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## **WMU executive suffers mild stroke**

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Dellanna O'Brien, executive director of the Southern Baptist Convention auxiliary Woman's Missionary Union, was hospitalized after suffering a reportedly mild stroke at her home in Birmingham, Ala.

O'Brien, 65, suffered a mild stroke on Sept. 26, according to Teresa Dickens, WMU communications specialist.

Dickens said Sept. 29 that O'Brien was experiencing weakness on her right side but was able to get up with assistance. O'Brien was able to communicate with family members and others, but her speech was slurred, Dickens said.

Dickens said early test results were favorable, but other tests were pending. O'Brien was scheduled to begin therapy Sept. 30.

O'Brien, a former missionary to Indonesia and educator, has led the 1-million-member WMU since 1989. Her husband, Bill O'Brien, is a former Foreign Mission Board administrator who now teaches missions and directs the global center at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham.

The WMU spokeswoman said O'Brien and her husband were in good spirits and "concerned but very optimistic about her situation."

Dickens said the couple "do appreciate your prayers" but that phone calls to their home or the hospital were discouraged. Cards and notes can be sent to O'Brien at WMU's mailing address, Dickens said.

## **Carter calls for inspection of U.S. missile attack site**

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Former President Jimmy Carter has called for a technical investigation of an Aug. 21 U.S. missile attack on a drug factory in the Sudan suspected of manufacturing an ingredient in nerve gas.

The Sudanese government has called upon the United Nations or another authoritative agency to send a qualified technical team to investigate its claim that the Shifa Pharmaceutical Industries plant in Khartoum was being used only to make medicine and veterinary supplies.

"Despite early American reluctance to support this request, this is something that now needs to be done," Carter said in a statement Sept. 17.

President Clinton ordered the Aug. 21 attack based in intelligence reports that the plant was being used to manufacture a precursor ingredient for chemical weapons and purported links to Osama bin Laden, a Saudi millionaire suspected of masterminding terrorist attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

News stories since the attack, however, have questioned the accuracy of those reports and whether the attack blew up the wrong target.

U.S. officials say there was enough evidence to justify the strike.

Carter said there would be no need for intelligence sources to be revealed in an international probe. A physical inspection of the plant site, analysis of remaining chemicals and pharmaceuticals and sampling of soil and building materials would reveal how the plant was being used, he said.

"If the evidence shows that the Sudanese are guilty, they should be condemned both for lying and for contributing to terrorist activities," Carter said. "Otherwise, we should admit our error and make amends to those who have suffered loss or injury."

Earlier, 19 Baptist ethicists, educators and congregational leaders sent an open letter to Clinton urging him to support an inspection of the plant by international scientists.

One of the letter's signers, Robert Parham of the Baptist Center for Ethics, said an independent investigation would dispel speculation of a "Wag the Dog" scenario -- that the military strike was intended to divert attention from the president's personal life -- and would be consistent with Clinton's promise at a White House prayer breakfast to follow "the path of repentance."

"Authentic repentance begins with expressions of contrition," Parham said, but "then moves toward restoration and righting wrong."

An investigation would "remove any doubt" about motivation for the bombing, Parham said. He also criticized the destruction of a plant known to produce medicines and the hurting of innocent civilians associated with the attack. "The President should right that wrong with the Sudanese people," Parham said.

Recent editorials in the New York Times and the religious magazine The Christian Century also criticized the action.

"The United States is entitled to use military force to protect itself against terrorism," said a Sept. 23 editorial in the Times. "But the case for every such action must be rigorously established. In the case of the Sudan, Washington has conspicuously failed to prove its case."

In a signed editorial in the Sept. 9-16 Christian Century, Editor James Wall observed: "Not since Ronald Reagan sent the Marines to save a medical school in Grenada so he could look tough after slinking out of Lebanon has a president been so open to criticism that he used military might to bolster his image. Clinton's attacks were unwarranted, ineffective and did more for Osama bin Laden's anti-American cause than it did for American security."

## **Religious liberty abroad is focus of new State Department office**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The leader of a new State Department office established to address religious freedom said it will aid in providing "predictable" U.S. responses for people who have been denied religious liberty abroad.

Robert Seiple, special representative of the secretary of state for international religious freedom, told Associated Baptist Press the office will assure that all available resources from the government and the faith community are being tapped to promote religious freedom in other nations.

For 12 years, Seiple served as president of World Vision, a Christian-based organization that provides humanitarian assistance to more than 45 million people in more than 100 countries. He also served as president of Eastern College and Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania.

