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## In this issue:

- **Donated kidney strengthens bond between longtime Christian friends**
- **Organ donation saves lives, but need greater than supply**
- **Baptists respond to North Korea famine**
- **Numbers of women clergy on rise in SBC, group claims**
- **Churches must tell Texans to leave guns at home, law says**
- **House panel approves religion amendment**
- **Employment non-discrimination bill creates debate among religious groups**
- **Evangelical group discusses church-government partnerships**

## **Donated kidney strengthens bond between longtime Christian friends**

By Greg Warner

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- For Nat Taylor, the decision to donate one of his kidneys to save the life of his friend was as simple as the four-letter motto on the wristband he wears -- W. W. J. D. -- "What Would Jesus Do?"

"If Christ could give his life for me, I could give a part of my body back," he explained. "There wasn't much more to it."

Nat, a 27-year-old high-school teacher from North Carolina, had surgery Oct. 21 in Jacksonville, Fla. His left kidney was removed and transplanted into Tammy Patterson, a 33-year-old mother of two with a rare disease destroying her kidneys.

It was Tammy's second kidney transplant. The first -- from her brother in 1991-- lasted until this summer, when recurring infections sent her back into dialysis treatments.

During that first surgery, Nat's family -- particularly his mother, Maggie -- helped care for Tammy. Both families were members of Galatia Baptist Church, a rural congregation in Northampton County, N.C. Tammy's husband, Hugh, was the church's minister of music and youth at the time.

"We couldn't have made it through the first surgery without this family," Hugh Patterson said of the Taylors.

"We take care of our people," Maggie Taylor said resolutely.

At the time, Nat was a member of Galatia's youth and college group. Although a student at Campbell University, a Baptist college two hours away in Buies Creek, Nat became close friends with Hugh and Tammy, who shared Sunday dinner with the Taylors almost every week.

The families remained close even after the Pattersons moved to a South Carolina church in 1994 and later to Jacksonville, Hugh's hometown, where he now works for a mortgage company.

Then word came this summer that Tammy would need another transplant.

Nat remembered he is the same blood type as Tammy -- O-positive. Although he had never had surgery before, and is fearful of needles, Nat immediately went to be tested as a possible donor. The battery of tests showed that Nat's kidney was compatible.

"God called my bluff," he joked.

In fact, O-positive is the most common blood type. But that fact actually made it less likely a donated kidney would come through the traditional transplant waiting list, which currently has 37,000 names. "There were so many people with that blood type, I would have had to wait for a long time," she explained.

A likely source for most transplant patients is family members, but none of Tammy's family members qualified medically.

In addition to blood type, possible donors are screened for blood-cell type and tissue type -- factors which determine the likelihood that a patient will accept a transplanted organ. Those two factors traditionally eliminate most donor candidates. But the development, particularly in the last three years, of new immunosuppressant drugs, which reduce the body's impulse to reject transplanted organs, has "expanded the horizons" of organ donation, said Thomas Peters, one of two doctors who performed the transplant.

"It isn't unusual any longer to have living, unrelated donors," Peters said.

Nat Taylor may never have known he qualified as a donor if he had not been in charge of a blood drive two years ago at Northampton High School West, where he teaches history and coaches baseball. When the drive came up one pint short of its goal, he suppressed his fear of needles long enough to donate for the first time. That's when he learned his blood type.

"If you hadn't been one pint short, you wouldn't be here today," Hugh Patterson reminded Nat one day before the transplant. An hour earlier, Nat had almost fainted when technicians drew his blood for a final cross-check, the last step before giving the operation the OK.

Second transplants are not unusual for kidney patients, whose only alternative is constant, often painful dialysis treatments three times a week. Second transplants now account for about 15 percent of all kidney transplants.

The Jacksonville Transplant Center, which arranged Tammy's operation, performs about 50 kidney transplants a year. About half of them come from living donors, but so far this year only four have been "living unrelated" donors like Nat. Tammy's operation was paid for by insurance. The National Kidney Foundation paid for Nat's.

Tammy's kidney problems were first diagnosed in 1989, about the time she and Hugh moved to Galatia Baptist Church. A rare disorder called IgA nephropathy would eventually require a transplant, she was told, but not soon. When she learned she could not have children without a new kidney, however, she and Hugh decided to seek a transplant sooner.

