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Andrew's first anniversary  
signals new beginning

By Jack Brymer

MIAMI (ABP) -- At about 5:05 a.m. on the morning of Aug. 24, 1992, Hurricane Andrew came ashore near Homestead Air Force Base with wind gusts of up to 175 miles per hour.

The maximum sustained winds of 145 miles an hour occurred on the north side of the hurricane, forming a band of destruction that stretched roughly between the Cutler Ridge area and S.W. 152nd Street and extended inland several miles.

A few hours after the storm, a small group of members of First Baptist Church of Cutler Ridge stood in front of their ravaged sanctuary, held hands and sang "Press On." The poignant scene was captured in a photograph which appeared on the front page of the New York Times.

In the days that followed, the church -- or what was left of it -- became a major staging area for church and government relief operations.

It took several days to realize the full impact of history's most destructive natural disaster. Property damage has been estimated at \$25 billion. Fifteen deaths were reported, but the Miami Herald reported on Jan. 31 that the body count in Dade County alone may have been as high as 75. Entire communities, such as Cutler Ridge, Naranja Park and Homestead, lay in ruins. Tens of thousands of people were left homeless and without food, water, electrical power and communications -- and for the most part without hope.

One year later, however, on Tuesday, Aug. 24, members of Cutler Ridge Church will meet again, this time to celebrate rebirth. The church will host a free celebration dinner for the community, with personal invitations

to more than 250 persons and groups who have helped the congregation "press on."

"Hurricane Andrew destroyed our houses, schools and shopping centers," the invitation reads, "but Hurricane Andrew DID NOT destroy the spirit of this community."

The event will be a time for families and friends to meet together where once they stood in line for food, medical assistance, material help and a cup of cold water or hot coffee, according to Charles Koch, pastor of the church.

"We have to say its over," said Koch. "We have to close this chapter emotionally and psychologically. There will be no peace of heart until we pass that date."

The anniversary event will signal also the change from a survival mode to a growth mode, as well as a call to personal responsibility, according to Koch. "We can't blame it on Andrew anymore," he said.

At nearby Leisure City, Iglesia Bautista La Hermosa will host a Thanksgiving Service to mark the anniversary, according to Pastor Guillermo Pichs.

Tommy Watson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Perrine, will mark Andrew's first anniversary with two sermons dealing with the storms of life. Reminders of the hurricane's \$5 million worth of damage to the church's facilities still linger. The congregation will not be able to get back into their worship center for several more months.

At Wayside Baptist Church in Kendall, Andrew's fury resulted in almost \$5 million in damage to the buildings, including a gaping hole in the sanctuary which has brought a bit of notoriety to the congregation. According to Leslie Williams, minister of education, they are now known as the church with a hole in the wall.

Williams, who was able to return to his residence only last week, said the anniversary of the hurricane will find most of the church's members back in their homes and in a more normal routine, although it will be several months before the congregation will be back in its sanctuary.

He said the response of Southern Baptists to the plight of the church had strengthened its position in the community and created quite an awareness that the church is part of a much larger family.

What was learned as a consequence of history's most destructive natural disaster will surely help prepare Miami Baptist Association pastors, churches and their members for the future.

"Our facilities are better than they ever have been or could have been, plus we have a greater sensitivity to the resources God has given us here," Koch said. "We linked arms with Southern Baptists everywhere."

Koch said he was never more grateful to be a part of Southern Baptist ministry. He praised John Sullivan, executive director of the Florida Baptist Convention, for setting the pattern of caring.

"I have felt overwhelmed any time any person in Florida and Southern Baptist leadership has been here," Koch said. "I have always felt they were concerned about me as an individual."

Also, Koch said Hurricane Andrew had taught him personally to be ready for anything. "Ministry is a call to flexibility," he said. "They didn't teach Hurricane 309 in seminary, and I was not called to pastor a church in hurricane recovery," he said jokingly.