The new State Department office is housed in the department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Seiple will report to the secretary of state and to the White House.

Seiple told religious leaders at a Sept. 15 meeting that he hoped the office could use "pre-emptive diplomacy" in promoting religious freedom and reconciliation abroad. The office can bring about "bureaucratic leverage" on foreign powers, he added.

He said it is important that "we are good stewards of this tremendous resource, which in some quarters is known as the last remaining superpower."

Seiple made the remarks at a gathering of the State Department's Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad. The group, established in 1996 by the Clinton administration, submitted an interim report on religious liberty earlier this year. The report outlines steps the State Department and other federal agencies are taking to promote religious freedom and listed several recommendations to make them more effective.

Jim Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church in Orlando, Fla., and former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, told a reporter that the State Department has already implemented some of the recommendations, including the establishment of the new State Department office to deal with religious freedom.

"I think the appointment of Robert Seiple is a tremendous asset to this group and to what we're trying to accomplish," Henry said, noting that Seiple's experience at World Vision helps him to know where a lot of the challenges are in the world.

Henry is one of 20 members of the advisory committee. He said Seiple will be a "connecting link" between the government and the religious community for religious-persecution concerns. "Now we know where to go and we're going to be talking to people who are more sensitized to religious concerns that are coming up."

Henry said his time on the advisory committee has taught him that persecution "is not limited only to Christians."

"I think that's one of the biggest things I've discovered -- though I think we're the largest group, without question, that's being persecuted," Henry said.

Seiple said the office should not limit its focus to persecution of Christians. "I think it would be wrong to separate out any particular faith and say that we're going to have a separate operation in the State Department to deal with that faith. It probably crosses constitutional boundaries, and I think it also crosses the boundaries of common sense," Seiple said.

He predicted the office would be established permanently. "It certainly deserves to be a permanent position given not just the interest, but the need to stand up for people who are experiencing some form of religious persecution and discrimination."

Seiple said when a religious persecution issue arises, his office would first go to the desk officer in the State Department for that country and would coordinate with the U.S. embassy in that country. The relationship with churches in the area would also be used, he said.

Seiple said the United States should stand for religious freedom around the world "every time we have a chance to stand for that kind of thing -- given the way this nation was founded, given who we are as a people, given what we believe in terms of human dignity."

Religious freedom should be "woven into the fabric ... of the American people and the institutions of this democracy in such a way that it will not fall out," he said. "So that if I leave at the end of this term, there are railroad tracks that are forever laid and someone else can come in and continue the exercise."

Seiple also said a United Nations report on religious tolerance around the world is expected in October. For about two years, a U.N. special rapporteur on religious tolerance has been studying religious freedom issues around the world, including in the United States. State Department officials have confirmed that at least one Native American group has raised concerns to the U.N. official about their freedom in America.

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## **GOP leaders tout teacher fired after prayer incident**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Armed with 300,000 signatures from New York citizens supporting school prayer, GOP lawmakers showcased the June firing of a teacher as evidence that God has been kicked out of public schools.

Mildred Rosario was fired from her teaching job at I.S. 74, a public school in the Bronx, for insubordination after she refused to give school officials assurances that she would not promote religion in the classroom after a controversial incident.

During class, a student -- troubled by the death of a fellow student -- asked Rosario if the child who had recently drowned was in heaven. In the process, Rosario led the class in prayer and told the students that Jesus came to save the human race. Rosario's lawyer said the teacher asked the class if it would be all right to lead them in prayer in the face of the question about the death.

The lawyer also said Rosario touched each child on the forehead as she said a prayer for their safety.

The incident came to light when an 11-year-old Jehovah's Witness student complained. Afterward, Rosario told supporters at a rally she would do it all over again.

At the Sept. 15 press conference with lawmakers in Washington, Rosario said one child asked if Jesus was the son of God. "I said, 'According to the Bible, yes, Jesus is the son of the living God.' Have I committed a crime? No." Rosario said the U.S. Supreme Court has confirmed that the United States is a Christian nation. "We were founded on Christian principles," she said.

GOP lawmakers said her firing illustrates the need for passage of the Religious Freedom Amendment, a constitutional amendment proposed by Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., which was recently defeated in Congress.

Istook said: "All of this arises, of course, out of a series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions, which began some 36 years ago, restricting prayer in public schools, prayer in school graduations, religious symbols that may be displayed on public property. A number of those were to five-to-four Supreme Court decisions."

Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., compared Rosario to pioneer civil-rights activist Rosa Parks. "Mildred Rosario had a similar challenge: Someone had died. And she thought that one way to express anguish and grief and to express hope was to pray."