"We both knew God had children intended for our lives," said Tammy, a native of Spruce Pine, N.C.

While in the hospital for a round of tests two months before the scheduled surgery, she suddenly went into kidney failure. The transplant was performed a week later, in December 1991.

The operation was a success. Twenty months later, the Pattersons' first son, Robert, was born. Bradley followed 18 months later.

But the disease that destroyed the first two kidneys eventually claimed the third. This summer Tammy's kidney function was weak enough to require dialysis, a three-hour procedure in which a machine performs the kidneys' function of filtering impurities from the blood.

"The first time I had dialysis, I decided I would rather die than do that the rest of my life," she recalled.

She began regular dialysis. It did not go well. Several different methods were tried, but none proved consistently successful. Her condition worsened. A series of infections sent her in and out of the hospital.

"I almost died in July," she said matter-of-factly. "I had pretty much accepted it."

Hugh and Tammy wrestled with tough choices. They were tired of fighting a losing battle with dialysis. Finding a donor could take months or longer. Stopping dialysis would bring death within two weeks. They worried about the boys, now 4 and 2.

"You don't want to know what I was thinking," Hugh admitted. Exhausted and discouraged, he fought to remain positive for Tammy's sake. But inside, he said, he had given up. "I was ready for her to die. Then I could start over."

After several weeks of unsuccessful dialysis, and with no prospect of a transplant in sight, the couple made preparations to admit Tammy to a hospice.

They decided to give dialysis one more try. If it didn't work, they agreed, she immediately would check into the hospice to await death.

At Galatia Baptist Church and Hendricks Avenue Baptist, their new congregation in Jacksonville, church members prayed earnestly. Hugh's fellow choir members huddled with him in prayer while Tammy lingered in the hospital.

During the agonizing weekend before the Monday dialysis, alone in her hospital room, Tammy had what she describes as a "near-death experience."

"I saw a light. And I wanted to go to the light. That's where I wanted to be. But I just couldn't get there. ... I know the light was the Lord, and he was telling me it wasn't my time yet. If you ever see it, you'll know it. It's life-changing."

As a result of that experience, Tammy said, a peace came over her. She was no longer afraid of what might happen, she said. It also has given her new purpose in life, she said. Relationships now matter most to her, more than material things or a long life.

"That was the point in my life when I said, 'Take my life, Lord.' I had said that before, but this time I really meant it. I hope he will take my life and use it to touch somebody. That's what this is all about."

That Monday, on the last-chance visit to the dialysis clinic, something changed. Dialysis worked. She began a turnaround.

Suddenly the prospect of a transplant seemed brighter. But before doctors would perform the surgery, she would have to remain on dialysis and clear of infection for three months -- longer than she had stayed healthy in years. Anxiously, they waited. In October, the doctors gave the go-ahead for the transplant.

Tammy has been warned the disease may also destroy her new kidney. But that is a chance she and the doctors are willing to take.

"Her risk of having a recurrence of the disease is certainly more than the average patient, but I don't think it's absolute," said Peters, lead surgeon for the transplant and the one who performed Nat's surgery. After consulting with several colleagues, he said, he decided the surgery was worth the risk. "She did well with a transplant before," he noted.

Robert King, another patient of the transplant center, agreed. After receiving a new kidney in 1992, he now awaits a second transplant. But, he said: "Five years off dialysis is worth it. And the second transplant is often better than the first."

"Quite a few of them have just sailed through," confirmed Susie Repper, transplant coordinator for the center.

"That's what I'm going to do," a buoyant Tammy had said hours before the surgery.

After back-to-back operations of more two hours each, Peters and surgical colleague Kenneth Jones emerged to report both surgeries had been successful and the transplanted kidney was already working.

Forty-eight hours later, Tammy Patterson walked from Room 608, where she was recovering, down the hospital hallway to Room 616 to visit Nat.

"When Tammy first came in, I felt awesome," Nat said. "I thought, 'There goes my kidney.'"

The transplant was tougher on Nat than on Tammy. But two days afterward both were doing well. "It hasn't really hit me that I'm missing something," Nat said smiling. "It's been a neat experience -- most of it."

After emerging from her brush with death to face a future that is less than certain, Tammy admits she has wondered if her fight for a longer life is worth all the effort.

