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## **Baptist-owned trucking company boasts largest chaplaincy force**

By Jack Harwell

DECATUR, Ga. (ABP) -- A Georgia trucking company owned by Baptists boasts what is believed to be the largest force of industrial chaplains in the world.

Allied Systems of Decatur, Ga., has 125 industrial chaplains spread across the United States and Canada.

Allied Systems recently took two major leaps in the auto-hauling industry when it acquired Ryder Automotive Carrier Services of Florida, the largest auto-hauler in America, and Auto Haulaway of Canada, largest auto-hauler in Canada.

Allied Systems now operates 5,300 auto-hauling rigs at 150 truck terminals. It has more than 10,000 employees and hauls 12 million new cars per year. With an annual corporate budget over \$1 billion, the company was recently listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Soon, it will expand into South America.

Since 1963, Allied Systems has employed industrial chaplains to minister to its employees and their families. The ministry was started by Guy Rutland Jr., then chief executive officer of the company started by his father in 1943.

The current CEO, Robert Rutland, has continued a family tradition of endowing Baptist causes, but he is most proud of the chaplaincy ministry at Allied Systems.

Because of the ministry's success, Allied Systems started a separate company to train chaplains. It has entered an agreement with the pastoral-care department at nearby Emory University to prepare college and seminary students for industrial chaplaincy.

Robert Rutland is called on frequently to speak to business executives about why a chaplaincy program is so important to a successful business.

"We see Christian chaplaincy as a vital component of the culture of our company," Rutland said. "We are a family-run business with a strong heritage of Christian commitment. It is good Christianity, and it is good business, to care for the spiritual, emotional and family needs of your employees and their loved ones."

Industry-wide, Rutland said, employee turnover is more than 100 percent a year in the trucking industry. At his company, he said, the turnover rate is about 4 percent. "We are able to keep our employees satisfied and happy and they stay with us," he explained. "The morale is better, productivity is better and the turnover is almost nil. That makes for bottom-line profits for everybody, including our customers."

Allied Systems has three full-time chaplains on its home-office staff in Decatur. Most of the terminal chaplains are contract chaplains, who work from 10 to 40 hours per week. Most are pastors, retired ministers or professional counselors.

Ed Salter is chief of the chaplaincy ministry. He was pastor of Redan Baptist Church in Atlanta for many years. While both Salter and his associate director, Huey Perry, are Baptists, their ministry is non-denominational. "We have chaplains from almost every religious affiliation you can name," he said.

Salter described the chaplaincy ministry as "primarily a ministry of presence, a ministry of caring."

"We like to say we minister by the way, by the truck," he said.

The chaplaincy program "is not an evangelistic or proselyting ministry," he said. "We are there, on the job, to meet whatever needs our employees might have, both at work and in their families."

Chaplains plan family picnics for employees, bring devotional messages at staff meetings, sponsor monthly birthday parties and yearly anniversary parties for employees and minister in all types of family crisis situations, Salter said.

Salter told of a recent experience where a driver was on the road in Western Canada when a tragedy struck his family in the Deep South. Through a series of "networking" calls, a chaplain was located in Canada. He met the driver at his next stop, stayed and prayed with him and made arrangements to fly him home, at company expense, to be with his family.

The chaplaincy department also maintains a spiritual library and family resource center at the home office, where more than 100 employees work. No alcoholic beverages are allowed at any Allied Systems functions.

Salter laughed as he related: "When we bought the auto-hauling company in Canada, and their employees learned we do not allow alcoholic beverages at company events, there was some grumbling on the part of truck drivers. But after just one or two functions, we were deluged with words of gratitude from wives and children who were grateful to attend company parties with sober husbands and dads."

Through the \$1.5 million chaplaincy department budget, Allied Systems also provides Guideposts Magazine to every employee. "We understand that Allied Systems is the largest corporate subscriber to Guideposts in the world," Salter said.

Salter said the chaplaincy ministry is not intended to take the place of a pastor, priest or rabbi. "We urge our employees to be faithful to their churches and their local ministers. But we are there, on the job -- 'by the way, by the truck' -- for any personal need which may arise on the job; and needs do arise."

After 30 years as a pastor, Salter termed it "a great personal thrill" to minister hands on as a chaplain. "And I have a profound appreciation for the life of the working man and woman, a role I never fully understood while I was a pastor."

K.C. Richardson, an Allied Systems driver in Hapeville, Ga., said: "The company policy of providing caring chaplains helps to create an environment of trust and listening. They give a word of encouragement, a hug of support. My chaplains have been great sources of inspiration to my whole family."

Robert Rutland summarized: "We very much want our employees to see in a tangible way that the company cares about them and their families. When that happens, employees will give the extra mile of productivity because they care about the company. And they care about keeping our customers happy."

## **IBTS professor/administrator joining faculty at Gardner-Webb**

By Robert O'Brien

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. (ABP) -- Cooperative Baptist Fellowship missionary Kent Blevins will join Gardner-Webb University's faculty after he leaves faculty and administrative posts at International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic, at the end of the current semester.

