said. "Too often there are no boundaries, and children are allowed to do what they want to do. Also, some parents deny that their child uses profanity at school because the child doesn't use it around them."

Parents can model correct language for their children and monitor the types of television programs and movies their children view, Yeager said.

Marvin Lane, a recently retired elementary school principal from Chattanooga, Tenn., agreed that parents can play an important role in reducing children's use of profanity.

Too often parents today do not take the time to carry on conversations with their children, Lane said.

"Parents can be role models for their own children," said Lane, a member of First Baptist Church in Chattanooga. "They can speak pleasantly about the school, about the teachers and about the school administrators. They can take some time to be positive with their children about what they learn at school. They should take some time to talk with the child about what happened during the school day and to praise the child for accomplishment. And if there are problems, they should explain to the children that this is not the kind of behavior that is acceptable and support the teacher and the principal."

Lane said that during the 20 years he served as a principal he encouraged his teachers to establish rules for classroom behavior and then to enforce those rules -- including ones about the use of profanity -- consistently and fairly. He added that he always advocated handling problems in a positive way so that the students did not develop negative attitudes or low self-esteem.

Robert Parham, director of the Nashville-based Baptist Center for Ethics, said parents have an ethical responsibility to play an active role in curbing the use of profanity by children.

"The rising tide of four-letter words among elementary school children results from the steady stream of profanity in popular movies, videos and television programs and the failure of parental modeling and discipline," Parham said. "It's not enough for parents and others to blame the media. Parents must be responsible and take initiatives to reign in their own language and that of their children."

Just as more and more parents teach their children that smoking harms their health, parents also must teach that profanity scars their moral development, he explained.

"At the same time," Parham added, "the media must be responsible to advance the common good. We are a freer and stronger community with complete conversation and full expression about issues. Profanity short-circuits healthy expression about feelings and issues."

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God sings through his people,  
songwriter Michael Card says

By Mark Wingfield

BOWLING GREEN, Ky. (ABP) -- The Christian's life is a song God is singing through him or her, according to singer/songwriter Michael Card.

Card, who has written contemporary Christian classics such as "El Shaddai," begins a 50-city tour in September with a benefit concert for the Baptist Student Union at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green Sept. 22.

It was at Western Kentucky, Card said, that he heard a new song God wanted to sing through him. As a student at WKU, he discovered his gift as a songwriter and began his professional music career. Card, who was raised in a Southern Baptist home, said he hopes his campus concert encourages other seeking students to grow in Christian faith.

"One reason I really feel a special call to be playing on campuses -- and we'll be on a number of campuses during this tour -- is because I believe it is during that period of your life that most people who make really serious decisions for Christ are impacted.

"College age is an important time to speak to people," he explained. "You're away from home, you're sort of deciding on your own what you're going to be and what your stand is going to be."

The tour features music from his latest recording, "The Word: Recapturing the Imagination." The album, part three of an Old Testament trilogy, focuses on the prophets.

Card spent a year studying the prophets before writing the songs. One of his most basic conclusions was that "God sings through the prophets," he said.

"God, all through the Bible, is speaking through visions that basically are songs," he explained. "The thing that excites me is to realize that God is still speaking to me in those ways, that my life is a song that God is sort of singing. He's singing to me, through me."

Card also realized there's more to understanding the prophets than translating locusts into B-52 bombers and the anti-Christ into the pope, he said.

Like most people, Card said, he struggled to understand the prophets. "The standard approach is on a predictive angle," he noted. "But I think everybody realizes there's more to the prophets than that.

"My focus was on what God is trying to do through the prophets.... I

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think "I just asked myself why God speaks the way he speaks."

Finally, Card said, "I realized that when God speaks to us, he is trying to recapture our imagination."

Imagination is the eye of the heart, he explained. "The Bible speaks to your imagination because it is the imagination that reaches both your heart and your mind."

"When John in Revelation 21 talks about God standing at the door and knocking, I think that door is the imagination. When the vision starts, John says, 'I beheld a door was open in heaven,' and I wonder if that door wasn't a door that was in John, the door of his imagination."

To look only for predictions of future events in the prophets is to miss the point, Card said. "The prophets are about listening to God, about being recaptured by God. The point is not waiting to see if all those things come true. The point is changing your heart now."

Card's latest songs -- like most of his earlier work -- contain thoughtful texts that challenge listeners to delve further into the Bible.

"Ultimately, I want the music to be a vehicle back to Scripture," he said. "If people just listen to my songs and get their ideas from that, they've lost and I've lost."

This emphasis on biblical music has a direct relation to Card's experience in Kentucky and his Baptist heritage.

He entered the biblical studies program at WKU with plans to teach Bible courses on a secular campus. But while living in Bowling Green, the Nashville native was given opportunities to write and sing his own songs.

He had been involved in music for years, raised the son of a classical violinist and jazz trombonist. But he also had strong ties to theology and sacred music.

One of his grandfathers, Fred Brown, was pastor of First Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tenn., and served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1933. His other grandfather, George Card, worked for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, where he compiled two hymnals, "Songs of Faith" and "Abiding Songs."

At Western Kentucky, Card met professor William Lane, who asked the young student to write some songs to go along with his weekly sermons at Cecilia Memorial Presbyterian Church in Bowling Green.

"I ended up doing that for six years," he recalled. "And every week people would say, 'I really like this' or 'I didn't understand that'... and unbeknownst to me, I was being trained to be a songwriter."

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CORRECTION: In the Sept. 3 ABP story "Baptist relief workers find baby...", please replace the fifth paragraph with the following:

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

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ADDITION: In the Sept. 3 ABP story "D.C. church severs ties...", please add the following after the 8th paragraph:

. In addition to leaving the SBC, the Riverside congregation announced its new affiliation with the Alliance of Baptists, an organization of moderate Baptist churches and individuals formed in 1987 and now based in Washington.

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