"I have thought about that a lot," she said while packing to leave the hospital. "I truly feel God has a purpose for all of it. I could say it's because of Hugh and my love for him, or my love for the boys, or the love being shown to me. How many people can say they have friends who will lay down their lives for them? But I really feel God has a purpose for me."

Two days after the operation, Tammy was dismissed from the hospital. The next day, she took her two sons to a fall carnival at church.

She cherishes the time she spends with her sons, who have never known their mother when she wasn't fighting that disease with the unpronounceable name. "I guess I miss them most when I'm in the hospital," she said.

But she doesn't speak of the regrets of lost time. Instead, she sees in her sons the evidence of God's hand on her life.

"When I look at them, they remind me of the miracles. They are the miracles."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: A photo to accompany the preceding story is available electronically from Associated Baptist Press, (904) 262-6626.

## **Organ donation saves lives, but need greater than supply**

(ABP) -- Thousands of people awaiting organ transplants die needlessly each year due to a lack of donors, experts say.

According to the Coalition on Organ and Tissue Donation, more than 50,000 Americans await life-saving organs, while hundreds of thousands could benefit from tissue transplants.

The first corneal transplant was performed in 1905, the first blood transfusion in 1918, the first kidney transplant in 1954 and the first heart transplant in 1968. Today, medical technology also enables the transplantation of skin, lung, heart-lung combinations, pancreas, liver, bone and bone marrow, blood vessels and the middle ear, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Certain organs, including the kidney, liver and parts of the lung and pancreas, can be transplanted from living donors.

The Uniform Anatomical Gift Act, effective in all 50 states, allows anyone over the age of 18 to indicate his or her desire to be an organ donor by signing a donor card. Donor cards are available in doctors' offices and in some states are on the back of drivers' licenses.

Anyone from birth to age 75 can become an organ or tissue donor, according to the National Kidney Foundation. That is a general age guideline, the organization said. Doctors are asked to determine the possibility of donation at the appropriate time.

Donors may choose to donate all organs and tissues or specify which organs they wish to donate.

Most states have laws requiring that family members be given the option to donate the organs and tissues of a deceased loved one for transplantation, according to HHS.

It is important for organ donors to inform family or loved ones of their decision, donor groups say. At the time of death, families will be asked about donation. Discussing the issue in advance can prevent confusion or uncertainty about a donor's wishes. Carrying out the deceased one's wish to save other lives can help comfort survivors in their grief.

All major religions approve of organ and tissue donations, according to organ donor advocates. People with theological or ethical concerns about donation are urged to discuss it with their minister.

-30-

-- By ABP staff

## **Baptists respond to North Korea famine**

DALLAS (ABP) -- Three Korean-American Baptist ministers from Texas are scheduled to go to North Korea in early November to oversee distribution of 130 tons of food donated to the famine-ravaged country.

Yoo Jong Yoon, pastor of Glory Korean Baptist Church in Dallas; Bong Hee Han, pastor of a Korean mission at Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler; and Benjamin Kim, Asian church consultant for Dallas Baptist Association, are scheduled to enter North Korea Nov. 4.

Korean Baptist churches in Texas recently donated about \$20,000 for famine relief in North Korea. Together with \$10,000 provided by the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the funds will buy 40 tons of flour, 35 tons of rice and 55 tons of corn.

Yoon, past president of the Korean Baptist Fellowship of Texas, is also on the Coordinating Council of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. He was instrumental in getting the Fellowship to establish an offering for famine relief for North Korea at the group's general assembly in June.

Fellowship Coordinator Daniel Vestal recently urged Baptists to step up their response to the hunger crisis in North Korea.

The Fellowship offering, which suggests that Baptists skip a meal a week for a month and send the equivalent cost for famine relief, had raised \$6,335 through mid-October. Vestal blamed a lack of information about the situation in North Korea for the slow response. At a recent Coordinating Council meeting, Fellowship leaders earmarked funds for promotion of the offering.

Experts say several million people in North Korea could face starvation in the next few months. Pervasive drought in Korea's mountainous north has destroyed 70 percent of the nation's corn and up to 30 percent of the rice crop. Tidal waves followed the drought, causing further destruction. The 1997 crop provided 46 percent of basic human requirements, according to a United Nations estimate. Observers say next year's food deficit could be even worse.

