

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Baptists in Middle East ask for prayers for peace**

By Martha Skelton

HAMBURG, Germany (ABP) -- Baptist leaders in the Middle East are asking other Christians to pray for peace as the crisis between Iraq and the United Nations reaches a critical stage.

"We are praying especially for the [Iraqi] people in these days," Shukri Rabadi, president of the Jordan Baptist Convention, told European Baptist Press Service. Rabadi said some Jordanian Baptist churches include Iraqi families who moved to Jordan after the Gulf War seven years ago and small Iraqi Baptist groups meet in some areas.

Baptists in Israel are struggling, with everyone else, to maintain a regular life while daily news broadcasts the threat of possible missile attacks. "We need special prayers that we will have peace," said Phillip Sa'ed, chairman of the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel. Most Baptist church members in Israel, including Sa'ed, are Arabs.

People are buying new gas masks and equipment to seal off a room in their houses from possible chemical or biological gas attack. Sa'ed is a pastor in Haifa, and it is predicted that Haifa and Tel Aviv would be the targets of an attack. As a parent, Sa'ed says, it is hard for them to take such precautions and still quiet the fears of their children.

At the same time, Christians are finding such crises "a time of deeper ministry," he said. "We do a lot of visiting, reading the Bible, preaching the gospel." But they are "praying [leaders involved] will solve the problem peacefully."

Lebanon does not face a direct involvement in the current crisis, but Baptists there do have some specific concerns, said Charles Costa, general secretary of the Lebanese Baptist Convention.

Two Iraqi students attend the Baptist Seminary near Beirut and they and their families back in Iraq are specific concerns for Lebanese Baptists. Costa asked for prayer for them as they try to communicate with their loved ones and struggle with the crisis situation without being close to their families at such a time.

Costa also asked for prayer and reflection on the total peace process in the area. He decried the "double standard" applied in the region by the United States in dealing with the governments of Israel and others.

"On the one hand, Israel bucks at every United Nations resolution with no ramifications and on the other hand, Iraq has to keep to the letter [of the resolutions.] That has left a feeling of disappointment even among the Christians [in the region,]" he said.

The three Mideast Baptist unions are members of the European Baptist Federation.

## Protect tithes from creditors, lawmakers told at hearing

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Federal bankruptcy laws need to be reformed to avert an "avalanche" of lawsuits demanding that churches forfeit contributions given by individuals who later file bankruptcy, witnesses told lawmakers at a Feb. 12 hearing on a pending bill in Congress.

The Religious Liberty and Charitable Donation Protection Act is sponsored by Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, and Rep. Ron Packard, R-Calif. It would bar bankruptcy courts from confiscating contributions to religious organizations and other charities to pay creditors.

The measure would protect contributions up to 15 percent of the debtor's annual income or more if the debtor can show that giving more than 15 percent to charities has been a consistent practice. It also would allow religious or charitable contributions to be included in the budget of a debtor after bankruptcy has been filed.

Recent court rulings have held that donations to churches are not protected from creditors because church contributors do not receive anything of reasonably equivalent value in exchange. So-called "fraudulent transfers" are forbidden in bankruptcy law to protect creditors against debtors giving away money to avoid paying their debts.

But sponsors of the bill and religious leaders told the House Subcommittee on Commercial and Administrative Law that courts have misinterpreted portions of the bankruptcy code in applying them to charitable gifts.

"Many of our churches and charities across this country live hand to mouth, Packard said. "What comes into the collection plate on one day is usually spent the next."

"When a creditor is allowed to sue a church or charity in order to recover a donation made possibly months earlier, the church or charity is usually put in a position of hardship," he said.

Stephen Goold, senior pastor of Crystal Evangelical Free Church, said his church's six-year battle to keep \$13,450 in tithes given by a couple during the year before they filed for bankruptcy "was the first in what has become hundreds of bad applications of good law."

Goold told lawmakers the church has spent more than \$300,000 in the protracted legal battle, which is still pending.

Opposing the bill, Stephen Case, speaking on behalf of the National Bankruptcy Conference, said Congress "should not slice up our fraudulent transfer laws with special-interest exceptions, no matter how deserving the special-interests groups may be."

Case also said the bill would create "an opportunity for persons filing personal bankruptcy to stop off at the local charity and make a donation on their way to file bankruptcy."

A scholar of constitutional law disagreed.

"If I understand federal bankruptcy laws, why would I drop off money at a charity on my way to the courthouse? I could drop it off in my retirement plan and then I could keep it," said Douglas Laycock, professor at the University of Texas Law School in Austin.

The current law already allows courts to recover donations made to delay or hinder a creditor.

"If I've been going on for years putting five dollars in the collection plate and all the sudden, before I file for bankruptcy, I clean out my last account and give 15 percent of my last year's income to my church, the trustee and the bankruptcy judge will look at the timing, the amount, the circumstances, the change in pattern and say ... 'you had the actual intent to defraud your creditors,' Laycock said.

"So the fraud scenario is not going to happen," Laycock said. "What is going to happen is that the routine demand that churches refund contributions ... will come to an end."

Laycock said the fact that "courts cannot constitutionally quantify the value of religious benefits and services does not mean that these services have no value."

Steven McFarland, director of the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom said creditors have not been similarly able to recover funds spent at entertainment facilities such as casinos.

"The bankruptcy code must be amended out of simple fairness to the church. Presently, a debtor can blow all [his or her] money on wine, women and dance the night before filing bankruptcy and the creditor cannot recover that money," McFarland told Associated Baptist Press after the hearing.

