

Associated Baptist Press

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Missionary killed in plane crash

AREQUIPA, Peru (ABP) -- A Southern Baptist missionary was among 117 passengers killed in a Feb. 29 jet airplane crash in Peru.

Lynn Davidson, 42, was a passenger on a Peruvian jet that apparently caught flames and crashed five miles short of the airport in Arequipa in southern Peru. All 117 passengers and six crew members died in the crash of Faucett Airlines Flight 251.

Davidson, a missionary in Peru since 1987, was returning home from a church-growth strategy meeting in Lima.

Flight 251 was about to complete the 465-mile trip from Lima to Arequipa. The crew had been cleared for final approach and landing, when all contact was lost and the plane went down in a remote mountain canyon.

Davidson was from Santa Fe, N.M. She was a speech pathologist in Baltimore, Md., at the time of her appointment as a missionary in 1987.

Her husband, Dennis, survives. He is from Albuquerque. She is also survived by their three children: Charis, 11; Cassia, 8, and Rannon, 4. Other survivors include her parents, Max and Marie Vanderford of Brighton, Colo.; a sister, Cathy Gilpin of Alamosa, Colo., and two brothers, Gerry and Keith Vanderford, both of San Jose, Calif.

The tragedy was the second in a month for the 65 missionaries of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Peru. Earlier in February, missionary Wade Watts and his family were seriously injured in a car wreck. Watts and his son Marcus remain in a coma since the accident.

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-- By ABP staff

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Baptist Peace Fellowship board encourages black organizations

LAKE JUNALUSKA, N.C. (ABP) -- The Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America is urging its 1,400 members to support the work of African-American-led organizations by becoming involved in one of the nation's major civil-rights groups.

Meeting Feb. 22-24 in Memphis, Tenn., the BPFNA's board of directors voted unanimously to renew membership for one year free of charge for any member seeking membership in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Urban League, the Center for Democratic Renewal or similar civil-rights organizations.

The board also sent letters commending the recent installation of former Maryland congressman Kweisi Mfume as president of the NAACP and a 1995 racism statement by the Baptist World Alliance.

The board also approved an "open letter" on racism to be published in an upcoming issue of Baptist Peacemaker.

Board president Glenda Fontenot said the actions are aimed at improving racial relations in the United States. "I am convinced that organizations like ours, which are predominantly white, need to move toward the vision of Martin Luther King's 'beloved community' by supporting African-American institutions rather than asking their constituency to join ours," she said.

Founded in 1984, the Baptist Peace Fellowship is a network linking Baptists involved in justice and peace issues throughout North America. Members of the board of directors represent 12 Baptist conventions and five racial-ethnic groups in Canada, the U.S., Puerto Rico and Mexico, plus representatives from the Baptist World Alliance and the Baptist Joint Committee.

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Clinton asks for modified abortion bill

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President Clinton informed Congress Feb. 28 he would not sign a bill outlawing a controversial late-term abortion procedure unless it makes exceptions in cases where a woman's health is at risk.

Supporters of the ban on the procedure known clinically as "intact dilation and evacuation" said Clinton's language would make the law meaningless. Pro-choice leaders said Clinton's letter amounted to a veto threat and lauded the president for his stand.

Abortion opponents call the controversial method "partial-birth" abortion, because the fetus is partially extracted feet first and the skull is collapsed by suctioning out the brain to make it easier for the head to pass through the birth canal. They call the procedure grisly and say it should be banned.

Opponents to the ban, however, argue the method is used only rarely and in some cases is the safest way to terminate a late-term pregnancy when a woman's life or health is endangered.

In a letter to Congress, Clinton said he found the procedure "very disturbing" and that he had "studied and prayed about this issue and about the families who must face this awful choice, for many months."

But Clinton said he could only support the ban if it allowed an exception when a doctor considered the method "necessary to preserve the life of the woman or avert serious health consequences of the woman."

Sen. Robert Dole, R-Kan., said the exception suggested by Clinton was "too vague" and that the bill's supporters would move ahead with the measure, setting up a certain veto by Clinton.

A Senate version of the bill would have allowed the procedure to be used only under lifesaving

circumstances. A House version had no exceptions. Differences between the two versions are being worked out, according to Associated Press.

Gracie Hsu, policy analyst for the Family Research Council, said Clinton's new position "shows his clear disregard for human life."

Clinton's clause on the mother's health "is so broadly defined in U.S. law that it would make all partial-birth abortions acceptable," she said. Adding a health exception to the ban "would render the bill meaningless," she said.

Will Dodson, director of government relations for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, said he "can appreciate the fact that President Clinton has sought God's guidance on this matter through prayer," but observed that "God does not reveal to our hearts that which is contrary to the truth revealed through his word."

"The word of God clearly condemns the killing of innocent human life," Dodson told Baptist Press. "We do not need to pray to God to reveal the truth about abortion. What we need to pray for is the grace and courage to do what is right."

Kate Michelman, president of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, told the New York Times Clinton's letter amounted to a veto threat.

"The important point (of the letter) was that the president needed to veto this legislation because it is indeed a violation of the constitutional right of women to choose," Michelman said.