"Now we've had schools with sex education," Gingrich said. "We've had schools where you can get raped if you go to the bathroom. We've had schools where you can buy drugs sometimes in the classroom, certainly when

you're out on the playground. We've had schools where there is so much violence you have to have security guards watching every hall. We've had schools where there is no respect for the teachers. But what was really dangerous was one day we had a school where a teacher actually prayed. Now that was a crisis."

The nation's founders, Gingrich said, would not have "understood how we got to this point."

Supporters of the separation of church and state, meanwhile, said Rosario acted inappropriately.

"Her answer was well-intentioned but wrong in that setting," said Melissa Rogers, associate general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee.

"Imagine the Jewish student held captive in that classroom," she said. "It is highly unlikely that he or she was comforted by such an experience," said Rogers.

"The Christian members of Congress who were so irate about Rosario's treatment likely would have been upset if she had preached a less familiar faith," Rogers added. "There are other constitutional, caring ways to handle these situations."

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## **Billy Graham schedules 1999 St. Louis crusade**

By Vicki Stamps

ST. LOUIS (ABP) -- More than 300 clergy and other religious leaders gathered Sept. 22 for an announcement that Billy Graham will conduct a crusade next year in St. Louis.

The Greater St. Louis Crusade is set for Oct. 14-17, 1999, in the TWA Dome. The announcement celebration took place at the Regal Riverfront Hotel in St. Louis.

Graham was not present, but his longtime associate Cliff Barrows was. "The joy of the team comes when we hear 'We've been praying for you,'" said Barrows, music and program director for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. "Don't wait till '99 for the blessing; begin to pray now."

The crusade will be Graham's third in St. Louis. His last one was in 1973; the one before that was in 1953.

Rick Marshall, director of North American crusades for the Graham organization, announced a goal of mobilizing 15,000 people prior to the event in prayer, leadership, training and outreach. "During the outreach stage, we want to make Jesus Christ unavoidable," he said.

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-- Vicki Stamps is a correspondent for the Missouri Baptist newspaper Word and Way.

## **Hurricane tests missionaries' faith**

By Rob Marus

CROSBIES, Antigua (ABP) -- Karen and Jerry Cowin's children feared their parents were dead -- at the hands of a surly visitor with an exotic French name. But, providentially, the couple -- who are missionaries with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention -- barely survived the wrath of Hurricane Georges at their home on the small Caribbean island of Antigua.

Nevertheless, they suffered a total loss of their house and all its contents, and the church and conference center where they minister lost its roof. This was the second time in three years the Cowins lost all their belongings to a natural disaster.

Antigua, a small island just east of Puerto Rico in the Leeward Islands chain, suffered Georges' full fury on Sept. 20, at a time when the storm's maximum sustained winds approached 130 miles per hour. Antigua and neighboring St. Kitts and Nevis are the first islands in the Antilles archipelago where Georges made landfall. The storm's tightly wound eye passed directly over the Cowins' house in the village of Crosbies.

The Missouri Baptist newspaper Word and Way reached the missionaries, who are Missouri natives, via cellular phone Sept. 24. All non-cellular communications on the island were destroyed by Georges.

"We spent two hours in the closet," Karen said. She and Jerry were huddled in the house's sturdy center, hoping a little flooding would be the worst they would experience. But, as the storm's winds grew more furious, ominous sounds of breaking glass and splintering wood emanating from other parts of the house turned out to be a warning of terror to come.

The Cowins' phone lines were still working through the first half of the storm, and they had been in constant contact with their children. Timothy is pastor of Rock Hill Baptist Church in St. Louis; Karrie is a junior at Union University in Jackson, Tenn.; adopted son Donnie Anderson is a helicopter pilot in Hillsborough, Ore.; and Jeremy is a recent graduate of Hannibal-LaGrange College who lives in Hannibal, Mo.

Karen was on the phone with Jeremy when the storm began to get bad. "Jeremy had just called and asked how we were doing, and asked if we were having fun with our hurricane party yet," Karen said, laughing.

Jeremy was monitoring weather reports for them at the time, and he decided to call when the storm's eyewall was passing through Antigua. "I called them just to reassure them that they were beginning to enter the hardest winds, and that it wasn't going to get much worse."

"I was talking to my mom, and she was talking about how part of the roof had come up in one of the bedrooms, and she just stopped, and said, 'Oh my!' and she screamed really loud," Jeremy recounted.