"In fact, the only place they can recover money is the church," he added.

Some creditors are handing out credit cards "before you even ask for them," McFarland said. "So don't cry to me when one of these guys goes bankrupt. The church -- what are they going to do? Run credit checks when they pass the offering plate?"

A separate bill sponsored by Rep. Helen Chenoweth, R-Idaho, was also discussed at the hearing. But religious leaders, including McFarland and Laycock, were critical of her approach.

Chenoweth's measure would only protect donations to religious institutions when the donor is under "religious obligation" to give.

The Grassley-Packard measure would protect donations to churches as well as other types of non-profit charities.

Grassley said protecting only religiously motivated donations from the reach of bankruptcy laws would violate the establishment clause of the First Amendment.

McFarland and Laycock disagreed but urged lawmakers to avoid that approach so as not to open the door for a constitutional challenge.

"Congress can avoid all that litigation if it protects secular and religious charities alike," Laycock said.

Laycock and McFarland also called on sponsors of the bill to expand the proposal to bar the confiscation of donations under state bankruptcy laws.

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## **Nation's oldest physician still practicing at 100**

By Jack Harwell

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The nation's oldest practicing physician celebrated her 100th birthday Feb. 1.

More than 300 people came to her "private" birthday party. She received birthday greetings from Presidents Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter and congratulatory calls from around the world.

In honor of the occasion, Druid Hills Baptist Church in Atlanta, where she has been a member for 65 years, made a donation to a well-baby clinic sponsored by Central Presbyterian Church in downtown Atlanta. For 56 years, Denmark donated her day "off" each week to the clinic, giving free care to inner-city mothers who could not afford a private doctor.

"Every Child Should Have A Chance" is the title of a book Denmark wrote in 1972. The book is now in its sixth printing. It embodies her philosophy of life and her practice of medicine.

At her 100th birthday party, she told a reporter: "I don't deserve all this recognition. My only mission in life has been to give a child a chance."

Thousands of young Georgia mothers would testify that she has done just that. One such grateful mother is Paula Lewis of Smyrna, Ga.

"We call Dr. Denmark our family saint," Lewis said. "A visit to her little office in Alpharetta is a spiritual experience."

"When your kids are Dr. Denmark babies, they are not sick much," Lewis added. "She teaches you to doctor them without medication. She does what the Bible commands -- she heals the sick."

Some of Denmark's methods are non-conventional, but she doesn't flinch from expounding them.

For example, she doesn't believe anybody ought to eat sugar. She has not knowingly taken sugar into her own body in 65 years. "And my fingers are as nimble as a teenager's," she demonstrated. "No arthritis at all."

She doesn't believe mothers ought to nurse their babies longer than seven months. And after that, she doesn't like them to have cow's milk. She says humans are the only animals who drink the milk of other animals, "and that can't be healthy."

But Denmark's hottest fervor comes out when she talks about young mothers staying at home with their infants. She believes every mother ought to stay at home from the time her first baby is born until her last baby is at least seven.

She recalls "the suffragettes" coming to her hometown of Portal, Ga., in the early 1920s, promising all the good things women would do when they got the vote.

"Well, women got the vote in 1922 and what have we done with it? Now we can kill our babies; that's what we've done with it. I believe in women having freedom. But with our freedom we have abandoned our children and wrecked our nation. Forty percent of the mothers who work outside the home lose their husbands. Is that progress?"

Bucking against popular trends is not a new thing for Denmark. In 1928, she was the only woman in the graduating class at Medical College of Georgia in Augusta. She was the first doctor certified for the staff at the famed Egleston Children's Hospital in Atlanta, a position she was to hold for over 60 years.

She still uses the same wooden examining table she started using in 1930. "My husband built it and it's the right height for examining infants," she explained. "Why would I want another one?"

For more than 40 years, she kept her office in the home she and her husband -- childhood sweetheart John Eustace Denmark -- built in Sandy Springs. John was a vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank in Atlanta; he kept the books and tended the roses. They shared a passion for golf and for Druid Hills Baptist Church, where John was a deacon for over four decades before his death in 1991.

In 1985, they sold their Sandy Springs home to Northside Hospital and moved 20 miles north to an open country location between Alpharetta and Cumming, Ga. They built a home duplicating the one they had left in Sandy Springs. And they renovated a 120-year-old house "out in the yard" to make her new office.

The office is sparse and humble. But she sees an average of 15 to 20 patients each day, four days per week. Her daughter, Mary Hutcherson of Athens, Ga., comes over on her off days and helps with the books and the roses.

Denmark, who is 5 feet tall and weighs about 100 pounds, walks several miles every afternoon, hikes in the mountains of Colorado with her medical-doctor grandson and golfs occasionally. "When I play golf, I play 18 holes," she bragged.

Harold Zwald, pastor emeritus of Druid Hills Baptist Church, recalled: "This devoted couple would always be there, in their favorite pew, every Sunday. They never sought acclaim, despite the great heights they achieved in their careers. Their daughter, Mary, and other family members often accompanied them to worship, and mutual love was always evident."

Denmark was named Atlanta's Woman of the Year in 1953. She has several honorary degrees. She was featured in Parade magazine in 1989. She also received Atlanta's coveted "Shining Light Award" in 1989.

But her greatest honors have probably been the number of grateful mothers who have named their daughters and granddaughters for her. She has given their children a chance.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Photos sent separately to Baptist state papers.

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