Blevins will end a 16-year missionary career in Europe to become associate professor of religion at the university in Boiling Springs, N.C. He and his wife, Debbie Crone-Blevins, served under the Southern Baptist International Mission Board, 1982-92, before resigning to become missionaries for the Atlanta-based CBF.

The Blevinses and CBF missionaries Don and Carolyn Berry are among faculty members losing jobs in a sweeping "refocusing" of the Prague seminary adopted last fall. EBF's executive committee approved IBTS trustee recommendations that will move the academic program away from a traditional degree-granting seminary model to one that supplements theological education offered at Europe's 45 national Baptist seminaries.

The Berrys and Blevinses will complete their responsibilities at IBTS on July 1 and return to the United States on CBF home assignment. That will leave no Baptist missionaries on the faculty of the seminary, formerly located in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, for the first time in many years.

Blevins will join Gardner-Webb's faculty in August to teach Old and New Testament and advanced courses for religion majors in ethics, missions, church history and theology.

The Berrys will remain on home assignment through Dec. 31 while exploring other ministry options, according to Gary Baldrige, associate global missions coordinator. Don Berry has taught world religions, missions and evangelism at IBTS and directed the European Baptist Federation's Institute for Missions and Evangelism since 1994.

Kent Blevins, who joined IBTS as an assistant professor in 1991, has been academic coordinator (dean) and associate professor of ethics and practical theology since 1994. He also became the seminary's co-president in 1996 after health reasons forced President John David Hopper to shift responsibilities and then retire as a Fellowship missionary in 1997.

Debbie Crone-Blevins has worked as IBTS registrar and taught English as a second language since 1992. She previously taught theological English at the Portuguese Baptist Theological Seminary in Queluz, Portugal. She is a graduate of Wake Forest (N.C.) University and a former social worker in Kentucky.

Previously, Kent Blevins taught at Portuguese seminary, 1984-91, and was pastor of two Portuguese churches, Grace Baptist Church in Lisbon, 1988-90, and Caldas da Rainha Baptist Church, 1985-86.

He was a Garrett Fellow in Christian ethics, 1980-81, at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., where he earned master of divinity and Ph.D. degrees in 1978 and 1982. He is also a graduate of Wake Forest University and earlier was minister of youth at First Baptist Church in Hopewell, Va.

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## **African-American pastors denounce education vouchers**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Terming public education America's "common denominator," a group of African-American pastors pledged March 31 to organize their community to oppose vouchers for private schools.

"We have decided to stand up and fight for our children," said Timothy McDonald, pastor of Iconium Baptist Church in Atlanta.

Members of the People For the American Way's African-American Ministers Leadership Council held a press conference opposing a congressional proposal to create a voucher program in the District of Columbia.

"You cannot have vouchers and public education," McDonald said. "They cannot coexist. They don't go together like black-eyed peas and rice. If we allow it to happen in D.C. today, it's coming to your home town tomorrow."

McDonald criticized a proposed constitutional amendment offered by Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla. He said the Religious Freedom Amendment is all "about vouchers."

Vouchers violate the separation of church and state, McDonald said. "If we give money to one, we have to do it for all of them." He said groups like the KKK and Heaven's Gate would be able to ask for money.

The ministers were joined by Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, D-D.C., who has been fighting the congressional proposal that would provide \$7 million for "educational scholarships" to some low-income students in D.C. to attend private and parochial schools.

Norton said "court precedents all but guarantee a dismissal" of the voucher program.

The D.C. voucher initiative passed the Senate last year. Norton said the House is likely to vote on the measure after it returns from an April recess that ends April 20. President Clinton is expected to veto the measure.

Voucher supporters say they are needed to help some children escape from a failing public education system.

Washington pastor Graylan Ellis-Hagler criticized "deceptive tactics used by proponents of vouchers," including a petition last year showing support for vouchers for D.C. among African-American clergy.

Hagler, pastor of Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ, said the petition was presented "as if it meant scholarships for poor children."

"Clergy signed on because they were led to believe that this new proposal would bring money to working families with children for public schools," he said. "We quickly discovered that we had been lied to."

"The real goal of vouchers is to take money out of the public coffers and redirect it to private schools," he added.

Hagler said when the ministers tried to remove their names from the lists, the sponsors of the list "abruptly ended their relationship with us."

"Let me set the record straight: black clergy in this city oppose vouchers," he said.

Rolen Womack, pastor of Progressive Baptist Church in Milwaukee, said "voucher schemes are the equivalent of a drive-by shooting where our neighborhoods and our children are the victims."

"Vouchers are simply another way that the elite in our country have found a way to defund our schools," he added.

Milwaukee is one of two U.S. cities which have implemented a voucher plan.

Womack said there are 100,000 public school students in Milwaukee but approximately 15,000 places available in private and parochial schools. "So even with vouchers, most students remain in the public-school system."