Karen said it was an unfortunate confluence of circumstances. "At that time, I saw the joint where the wall and the ceiling met just tear apart, and I screamed, 'Oh my God, the roof!' And then the phone went dead."

Jeremy was crestfallen. "At that point, I thought the worst; I thought my parents had died," he recalled. He called his siblings, and he had friends over for prayer and support. His wife, Heather, who is a dormitory adviser at HLG, shared the family's prayer requests with students in her dorm.

Meanwhile, back in Antigua, Jerry and Karen were counting their blessings. The roof had blown off and they were a little wet, but the storm's calm center soon passed over them.

"When the eye hit us -- and it was a short eye, so we only had 30 minutes -- we decided to check the house," she said. The roof was gone, and the walls were beginning to disintegrate. The Cowins knew their house couldn't withstand the winds from the rest of the storm.

"When we saw how bad it was, our neighbors were outside yelling at us to come to their house to ride it out," Karen said. "So, we spent about five or six hours with them.

"Fortunately, God was so sweet, because our neighbors have cell phones," she added. She was able to call Jeremy and tell him the good news that they were alive, well, and in a safer place.

"We kind of are laughing about it now, but I don't think we were laughing about it then," she said. "But, our humor is returning."

The Cowins are no strangers to natural disaster. After serving previously as missionaries to Brazil, they first went to Antigua three years ago in the wake of Hurricane Louis, which devastated the island. Before their belongings could be shipped to the Caribbean, a flood in Brazil claimed all of their possessions.

"We're beginning to think God thinks we only need a suitcase of clothes," Karen joked. "This is our second big loss, but we have not had time to think about it."

Both Cowins said more devastating than their personal loss from Georges is the damage to their church building and ministry center. Jerry is pastor of the International Baptist Church of Antigua, and the couple operate a conference center that hosts camps, sports retreats and other events for Baptists on the islands.

Jerry thanked Missouri Baptists for being true "prayer warriors" during their time on the mission field, and he asked for continued prayers for their ministry and the people of Antigua and nearby St. Kitts and Nevis, where they also minister.

"I'd ask them to pray that God would give us wisdom in finding the right house, that he would provide for a way to rebuild the center, and ask them to pray for the families that have lost homes."

Jerry said at last report, at least 3,000 residents of St. Kitts were left homeless by the storm. The vast majority are uninsured. Two people were killed in Antigua and Barbuda, and three were killed in St. Kitts and Nevis.

The storm continued to wreak havoc throughout the Caribbean, taking at least 250 lives in a chain of death stretching from the Leeward Islands to Cuba and on to the Florida Keys.

"We just pray that God would help us to be there for the people," Jerry said.

Karen said the prayers shouldn't stop with missions causes. "Just encourage the people to keep praying for the missionaries. But pray for yourself, because you never know when something like this is going to happen to you. You should lay up your treasures in heaven."

Jeremy said the excitement and relief of the adventure remind him of God's provision amid the danger of his parents' vocation. "It's a reminder of how dangerous it is, but it's also a reminder of how active God is in our lives," he said. "It seems every time that I worry, that I fret, God opens my eyes and reminds me, 'Hey, I'm in control.'"

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## **African missionaries ride out turmoil in Lesotho**

By Rob Marus

MASERU, Lesotho (ABP) -- Members of Missouri Woman's Missionary Union are praying fervently for Southern Baptist International Mission Board missionaries to the tiny African nation of Lesotho.

The country is recovering from major civil and military unrest -- the effects of which may hamper the missionaries' ministry for years to come. Missouri WMU has participated in a prayer partnership with Southern Baptist missionaries to the country since 1987.

Lesotho (pronounced luh-SOO-too) is a small, mountainous country completely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. It is governed by a parliamentary monarchy.

On Sept. 22, the government asked South African President Nelson Mandela to send troops to help bring stability to a situation marked by military mutiny, loss of police control, riots, strikes and roving bands of guerrillas. The Associated Press reported Sept. 23 that the 600 South African troops were surprised by the severity of the resistance. They were reinforced by about 200 troops from neighboring Botswana.

The intervention marked the first time South Africa has taken military action outside its borders since its segregationist system of apartheid ended in 1994.

Three International Mission Board missionary couples currently are serving in Lesotho -- Charles and Rebecca Middleton, Gene and Jean Phillips, and Jim and Brenda Brock. The Brocks' daughter, Paige, also lives with them in Maseru, the capital city.

The Middletons and Phillips had fled Sept. 17 to Johannesburg, South Africa, after learning of impending problems resulting from a report on the Lesotho's May elections. Charles Middleton said the unrest was sparked by dissatisfaction over alleged fraud in the elections.