Not everyone sees the first anniversary of Hurricane Andrew as a

pivotal event, however. Last week, news of tropical storm Bret brought a near-panic reaction in certain quarters. "See, I told you we would not make it a year," one member told his pastor.

Regardless of the anniversary date, Hurricane Andrew presented Florida Baptists and Southern Baptists their most formidable ministry challenge to date. By all accounts, Baptists rose to the challenge with unprecedented compassion and energy. Testimonies of pastors and associational leaders validate that fact.

But a new challenge now confronts Southern Baptists on the eve of Andrew's first anniversary, leaders say. It is to sustain the ministry energy of the past year into helping people rebuild their lives spiritually as well as physically, and to capitalize on the new-found outreach opportunities to win Miami for Christ.

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Hurricane's wrath lingers;  
need for volunteers remains

By Barbara Denman

MIAMI (ABP) -- From the turnpike leading into South Dade County, the new roofs gleam brightly in the hot August sun. But the semblance of restored order is broken on closer inspection. In the neighborhoods, where one home in four still languishes in disrepair, there are ever-present reminders of Hurricane Andrew, which one year ago plundered and clawed everything within a 20-mile path.

On the eve of the first anniversary of Hurricane Andrew, the wrath of the most destructive storm in U.S. history lingers.

It has been a year since that Aug. 24 Monday morning, but there is still much to be done to repair the estimated \$25 billion in damage. A fourth of the homes in lower South Dade County is still uninhabitable. An estimated 14,000 houses of uninsured and under-insured homeowners still need help.

"One of the biggest misconceptions is that most of the repair work is done," said Roger Harrington, on-site coordinator of the Florida Baptist Convention's disaster-relief effort. "An official gave a conservative estimate that barely one third of the damage is repaired."

Although a house may boast a new roof, a look at the interior reveals scarred and bared 2X4s, stripped drywall and wet, mildewed insulation. A stench from a year of neglect hangs in the air, while mosquitoes breed in stagnant water.

Taking a week's vacation to rebuild homes in Miami, airplane mechanic Sean Mullin observed, "It's unbelievable that 11 months later, it still looks like this. When I first drove down here, I thought I was going into Beirut."

Mullin and a 24-member crew from Denver Baptist Church in Denver, N.C., just north of Charlotte, were gutting and roofing homes in Naranja Park, an area that has been overlooked in much of the reconstruction efforts. In the cul-de-sac where they worked, less than half of the homes have been rebuilt. Mullin lamented the fact that he already had taken three

weeks of his vacation time. "I wish I could stay here three weeks. I wish my kids could experience something like this."

Each day, walk-ins and referrals hesitantly open the sliding glass door of the metal trailer that serves as the makeshift headquarters of the Florida Baptist Convention's disaster-relief program. Only a yellow disaster-relief sign marks the site of the center located at First Baptist Church in Florida City.

Those seeking help have heard that this was where they can get a hand in rebuilding their homes. Each of them tells a similar story of expired building permits, dishonest contractors, or repairs that didn't meet building codes. "Can you help us?" they ask almost pleadingly.

Smiles break across their faces when they hear that Florida Baptists can help.

"We don't have to go looking for work anymore. Most of it comes to us," Harrington noted.

Armed with nearly 75 volunteers a week, donated supplies and \$3.2 million in contributions, Florida Baptists have helped rebuild 710 homes and churches in South Dade since October 1992. Another 75 homes are on the list for rebuilding. And the potential remains -- if volunteers and funds hold out -- to add another 100 to 150 homes.

Immediately after the hurricane, Southern Baptists responded by the thousands, cooking hot meals for survivors, distributing water and packaged foods, as well as performing temporary repair jobs. Another 4,397 volunteers participated in the next phase of relief-rebuilding homes for those without adequate insurance. Volunteers have signed up to work through March 1994.