A survey in September by World Vision, a non-denominational Christian aid organization, reported death tolls of 15 percent in numerous towns and villages from the year-long famine. The survey reported that in regions where food was distributed, residents ate an average of 1.4 meals per day, while in other communities people lived on roots, tree bark and seaweed.

Baptist World Aid, a relief arm of the Baptist World Alliance, announced Oct. 24 it was supporting an effort by Canadian Baptists to feed people in North Korea.

North Korea's closed political system has complicated international relief efforts, noted a BWA official. A Newsweek magazine report in September said the North Korean government's isolationist policies and refusal to blame the nation's problems on its socialist system hindered international response.

"BWAid did not make an earlier appeal for funds for North Korea until it was convinced that it had the right avenue of providing support to those in need," said Paul Montacute, director of BWAid. "We now believe that we have that avenue, and God calls us to care for all our sisters and brothers, wherever they are and whatever their political dogma."

Canadian Foodgrains Bank sent an initial shipment of 13,500 metric tons of wheat to North Korea in June. The agency said the shipment provided 1.3 million people with flour rations for 18 days.

The Southern Baptist Convention has distributed about \$1.2 million in hunger funds to North Korea since 1995, according to a news release in May. A partnership of Southern Baptists, American farmers and an international food bank provided a shipment of 1.8 million meals in April.

A Texas Baptist official, John LaNoue, has been in North Korea since August to observe distribution of food contributed by non-governmental organizations. LaNoue is expected to return to the United States Nov. 7 and is scheduled to speak on famine relief at this year's Texas Baptist Men's Convention, Nov. 11 in Austin.

-30-

-- By Bob Allen and Ken Camp

### **Numbers of women clergy on rise in SBC, group claims**

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (ABP) -- At least 1,225 women serve as Southern Baptist clergy, according to research compiled by Baptist Women in Ministry.

While their numbers remain small compared with other denominations and despite opposition to women's ordination in Southern Baptist Convention resolutions, Southern Baptist women made progress in religious leadership during the 1970s and 1980s, sociologist Sarah Frances Anders wrote in the Fall 1997 issue of Folio, newsletter for the organization based in Kansas City, Kan.

The most popular vocation for women clergy is chaplaincy, the article said. Twenty-five percent of confirmed Southern Baptist clergywomen serve as chaplains. At least 85 women are pastors in Baptist churches, while more than 100 serve in an associate-pastor role, Anders said.

Sixteen states have at least one woman who is a senior pastor, she said, with North Carolina being home to the largest number of women pastors. Ordained "academicians," she said, constitute less than 2 percent of the total.

Official records of the Southern Baptist Convention do not track women ministers, and counting them is difficult, Anders said. The SBC annual lists ordained ministers by name but without gender identification, and Baptist state papers often do not report women being ordained as ministers or deacons, she said.

Anders said several individuals began keeping records since the 1964 ordination of Addie Davis, the first documented clergywoman in the SBC. A 1979 count reported the number of Southern Baptist clergywomen as 58.

In the same issue, a regular feature of the newsletter, "Ovations," listed 50 names of women who were either recently ordained or had taken a new ministry position.

-30-

-- By ABP staff

## **Churches must tell Texans to leave guns at home, law says**

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Any Texan licensed to carry a concealed weapon can pack a pistol at church unless there's a sign on the church door forbidding it, members of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission learned at their October meeting.

The latest edition of "Texas Concealed Handgun Laws," published by the Texas Department of Public Safety to reflect changes made in the 75th Texas Legislature, states that churches now are required to post notice if they want to prohibit concealed handguns on their property.

The law states a property owner or someone acting with authority on behalf of the owner must provide notice "by oral or written communication" to ban concealed weapons. In practical terms, it means a church must place clearly visible signs at its entrances if it wishes to ban guns in its buildings, said Phil Strickland, director of the Texas Baptist moral-concerns agency.

To declare church property a gun-free zone, a church must post in letters at least one inch high -- in both English and Spanish -- the following statement: "Pursuant to Section 30.06, Penal Code (trespass by holder of license to carry a concealed handgun), a person licensed under Article 4413 (29ee), Revised Statutes (concealed handgun law) may not enter this property with a concealed handgun."

