

# Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Greg Warner  
Associate Editor: Bob Allen  
Phone: (904) 262-6626  
Fax: (904) 262-7745

October 22, 1998

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
Nashville, Tennessee

(98-80)

OCT 28 1998

## *In this issue:*

- Letter from President Clinton seeks forgiveness from home congregation
- Baptists care for victims of south Texas floods
- Churches ousted over homosexuality seek membership in New York region
- Former Houston pastor heads Oklahoma group
- Nashville church rebuilds after April tornado

## **Letter from President Clinton seeks forgiveness from home congregation**

By Trennis Henderson

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (ABP) -- President Bill Clinton's home church has received a handwritten letter in which Clinton asks forgiveness from his fellow church members. Rex Horne, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., read the two-page letter at the conclusion of the congregation's morning worship service Oct. 18.

According to Horne, Clinton "expressed repentance for his actions, sadness for the consequence of his sin on his family, friends and church family and asked forgiveness from Immanuel."

As the home church of the embattled president, Immanuel has come under fire from critics who contend the congregation should exercise church discipline against its most famous member in light of Clinton's public admission that he had an inappropriate relationship with a White House intern and misled the public about it.

A leading critic, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Albert Mohler, declined to comment on Clinton's letter, according to Baptist Press.

Horne has refused to enter the debate over local-church discipline and autonomy. "As a pastor of a local church, I have a responsibility to do what's right before the Lord and for our church," he told the Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine.

In an earlier interview, he emphasized that "Immanuel has always approached the work of the Lord as an autonomous church while seeking to be cooperative in every way possible."

Concerning Clinton's letter to the congregation where he has been a member since 1980, Horne said it "was the right thing for the president to do." He added that he "sensed an affirmation of the president's request for forgiveness" from "the great majority of the people" attending the Oct. 18 service.

Mike Seabaugh, chairman of this year's Arkansas Baptist State Convention resolutions committee, said Immanuel's response to Clinton's letter indicates that "this issue has been dealt with on a spiritual level."

Acknowledging that unfolding developments in the presidential crisis "put us in an odd in-between time between forgiveness and justice," Seabaugh added, "I hope any statement we make would affirm the basic biblical

principles of forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration without neglecting the ideas of accountability and God's judging of sin.

"I want the resolutions committee to lead Arkansas Baptists to the high ground in all of this," said Seabaugh, pastor of First Baptist Church in Camden, Ark. "We want to make a positive statement for the cause of Christ."

In a related development, messengers attending the Pulaski Baptist Association annual meeting adopted a resolution supporting "our cherished doctrine of the autonomy of the local church." The resolution, presented by the association's executive board, affirmed Immanuel's right "to conduct their ministry as they see fit under the direction of God's Holy Spirit."

The association, which includes Immanuel as a member congregation, also voted to present the resolution for consideration during the Nov. 3-4 state convention annual meeting in Arkadelphia.

"The bottom line is we need to affirm the autonomy of all of our churches, not just Immanuel," Seabaugh noted. "This has been a very public crisis that involves very private issues. It would be wise for all of us to take heed not to judge what we're not a direct part of."

-30-

## **Baptists care for victims of south Texas floods**

By Ken Camp

NEW BRAUNFELS, Texas (ABP) -- When a once-in-a-lifetime flood swamped Dick Davis' home for the second time, he took it in stride.

Davis' house near the Guadalupe River first flooded in 1972, the same year he joined First Baptist Church of Seguin, Texas. Twenty-six years later, he was again standing in knee-deep mud in what had been his living room.

"I'm older now. I've been through it before. And I have a lot of faith," Davis said. "I quit worrying a long time ago about why things like this happen. I'm not in charge of that. I'm not the chairman of that committee."

A line of thunderstorms dumped more than 20 inches of rain on south central Texas, Oct. 17-18. The torrential rains caused flooding in 60 counties that claimed at least 22 lives and drove thousands from their homes. President Clinton had declared 25 Texas counties a federal disaster area as of Oct. 22.

Texas Baptist volunteers working from three disaster-relief units and numerous churches provided hot meals for flood victims in the region. Southern Baptists from Arkansas and Oklahoma joined the relief effort as floodwaters drained southeastward toward the Gulf of Mexico.

Dick Talley of First Baptist Church in Dallas coordinated the multi-state disaster relief response from the American Red Cross office in Austin. He took on that responsibility just two days after returning from Puerto Rico, where he had ministered to victims of Hurricane Georges.

Volunteers set up the 18-wheel Texas Baptist disaster-relief mobile unit and its field kitchen near the police station in New Braunfels on Sunday, Oct. 18, in time to serve the evening meal.

From their base of operations in New Braunfels, the Texas Baptist Men cooked meals that Red Cross workers delivered to flood victims throughout the region.

The team prepared about 6,000 meals in the first three days. They expected the numbers to rise rapidly as transportation into flooded areas improved, according to unit coordinator Mel Goodwin of Clarksville City Baptist Church near Longview, Texas.

The Senior Center in New Braunfels filled with four feet of water on Oct. 18. The center is home base for a meals-on-wheels program that serves 100 homebound elderly residents each day. Volunteers at the center normally serve about 15,000 on-site meals a year to senior adults. Thanks to Texas Baptists, the meals-on-wheels service was interrupted for only one day.

The disaster-relief team provided hot meals for home delivery by the Senior Center's volunteers, who also worked quickly to restore their facility to working order in a matter of just a few days.

Fort Worth-area volunteers set up the Tarrant Baptist Association regional response unit at Onion Creek Baptist Church on the southeast edge of Austin. The regional unit from Wichita-Archer-Clay Baptist Association set up emergency food service at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio.