It's not that South Florida residents haven't tried to repair their homes themselves, said Harrington. "The state of mind of these people is that they are still depressed. Their lives have been disrupted and they just can't seem to put it back together."

"Andrew is personified. In every sense of the word," said Harrington. "Andrew is a person who came and ruined their lives."

The trauma was so intense that many of the 250,000 homeless packed up and left. The Metropolitan Dade County Planning Department estimates that 57,000 people have moved out of the county.

Others refuse to let the events of a year ago defeat them. When her husband's family gave Peggy Tuten a severely damaged house, she took a carpentry course while her husband replaced the trusses in the roof. Their initiative, coupled with the volunteer labor from the Florida Baptist Convention, soon will give the young family a home of their own.

But not everyone is capable of helping themselves.

A friend and fellow member of First Baptist Church of Perrine referred Alex Brannen and his wife to the convention's disaster-relief program. Although the elderly Brannens hired a contractor to roof their home, the work did not meet specifications. A county building inspector ordered them to remove part of the roof. Another paid contractor did sloppy work too.

A neighbor installed two windows incorrectly so they won't open or close. Gaps left between the frame and wall leave no protection from mosquitoes.

Now the Brannens have run out of insurance money, and because Alex Brannen is confined to a wheelchair and unable to do home improvements, they have few options.

"It makes my blood boil when people see you are down and take advantage of you," Brannen noted. "I'm baffled at what these contractors do."

When a news report of the Midwest flooding is heard, Brannen shares great empathy for flood victims. "It will take them a year to recover," he said aloud. Then remembering that it been a year since the hurricane, the elderly man paused.

"I thought it would be much quicker," he said. "It's mind-boggling. You'd think these contractors would be decent enough to do their job. When they get to the Golden Gates they will have to account."

In the next few weeks, Southern Baptist volunteers are scheduled to repair Brannen's home.

Complaining about contractors and changing code requirements and bureaucratic red tape has become the sport of the day in Miami. The Miami Herald recently sponsored a contest for the best horror story about contractors. Too many residents have spent their insurance money for repairs only to find their efforts did not pass final inspection.

It is not too often that Southern Baptist repair and rebuilding efforts have fallen short of the code. County building inspectors have written letters praising Southern Baptists for the quality of their work.

Their reputation causes others to seek out the Baptists.

A Miami Herald photographer spent a day shooting pictures of the volunteers from Denver, N.C. When he discovered that the work was being done for free, the surprised photographer claimed the volunteers' work was better than most contractors he had been photographing.

This provides the volunteers with opportunities to share their Christian faith, Mullin said. "I think its a great witnessing tool. When you meet basic needs the words come naturally."

Warren Davies, assistant coordinator of the Baptist relief effort, tells the story of a group of volunteers who arrived at their work site to find an elderly woman rocking in a chair in the kitchen and her son, in his 30s, drinking beer in front of the television. Occasionally the son would holler for the volunteers to pipe down.

By late afternoon, the woman got up from the rocker and began cleaning her kitchen for the first time in three months. Then, the son began handing materials to the crew on the roof. The next day the son climbed on the roof and became a member of the crew.

"These people were like so many here," Davies explained. "They were depressed and angry, but the Holy Spirit used the volunteers' energy and excitement to pull them out of their stupor."

Several weeks later, the mother and son professed faith in Christ because of the testimony of a group of Mennonites.

Each Sunday a new crop of volunteers arrives at the disaster-relief center filled with enthusiasm and commitment. Their contagious excitement gives a weekly boost to long-term workers. "They pump us up each week." Davies said.

By the end of the week, the heat, humidity, mosquitoes and primitive living conditions have tested the volunteers' mettle.

Amy Bible, a 17-year-old senior at Sebring (Fla.) High School, worked through the difficulties and still promised to return. "I think it's been a good exposure, really helping people and sharing the Lord."