The original law that legalized the carrying of concealed weapons in Texas contained an exception making it illegal to carry any handgun "on the premises of a church, synagogue or other established place of religious worship."

A loophole was added in the last legislative session, however, specifying that the exemption for places of worship "do not apply if ...[the person carrying a concealed handgun] was not given effective notice under Section 30.06."

The law requires such notice to be posted "in a conspicuous manner clearly visible to the public."

"I think the language, unfortunately, is exceedingly clear," Strickland said. "What they have done is to require churches to provide notice that a person is not to go on the property with a concealed handgun."

-30-

## **House panel approves religion amendment**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- For the first time since the Bill of Rights, a U.S. House of Representatives committee has approved a constitutional amendment addressing religious liberty.

The House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on the Constitution approved Oct. 28 a revised version of the Religious Freedom Amendment on a party-line 8-4 vote with Republicans in favor and Democrats against.

The proposal offered by Reps. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., and Sanford Bishop, D-Ga., would insert for the first time a reference to "God" in the Constitution and would allow for some forms of government-endorsed religious speech and school-sponsored prayer.

It would also open the door for vouchers and other government money to religious groups that would otherwise be barred by the First Amendment's establishment clause.

"This is a key step forward to restore the full protection for our American values and beliefs," Istook said. "We wish it did not require a constitutional amendment but un-elected judges have changed it for us, distorting our First Amendment religious liberties."

A subcommittee staffer said the Congressional Research Service found that although the House voted in 1971 on a school-prayer amendment, it reached the floor by a method other than a committee.

The Istook proposal passed the committee after six amendments offered by Democrats failed and after a substitute proposal offered by Rep. Asa Hutchinson, R-Ark., passed. Among changes in the substitute, Hutchinson's proposal, would bar government from establishing an "official religion."

As amended, the Istook text now reads:

"To secure the people's right to acknowledge God according to the dictates of conscience: Neither the United States nor any state shall establish an official religion, but the people's right to pray and to recognize their religious beliefs, heritage, or traditions on public property, including schools shall not be infringed. Neither the United States nor any state shall require any person to join in prayer or other religious activity, prescribe school prayers, discriminate against religion, or deny equal access to a benefit on account of religion."

Baptists groups advocating for religious liberty in the nation's capital disagreed over the effects of the text changes.

Brent Walker, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, said the addition of "official religion" to the Istook amendment makes the proposal worse. The BJC opposes the Istook measure.

Walker said the new language "gives the false impression that as long as no official religion is established, there is no problem." That is "not so," he added. "There's a slew of things government can do short of official recognition that will destroy the rights of conscience."

Will Dodson, governmental affairs director of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, which supports the Istook proposal, said the new wording makes it more clear that the intent of the measure does not revoke the establishment clause.

Dodson said a public school could allow students to voluntarily pray over the intercom if it applied a policy in a fair manner. For example, he said, if Protestants made up 50 percent of the student body and 20 percent of the students were Jewish, a school could allot a proportional amount of time to students who want to pray.

Dodson said his views do not differ from traditional Baptist principles. "Baptists have not historically held to a strict separation of church and state as it is held now," he said.

Lawmakers on the subcommittee debated the proposal for over three hours before approving the revised version.

Subcommittee Chairman Charles Canady, R-Fla., said Istook's amendment is necessary because "it would allow students to engage in group classroom prayer on a voluntary basis and would allow prayer at high school graduation ceremonies as long as the government did not require that the prayer occur or seek to set forth the text of the prayer."

Rep. Robert Scott, D-Va., an amendment opponent, however, said it would "end church-state separation."

"I am a supporter of school prayer, but no one should be forced to, against their will, submit to the religious beliefs of others simply because they attend a public school, visit a courthouse or work in a government agency," Scott said.

"What happens when the Catholics must compete with the Baptists for limited school funding? ... How much better off will the churches be when they become dependent on government funding?" he asked.

Proponents of the constitutional amendment said the Supreme Court has been amending the Constitution by its rulings that go against the will of the people.

Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., said the "Supreme Court has been rewriting the Constitution with a free hand for many, many years."