He also said parents participating in the Milwaukee program found that the \$3,600 voucher did not cover "hidden costs for high registration fees, books, uniforms and transportation." Students also "were frequently turned away from established private schools if their previous performance was found lacking," he said.

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## **Equal treatment sometimes hinders religion, panel says**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Religiously neutral laws, such as those dealing with zoning and bankruptcy, often interfere with religious practice, a panel of religious experts told a congressional committee March 26.

The legal specialists asked the House Subcommittee on the Constitution to create a new law giving special protections for religious practices in the face of general laws enforced by state and local governments.

"There is a trend in the interpretation of the religion clauses to treat religion like everything else," said Mark Chopko, general counsel of the United States Catholic Conference.

The subcommittee hearing was part of congressional efforts to bolster protections for religious practice after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the Religious Freedom Restoration Act unconstitutional.

Congress enacted the law in 1993. Under RFRA, governments could pass laws which restrict religious practice only if they could demonstrate a "compelling" reason to do so. That was the standard used in Supreme Court rulings until 1990, when the high court's decision in *Employment Division vs. Smith* made it easier for government to enact laws and policies that happen to burden religion.

Last summer's ruling by the high court that Congress lacked the authority to impose RFRA's protections for religion on state and local governments sent federal lawmakers back to the drawing board.

Members of the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion, a diverse collection of religious and civil-liberties groups formed originally to help enact RFRA, want Congress to restore protections provided by the 1993 law. Such legislation could be enforced by Congress under its power to regulate commerce between states or the distribution of federal funds.

The seven members of the legal panel detailed examples of government actions that interfere with religion:

- Bankruptcy laws can force churches to turn over tithes that are contributed by members who later declare bankruptcy.
- Public school policies against the wearing of hats can prevent a Jewish boy from wearing a yarmulke.
- Zoning restrictions can prevent religious groups from meeting in certain neighborhoods.
- Prison officials and prosecutors can tape ritual "confessions" and other communications inmates might have with their priest or pastor.

Dean Ahmad of the American Muslim Council said that since the high court struck down RFRA, "Muslims, among others, have been left naked before the power of state and local authorities."

Marc Stern, co-director of the American Jewish Congress, said Congress needs to put in place a mechanism that requires government officials to take a "second look" before enforcing general laws on religious practices.

"What is needed is a mechanism to force negotiations, to compel public officials to move beyond a mentality of 'this is the way we do things -- we don't make exceptions,' and to force a recognition ... that not everything government regulates or undertakes is equally weighty or that there is only one way to do things," Stern said.

Subcommittee chairman Charles Canady, R-Fla., said Congress "should work to ensure that this basic right is not relegated to second-class status."

In a written statement, Canady said he looks forward "to working successfully in this Congress to preserve full protection for our 'first freedom' -- the freedom to practice one's religion without government interference."

During the hearing, Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., asked members of the legal panel whether a proposed constitutional amendment recently approved by the House Judiciary Committee would harm the ability of religious groups to get special accommodations from the government by requiring that government treat religion equally.

The panel agreed that the Religious Freedom Amendment, sponsored by Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., would not help religious groups, especially those from minority faiths, win exemptions from generally applied laws that restrict religious practice.

Under the Istook proposal, the government would not be able to "discriminate against religion, or deny equal access to a benefit on account of religion."

"Equal treatment is precisely the problem -- neutral laws being applied equally," Stern said. The proposed constitutional amendment would "enhance the argument that zoning laws would be applied generally," he added.

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## **Smith decision gives 'comfort' to author of Russian religion law**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The author of a controversial Russian law which restricts nontraditional religions used a 1990 U.S. Supreme Court decision as "support" for the Russian measure, according to a religious legal expert.

The high court's decision in *Employment Division vs. Smith*, which led to an outcry from the U.S. religious community and passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, gave Victor Zorkaltev comfort, said Barry Fisher.

Fisher, former chairman of the American Bar Association Subcommittee on Religious Freedom, spoke at a congressional hearing March 26.

Zorkaltev, chairman of the Public Organizations Committee of the Russian Duma, authored a law giving special status to the Russian Orthodox Church and restricting activities of minority religions.

Fisher told the House Subcommittee on the Constitution the *Smith* decision stated that "any society that made exemptions to general laws for those acting under their religious beliefs 'would be courting anarchy,' and that the 'danger increases in direct proportion to the society's diversity of religious beliefs.'"

Fisher, who recently spoke with Zorkaltev, said "the Duma committee chairman understood the American Supreme Court to be proceeding from the premise that the stability of society is threatened by the proliferation of religions, each with its own demands for accommodation of its particular beliefs and practices, and that the general laws of the state are a necessary anchor to assure social equilibrium," Fisher said.

He added, "It is indeed disturbing that a U.S. Supreme Court decision interpreting the First Amendment is taken abroad as precedent -- or even as an excuse -- for repressive legislation."

Fisher joined six other religious legal experts at the hearing in asking lawmakers to create a new law to increase protections for religious practices in the face of general laws enforced by state and local governments.

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