The Florida Baptist Men's department has issued a call for 200

volunteers for Labor Day Weekend. Skilled roofers, drywall hangers, plasterers and carpenters, as well as unskilled laborers are needed. Also needed are Campers on Missions or Christian Service Corps volunteers who can spend several weeks on site.

All volunteers are asked to notify the relief center of their arrival dates by calling (305) 248-7059. Although some volunteers have signed up through March, Davies reported that September's volunteer workers numbers are low.

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Andrew's victims find ways  
to count their blessings

By Jack Brymer

MIAMI (ABP) -- Despite all the damage, pain and suffering, Hurricane Andrew has resulted in a lot of blessings for many, according to several Miami pastors and associational leaders.

"It made a lot of difference in the Miami Association," said Doyle Wetherington, director of missions. "A sense of common involvement is greater than it was, and as churches are becoming more open and active there is a new spiritual vitality. If we can move on in that spirit without getting tangled up with old traditions, we can see a real turning point in the spiritual response in the city."

According to Wetherington, people now know their neighbors and are looking out for each other. Even the SBC controversy, which he said had been a source of embarrassment to some but not a real problem in Dade County, hasn't been mentioned since the hurricane.

"Taken as a whole, Southern Baptists have done themselves proud," he said, adding that he has received inquiries from "a lot" of independent churches about affiliation with the association and Southern Baptists since the hurricane.

According to Mike Daily, director of church and community missions for the Miami Association, Southern Baptist response to Hurricane Andrew has created an awareness of the needs in south Dade County, particularly those of migrant farm workers, and opened new doors for ministry.

"People have now been in migrant camps and dealt with the homeless," he said. "Even those in north Dade County have a sense of concern and an awareness of the needs."

Also, Dailey said, the response of Southern Baptists, which has not let up after a full year, has been a tremendous encouragement to the people and a boost to the churches in motivating them to become involved locally.

Guillermo Pichs, pastor of Iglesia Bautista La Hermosa in Leisure City, said that while Hurricane Andrew was bad, the opportunity to provide food and relief was good for the church. As a result, a second education building is planned and a day-care center will be opened in January 1994.

Tommy Watson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Perrine, which sustained \$5 million in damages, said the spirit in his church is the best it has been in 35 years.

Reginald Walters, retired planning director for the City of Miami,

said the response of Florida Baptists and Southern Baptists to the tragic event made a "tremendous impression" on community and business leaders.

A member of West Flagler Park Baptist Church, Walters told of attending a meeting of community and business leaders in which the president of Miami-Dade Community College's South Dade campus said Southern Baptists were the first to respond to the emergency at the school's gymnasium which was designated as an emergency shelter.

Most of the buildings on the campus were damaged, including the gymnasium. When the storm was over, the people were unable to return to their homes because of widespread and extensive damage. Although designated as a shelter, college officials were not prepared to house the victims. There was no food, ice or water. Southern Baptists were the first to show up and immediately set up food lines, the college president said.

"He was amazed how they could be there so quickly," recalled Walters. "That was just one testimony. I heard later on that the U.S. Army itself, which played such a big role in the aftermath of the hurricane, sought advice on how Southern Baptists were able to feed so many so quickly."

Walters said city officials, who themselves were sweating out emergency relief, were tremendously impressed. "Southern Baptists really gave impressive evidence of their caring, concern and generosity," he said. "It made me very proud to be a Southern Baptist in this situation."

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President, pontiff explore  
justice, international issues

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The head of the 950 million-member Roman Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist president of the United States explored common concerns about international problems and social and economic justice in their first meeting Aug. 13 in Denver.

President Bill Clinton and Pope John Paul II met privately and with aides as the 73-year-old pontiff arrived for a four-day visit in connection with World Youth Day activities.

"We shared many values and perspectives," President Clinton said after a meeting he described as cordial and productive and one that "laid the basis for a productive and constructive relationship in the future."

The pope said he was pleased to have the opportunity to discuss "some of the principal concerns of the world situation" and the "inalienable dignity of a human being and the rights which flow from that dignity."