Rep. Melvin Watt, D-N.C., said proponents of the amendment were criticizing the Supreme Court for misinterpreting the Constitution on the one hand while counting on the court to properly interpret the Istook amendment on the other.

"The more words we give the Supreme Court to interpret, the more they're going to have to interpret," he said. Watt asked Hyde, "What is it that makes you think the Supreme Court is not going to interpret the new language in a way that you don't like?"

Hyde responded, "Just hope."

-30-

## **Employment non-discrimination bill reates debate among religious groups**

By Andrew Black

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Religious groups disagree over a bill intended to protect homosexuals from employment discrimination.

In an Oct. 23 hearing, members of the Senate Labor and Human Resources committee were urged to pass the Employment Non-discrimination Act, which would prohibit hiring, firing, promotion or compensation on the basis of sexual orientation.

A similar measure fell one vote short of passage in the Senate last year. The bill would not apply to businesses and organizations with less than 15 employees. Religious organizations would be exempt from ENDA's provisions. However, religious entities involved in for-profit operations would have to comply.

Sen. James Jeffords, R-Vt., the bill's sponsor, said ENDA should be passed because "too many hard-working individuals continue to face discrimination in their workplaces based on nothing more than their sexual orientation." He added that a recent poll showed 68 percent of Americans support such legislation.

The bill's opponents include the Christian Coalition, Family Research Council and the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. They claim that ENDA would grant gays and lesbians special rights and force many employers and coworkers to accept what they see as a sinful lifestyle.

Arne Owens, a spokesman for the Christian Coalition, said he had not read the legislation but claimed the bill would be a "trial lawyer's dream" and give "government sanction to a sexual preference most Americans believe is immoral."

Representatives from mainline Christian organizations, on the other hand, submitted testimony in support of ENDA, calling it an act of justice.

"As a child of God, every person is endowed with worth and dignity that human judgment cannot set aside," said Oliver Thomas, special counsel for the National Council of Churches. "Furthermore, we understand that as Christians we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves without exception. These principles guide us to believe that every person is entitled to equal treatment under the law,"

The committee listened to testimony from homosexuals who said they were rejected for jobs because they were gay and from business executives who have voluntarily adopted non-discrimination policies which include sexual orientation along with race, gender, religion and disability.

Kendall Hamilton from Oklahoma City told the committee he was denied a promotion at a national restaurant chain because he is gay and was told to leave his position or else "life could become miserable" for him.

He then was told that under federal and state law he had no legal recourse against discrimination.

According to Jeffords, eleven states, the District of Columbia and 170 cities and counties have passed legislation protecting gays and lesbians from discrimination.

Jeffords noted that the bill has several provisions designed to address concerns of critics. It forbids the government from collecting statistics on workers' sexual orientation and from asking employers to do so. He also cited a government report showing that state laws had not created a significant amount of litigation.

James Cox of the Rutherford Institute said a problem with the bill would be its application to religious businesses and organizations, such as a Christian publishing house, for example.

He claimed the bill would amount to the government saying "you have to hire them [homosexuals]" and that religious freedom would be violated by "forcing an opinion into religious organizations."

Another religious liberty specialist, however, said ENDA's guidelines would provide the appropriate amount of protection.

"The exception for religious organizations is critical to protect religious freedom," said Brent Walker, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee. "But those with religious objections to hiring homosexuals should not be able to discriminate when they engage exclusively in for-profit enterprises,"

A committee spokesman said further action on the bill may take place early next year. A House version of the bill sponsored by Rep. Christopher Shays, R-Conn., will likely face an uphill battle, according to the spokesman.

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## **Evangelical group discusses church-government partnerships**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Speakers at a recent gathering of progressive evangelicals voiced support for an experiment with education vouchers and urged churches to take advantage of the charitable-choice provision in the new welfare law.

Jim Wallis, an organizer of Call to Renewal, said America is at a turning point in the history of the nation's social policy. "The role of churches in social policy is changing dramatically," he said. "We need to be ready to step up to the plate."

The evangelical group was formed in 1996 to counter the Christian right but avoids the "Christian left" label. The group stemmed from a 1995 statement signed by more than 100 Christian leaders, voicing discontent with political labels and the solutions to social problems offered by the political right and left.

The group held its second annual conference Oct. 16-17 to discuss the changing relationship between church and state and the role of the religious community in shaping and implementing new social policy.