"At 2 p.m. our time [on the 17th], we got a message saying all the shops in town were closing and that really big trouble was expected," he said. "We hurriedly packed a suitcase, got two or three small bags of important files and left Maseru."

The Brocks already had been in Johannesburg getting medical treatment when the other couples arrived. They decided they needed to go back and secure their home for a possible extended absence. So they left for Maseru, where they became trapped by the escalating unrest.

The following are excerpts from e-mail updates Jim Brock sent to prayer partners in Missouri during their ordeal:

-- Monday, Sept. 21, 11:56 a.m. -- "Just wanted to let you know that things are going down, but we don't know when they will hit bottom. Please pray that reason will win out. ... The opposition group has stopped calling this a protest and are now using the word 'revolution.' They are now calling the palace area 'Freedom Square.' ... Radio Lesotho was taken by the opposition yesterday and is still off the air."

-- Monday, Sept. 21, 8:24 p.m. -- "The situation has gone down some more. All are advised [by the U.S. Embassy] to remain indoors tonight and tomorrow morning. ... I think we have the makings of a bad night and morning."

-- Tuesday, Sept. 22, 6:09 a.m. -- "We have been occupied by South Africa ground and air forces. Troops are still coming in, surrounding military bases and other government institutions. As of yet, no shots have been fired."

-- Tuesday, Sept. 22, 6:54 a.m. -- "Please pray for Lesotho. Gunfire has broken out all over the city. It has been almost continuous for the last half hour. We are holding our heads down and are fine. Troops are assaulting the palace as I type. We can hear screaming from the palace and town. Our house is across from the palace and the gunfire is very heavy, along with mortar or grenades."

-- Tuesday, Sept. 22, 11:22 a.m. -- "The situation continues. ... The air is still full of smoke from houses and businesses that are burning. RSA [Republic of South Africa] tanks have moved in to confront the military that is still resisting in some areas. Some opposition people are still driving around in the residential areas of town -- some with loudspeakers, others still setting fires and others shooting at people who are out of their houses. The border is still closed on both sides.

"Some cars approaching the border have been shot at; all cars that reach the border are reported as being turned back. ... We are keeping our heads down."

-- Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2:44 p.m. -- "The looting in the city is becoming more widespread. It seems to be clear that the RSA forces have come with force to resolve the military situation, but have as yet not been able to resolve the civilian opportunistic situation of looting and burning. ... The USA Embassy is attempting to broker an evacuation convoy sometime this day. If that will take place and what it would offer is still not clear.

"We are preparing to evacuate if that looks possible. This will be my last transmission until we are out of the country OR have reached the decision that it is not advisable to try and leave."

-- Tuesday, Sept. 22, 5:19 p.m. -- "Evacuation is no longer an option. We tried to make a run for the border but found all our routes blocked by opposition persons. In the end, we simply had to return home. ... The downtown section of the city continues to burn. ... Most buildings and stores have been looted and are reported to be burning. Looters are spreading out from the center of town. ... Gunfire continues in sporadic patterns. Reports from a doctor friend at the hospital says there have been many deaths. ... We are in for the night and will not attempt going out again. We are well in spirit and in heart."

The Brocks were able to escape the next morning to Johannesburg, but they asked Missouri Baptists to continue to pray for the situation. "We must now watch and wait until we feel we can go back in," Jim Brock wrote Sept. 24. "Please pray for our house, that it will be safe. Paige would ask you to please pray for the safety of our dogs. We were forced to leave them there."

The Associated Press reported Sept. 25 that the South African military had been able to restore order in most of the country. Charles Middleton said they did not know when they would be able to return to Lesotho, but things will not be easy no matter when they do.

"We just have no way of knowing whether our house is still standing or whether it has been looted," he wrote. He added he was much more concerned with Lesotho's residents and their continued peace and stability.

"There will be severe food shortages, and no one can work because all businesses have been destroyed. Analysts are already saying it could take decades to rebuild the tiny kingdom of Lesotho ... .

"We see an increased and violent antagonism toward whites and other foreigners. Americans look like the white Afrikaners [South Africans] and are considered to be part of the problem because they are representative of the invading South African forces.

"We ask prayer for personal safety, we ask for wisdom in being able to deal with situations that are potentially dangerous. ... Pray for us as we try to assist our Basotho brothers and sisters, who will be facing loss of jobs, lack of food, exposure to violence and even the threat of death to themselves and family members."

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