Raymond Flynn, recently sworn in as U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, told reporters after the meetings that "a chemistry was developed between the president and the Holy Father, one that I think is in the interest (of) and incredibly important to the entire world community.

"There are no finer voices of social and economic justice and of moral commitment than that of the Holy Father and the president of the United States," Flynn said.

Before meeting with the pontiff, Clinton told a crowd at Stapleton International Airport that "America has maintained its youth by always

being able to change while holding fast to its fundamental values: a determination to support family and work; to the proposition that all children matter and we don't have a one to waste; to the proposition that in every corner of the world, race and creed should not deter any young boy or girl from growing up to the fullest of their God-given capacities."

Clinton said all Americans are grateful for the pope's moral leadership.

"We know that you were the force to light the spark of freedom over communism in your native Poland and throughout Eastern Europe, that you have been an advocate for peace and justice among nations and peoples, a strong voice calling for an end to hatred and to hunger everywhere and reminding people blessed with abundance that they must offer special comfort to the poor and dispossessed," the president said.

At the airport John Paul previewed themes he would stress during the four-day visit: the importance of the church's ministry to today's younger generation and a call to respect the moral teachings of the church.

The pope said he has been deeply moved by the difficult conditions faced by the world's children and youth.

"Too many sufferings are visited upon them by natural calamities, famines, epidemics, by economic and political crisis, by the atrocities of war," he said. "And where material conditions are at least adequate, other obstacles arise, not the least of which is the breakdown of family values and stability."

The pope later emphasized to U.S. bishops that the younger generation represents the future of the church.

John Paul also urged audiences in Denver -- which numbered as many as 350,000 people at an outdoor mass on Sunday -- to respect the moral teachings of the church.

Public opinion surveys show that many American Catholics disagree with some of those teachings.

A Washington Post-ABC News survey released the week of the pope's arrival showed that while most Catholics in the United States (74 percent) look up to John Paul II as a moral leader, 60 percent or more take issue with some aspect of the church's stance on birth control, divorce, abortion, sex outside marriage and ordination of women as priests.

During his Denver appearances, the pope repeatedly underscored the church's opposition to abortion. That position is at odds with the pro-choice policies of the Clinton administration but consistent with recent stances taken by Clinton's denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention.

"The ultimate test of your greatness," the pope said, "is the way you treat every human being, but especially the weakest and most defenseless ones."

In a challenge issued in Clinton's presence, the pope said, "If you want equal justice for all and true freedom and lasting peace, then, America, defend life. All the great causes that are yours today will have meaning only to the extent that you guarantee the right to life and protect the human person."

The pontiff also emphasized that respect for life must go beyond opposition to abortion to include concrete steps on behalf of those in difficult situations.

Asked whether Clinton responded in private to the pope on the abortion issue, Flynn said he understood the two primarily discussed international

problems and social- and economic-justice issues.

The views of both Clinton and John Paul are well-known and no one expected either's mind to be changed in the meeting, Flynn said.

"The president has his position and the Holy Father has his position on this very important issue," Flynn said. "But I think it's also very important to point out that there was an enormous amount of common ground on issues of conscience and social and economic justice."

Flynn said the Bosnian situation was the most significant issue the two discussed. The president made it clear to the pope, he said, that the United States cannot "sit on the sidelines" and allow the suffering in Sarajevo and the former Yugoslav republics to continue without speaking out and engaging the European Community, NATO and the international community to try to resolve the crisis.

"Both of them were deeply committed to doing something immediately," Flynn said.

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46 percent of Americans feel  
responsibility to share faith

By Mark Wingfield

GLENDALE, Calif. (ABP) -- What's the profile of the American most likely to share his or her Christian faith with someone else?

A black Protestant who lives in the South, attends church regularly, considers himself or herself "born again," has no college education and earns less than \$20,000 per year.