"While the Democrats and Republicans have been congratulating themselves on 'ending welfare as we know it,' the Call to Renewal has been traveling the length and breadth of the country to mobilize people to end poverty as we know it," Wallis said. "Who but the church is better equipped to offer the social and moral leadership now needed in the nation?" he asked.

Some Call to Renewal leaders are now promoting one of the top legislative agendas of the Christian Coalition and other religious right advocates -- vouchers for parents to pay tuition at private and parochial schools.

Ron Sider, president of Evangelicals for Social Action, led a breakout discussion on vouchers and said he is not in favor of a universal voucher system but is ready to test a voucher program.

Sider said a voucher program should be tested in five to 10 different places and extra money should be given to accommodate poor and handicapped children. He said the government should set minimal health and safety standards, administer standardized tests and disqualify schools that are not performing well.

He also said any experiment should assess how it affects the poor and racial minorities. "If it failed on those two counts, I would lead the fight against vouchers," Sider said.

Sider listed the pros of vouchers, including giving parents fundamental control of education, bringing values back into education and giving the poor a real choice for the first time. He said new polls indicate that there is growing support for vouchers in the African-American community.

Citing the cons, Sider said vouchers could threaten the separation of church and state and could fail students with consistent discipline problems, forcing them back into the public system. He also said vouchers could lead to a further polarization in the public schools and possibly hurt the public-school system.

Another Call to Renewal leader disagrees with Sider about vouchers. Tony Campolo, professor of sociology at Eastern College in St. Davids, Pa., said vouchers do not resolve the issue of how public schools are kept from becoming the dumping ground of kids who are not wanted by private schools.

Campolo, a prominent participant in the Call to Renewal, said: "Private schools have the ability to reject students who they deem to be undesirable. Public schools do not."

In an interview, Campolo also said under proposed voucher plans, "there would be nothing to keep extremist groups from starting their own schools and nurturing extremist values in children while the taxpayers foot the bill." He added that the voucher plan would cause the nation to cross a line separating the church and state "that we may regret crossing."

"I worry about Christian children never having to interact with Jewish, Muslim and agnostic children," Campolo said. "Living in a pluralistic society -- learning to get along is crucial and the separatism that would be encouraged by vouchers would hinder children from learning to accommodate to those of other backgrounds," he said.

Campolo said he is troubled that the weight seems to be shifting in favor of vouchers. African-American pastors are beginning to favor vouchers, he said, because they are frustrated by the lack of improvement in public education, and there is a growing desire to start their own church-based schools.

Campolo said one education reform that should take place is a national testing system that would hold children to a universal accountability for learning.

"I find it incredibly strange that the conservative establishment, which has been so committed to cutting government spending, should turn around and advocate the voucher system, which obviously is going to cost this country a fortune."

In another breakout session, Call to Renewal members were urged to take advantage of a new welfare provision called charitable choice, which allows churches to use government money through contracts and vouchers.

Stanley Carlson-Thies, a senior fellow at the Center for Public Justice, distributed "A Guide to Charitable Choice." The guide, which prints questions and answers about the new welfare provision, was published by the Center for Public Justice and Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom.

Carlson-Thies outlined the differences in the new law between government vouchers and government grants. He said when states contract with a faith-based provider, none of the funds may be used for sectarian worship, instruction or proselytization. "Helping someone get saved is not the public purpose of this money," he said.

There is no such restriction, however, when the money comes to the faith-based group in the form of a voucher, he added. Carlson-Thies said under vouchers welfare recipients are allowed to "get a full-blooded religious experience."

In coordination with the Call to Renewal meeting, a diverse group called the Christian Roundtable also met to discuss solutions to poverty. The group first gathered in April just before the Presidents' Summit for America's Future. Participating in the discussion were representatives from groups such as the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., National Association of Evangelicals, Family Research Council and the U.S. Catholic Conference.

The group agreed on a plan to create a national Internet database focusing on successful church-based efforts around the country and aiming to assist churches who might want to offer similar programs.

The national bodies participating in the roundtable also agreed to send a letter to all 50 state governors, requesting "meetings to facilitate the creation of new church-government-business partnerships, including implementation of the charitable choice provision which allows states to finance programs run by religious-based groups."