If the law passes, it will be the first time Congress has acted to outlaw an abortion procedure since 1973, when the Supreme Court ruled that laws banning abortion are unconstitutional, citing a woman's right to privacy.

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-- By ABP staff

Rule on CIA use of missionaries draws attention of church groups

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A government policy that prohibits the use of overseas religious workers as Central Intelligence Agency informants once again is drawing the attention of U.S. religious groups.

The CIA policy, which has been in place since 1976, also bars the U.S. spy agency from using journalists in its covert operations.

CIA Director John Deutch's recent acknowledgement that the policy can be waived in rare circumstances has raised concerns among news and religious organizations.

Deutch told the Senate Intelligence Committee that journalists are not used in covert operations unless the agency's director or deputy director deems the situation of "tremendous importance" to the security of the United States.

Deutch was not asked during his Senate appearance about the use of religious workers, but a CIA spokesman told Associated Baptist Press that the same loophole -- a waiver by the director or deputy director -- exists in the case of clergy and missionaries.

The agency's "policy is that we do not use members of the clergy," the spokesman said. But, as with every federal agency, the agency head has the authority to waive the internal regulation, he added.

The spokesman said he could not comment about whether the ban against use of religious workers has been waived.

Baptist mission leaders echoed concerns raised in 1980 when they urged Congress to ban intelligence agency use of clergy and missionaries.

It's a "terrible policy," said Keith Parks, global missions coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

and former head of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

Because of the loophole possibility, Parks said, the prohibition against the use of missionaries "needs to be stronger than an in-house directive."

"I can think of nothing that would more significantly compromise the gospel," said John Sundquist, executive director of International Ministries of American Baptist Churches U.S.A.

Charles Sydnor, secretary for international issues at ABC's International Ministries, said the "clear and predictable result of such a policy would be to undermine the credibility of the clergy."

In a Feb. 22 letter responding to news reports about the policy loophole, Baptist Joint Committee Executive Director James Dunn urged Deutch to "take steps ... to assure Americans concerned about the integrity and safety of their missionary enterprises that U.S. intelligence operations are not compromising the mission of overseas religious workers."

Baptist missionaries "view themselves and are considered by others to be agents of Jesus Christ," Dunn wrote Deutch. "For them to be viewed as agents of the United States government not only jeopardizes their work but has the potential of putting them in dangerous situations."

In 1982 Parks and Bill O'Brien, now director of the Global Center at Samford University, received assurances from then-CIA director William Casey that missionaries would not be used under the policy. At that time, Parks was president and O'Brien vice president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

In 1980 a number of Baptist organizations and mission-sending groups supported legislation that would have barred U.S. intelligence agencies from using clergy, journalists and academics as informants and would have prohibited intelligence personnel from posing as members of those professions.

The measure failed to win approval as Congress backed away from enacting a new charter for all U.S. intelligence operations.

Parks said he knows of no incidents in which Foreign Mission Board or Cooperative Baptist Fellowship missionaries were "ever utilized as spies."

O'Brien said concern always exists when a policy can be waived for "nebulous" national security reasons.

"You always have the uneasy feeling that ... justifications can be found for doing these sort of covert things that jeopardize the cause of missions worldwide," he said.

Religious organizations argue that even the suspicion that missionaries are involved in U.S. intelligence operations jeopardizes the safety and mission of overseas religious workers.

"The shadow of suspicion falls on the entire missionary enterprise, particularly in those countries that are facing instability economically and politically and are looking for scapegoats," O'Brien, said.

For their part, many missionary-sending organizations have their own restrictions against participation in U.S. intelligence gathering efforts.

The SBC Foreign Mission Board considers any missionary involvement "with any intelligence-gathering agency of any government" as "grounds for immediate dismissal," said Don Kammerdiener, FMB executive vice president.

Paul McKaughan, president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Missions Agencies, which represents 100 organizations and 20,000 missionaries, said most of its members are extremely sensitive about the issue and are careful to avoid "even the appearance" of ties to intelligence operations.

"It tends to be a smoke screen behind which a lot of governments hide to restrict access," McKaughan said.

Baptist Women in Ministry hires Missouri staff member

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (ABP) -- Pamela May of Gladstone, Mo., has been named center administrator of Baptist Women in Ministry.

May, who assumes the office April 1, will oversee renovation of new offices for the organization at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Kan., said Kathy Manis Findley, president of Baptist Women in Ministry.

A former special assistant to the academic dean at Central Seminary, May succeeds Malinda Fillingim, who has been center administrator one year at Women in Ministry's current offices in Louisville, Ky.

Women in Ministry directors voted in November to accept an invitation to move the organization's offices to Central Seminary. The offices have been at Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville since Women in Ministry's founding in 1983.

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-- By ABP staff

CORRECTION: Please replace the third graph of the Feb. 28 ABP story "SBC foreign missionaries report record year for new churches" with the following:

Baptisms, meanwhile, dropped 5 percent, following a 15-percent gain last year, to 287,806. Officials termed the baptism total the equivalent of a "Pentecost harvest" every four days and estimated total professions of faith in Jesus Christ at 1 million.

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