That's the finding of a nationwide poll by the Barna Research Group of Glendale, Calif., which sought to identify the "evangelizers" in America.

The poll discovered 46 percent of American adults believe they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs with others.

But the more than half of U.S. citizens who do not believe they are responsible to share their faith include significant segments of the religiously devout, added researcher George Barna.

Only 59 percent of adults who attend church worship services twice or more in a typical month feel a responsibility to share their faith, the poll found. Even among "born-again" Christians, 27 percent see no responsibility to share their faith.

"That more than one quarter of born-again Christians believe they have no responsibility to share their religious beliefs is remarkable," Barna noted. "These people have made a commitment to Jesus Christ that they still consider significant in their lives, and they believe they will go to heaven because Christ has forgiven their sins. Yet despite the change in their lives they attribute to their own conversion experience, many of them strongly feel they do not need to share the experience with others.

"For many Americans, even born-again Christians, religion remains a very private subject," he observed.

The poll reveals clear demographic markers of people most likely to believe they ought to share their faith. The "evangelizers" are more likely to be:

-- Black than white or Hispanic. Of blacks, 62 percent feel a need to share their faith, compared to 44 percent of whites and 32 percent of Hispanics.

-- Southerners (56 percent) than Northeasterners (38 percent).

-- Earning less than \$20,000 per year (54 percent) rather than earning more than \$60,000 (34 percent).

-- Not college educated (54 percent) than college graduates (37 percent).

-- Protestant (57 percent) than Catholic (31 percent).

America's 115 million "evangelizers" are most likely to hold conservative Christian beliefs, the poll also found. Evangelizers are more likely than the average American to believe that the Bible is totally accurate in all it teaches, that Jesus Christ is risen and alive today, and that all people will be personally judged by God.

However, those prone to evangelize do not always adhere to orthodox Christian theology, the poll discovered.

For example, about one-third of evangelizers -- the same percentage as in the general population -- believe "there are some crimes, sins or other things people might do which cannot be forgiven by God."

Also, 42 percent of evangelizers believe in a salvation by works, the poll found. They affirm the notion that "if people are generally good, or do enough good things for others during their lives, they will earn a place in heaven."

A majority of evangelizers among Presbyterians and Methodists agree with this statement, while only 27 percent of Baptist evangelizers agree with it, the poll found.

"There is plenty of reason for churches to worry if nearly one-half of their people who believe in evangelism also believe in salvation by works," Barna said. "The central message of Protestantism is in salvation by faith alone in Christ, yet 45 percent of Protestant evangelizers seem to be preaching a different message."

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College trustees start search  
for Nobles' replacement

By Andy Kanengiser

CLINTON, Miss. (ABP) -- Mississippi College trustees, planning their search for a president Aug. 16, promised to weigh advice from students, faculty, alumni and other supporters.

Trustees, however, have the final decision in a process that they said could last until fall 1994.

For the first time since 1968, the Baptist college seeks a president following the Aug. 3 resignation of Lewis Nobles, 67.

Court documents filed by the college accuse Nobles of diverting about \$3 million of donations during the past 15 years into secret accounts. Federal and state officials are investigating, as well as the trustees. Nobles has said that "only one side of the controversy has been presented."

A search committee of 10 trustees met privately for more than an hour

Aug. 16. The new president, Vickery said, must "come from the (Southern Baptist) denomination and have the attributes of leadership in management and higher learning."

Students interviewed outside the meeting room said the new president will need sound moral values to boost the college and its 4,000 enrollment.

"It is essential that students play a role," said junior Stephanie Garland, 20, of Canton as trustees gathered one floor above at the President's Dining Room. "I'd want to see one (a president) with a Christian background and good will. This school has a good reputation."

"We need a strong leader -- with everything going on," said sophomore Darryl Hamilton, 22, of Clinton.

Rory Lee, the acting president, is not prohibited from becoming a candidate. Lee has said he will leave that decision to trustees.

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