The Arkansas Baptist disaster-relief mobile unit entered Victoria, Texas, on Oct. 21. The next day, Oklahoma Baptist disaster relief volunteers reported to the Houston headquarters of American Red Cross for assignment. The Oklahoma Baptists were slated to set up operations at First Baptist Church, Rosenberg.

First Baptist Church in New Braunfels provided overnight lodging to 45 flood victims on Saturday night, Oct. 17. The church also provided meal service, a clothes closet and cleaning supplies for a couple of days until the disaster relief efforts could be coordinated, with various churches in the city assuming specific responsibilities.

By mid-week, the church's family life center became a staging area for the city to dispatch volunteer work crews.

Floods damaged the homes of at least two dozen member families at First Baptist Church in New Braunfels, and probably 10 of those were major to complete losses, according to Larry Soape, minister of education.

Neil Kibble, pastor of First Baptist Church in Seguin, knew of 45 families in his church who sustained some flood damage to their homes.

At Pecan Cove Estates, where at least two member families from First Baptist Church in Seguin had river-front homes, some large boats perched in treetops. Floodwaters had wrapped others around tree trunks or tossed them along the roadside like crumpled scraps of tinfoil.

Floods reportedly destroyed the home of Mitch Kolonovsky, pastor of Forest Hills Baptist Church in Seguin. At least three families belonging to Calvary Baptist Church in San Marcos lost all their belongings to the floodwaters.

Milfred Minatrea, director of the church ministries department of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, made an initial family assistance funding disbursement to several associations in the flooded region. Family assistance is made available by the state convention to member families of Texas Baptist churches and is coordinated by local associations.

"We could easily be talking about \$60,000 in family assistance," Minatrea said, noting that reports from a number of associations were still forthcoming.

-30-

## **Churches ousted over homosexuality seek membership in New York region**

ROCHESTER, N.Y. (ABP) -- Four American Baptist churches that were kicked out of regional organizations over homosexuality have applied for membership in the American Baptist Churches in the Rochester/Genesee region, centered in Rochester, N.Y.

The churches -- First Baptist Church of Granville, Ohio; First Baptist Church of Berkeley, Calif.; New Community of Faith in San Jose, Calif.; and Church of the Covenant in Palmer, Alaska -- are four of six congregations which have been disfellowshipped in their regions for joining the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, according to the organization's newsletter.

According to the newsletter, the New York association's executive director, Kenneth Williams, said the applications will be processed the same as any other application for a new member. The association's executive board has voted twice to consider applications by churches disfellowshipped from other regions.

While one church in the Rochester association is a Welcoming-and-Affirming congregation, the association has not reached a consensus on the issue of homosexuality and Christianity, Williams said.

"We are no different in our wide continuum of opinion regarding the place of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons in the church than the rest of our denominational family," he said. "Any action we take as a region concerning disfellowshipped churches would not be made as a political statement about sexual minorities but as a statement about our love of Baptist principles and our commitment to the Covenant of Relationships."

The Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists is composed of American Baptist churches, organizations and individuals who "welcome and affirm" persons regardless of sexual orientation and advocate the inclusion of gays, lesbians and bisexuals within American Baptist communities of faith.

In January, United Community Church of Cortland, N.Y., became the 29th congregation to declare itself Welcoming and Affirming, according to the newsletter.

In another development, the newsletter reported that an effort to disfellowship two Seattle churches from the American Baptist Churches of the Northwest did not pass this year, but Welcoming and Affirming Baptists left the biennial convention "acutely aware" that the region did not want to remain in fellowship with them.

-30-

-- By ABP staff

### **Former Houston pastor heads Oklahoma group**

NORMAN, Okla. (ABP) -- Former Houston pastor Bruce Prescott has assumed duties as executive director of Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists, a moderate group based in Norman, Okla.

Prescott, a native of New Mexico, was elected to the post in September. He has been pastor of Easthaven Baptist Church in Houston for 12 years while also holding leadership positions in the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Texas Baptists Committed and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

A former police officer, Prescott is a graduate of the University of Albuquerque with a master's and a doctor's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He has been married 25 years to former Oklahoman Kylene Winters Prescott, whose father was a pastor in the state. They have two children. A son, Bill, is a student at Rice University and their daughter, Candice, attends high school.

-30-

-- By ABP staff

### **Nashville church rebuilds after April tornado**

By Lonnie Wilkey

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- When a tornado swept through Nashville, Tenn., in mid-April, historic Edgefield Baptist Church was in its destructive path.

Nearly six months later the church has picked up the pieces and moved on with its ministry.

To celebrate the restoration of its facilities, members rededicated the church on Oct. 11 in a special afternoon service.

Taking note of the events that transpired on April 16, Pastor Terry Carver said, "We were overwhelmed with the amount of support given to us during that stressful time."

He noted sister churches in Nashville provided physical labor immediately following the tornado along with monetary contributions. Tennessee Baptist disaster-relief volunteers also played an important role, Carver said.

The Edgefield pastor recalled the congregation met in the foyer of the church on the Sunday after the disaster. There was no electricity.

Carver read from Romans 8:28 which says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God ... ."

"It's one thing to know that; it's another to experience it," Carver commented.

Carver admitted members of the 131-year-old church were disheartened after the tornado. "We did not know what the outcome would be," he said.

The storm left the church with about \$840,000 worth of damages. Half the roof was taken off an educational wing, 92-year-old stained-glass windows were blown out and there was extensive water damage. The church was properly insured, however, and basically only had to pay the deductible, Carver said.

In his article in the church's October newsletter, Carver asked the question, "Why did we build back?"

"Was it to save a great historical building? Was it to maintain heritage? Was it to show our great resilience?"

"I hope the main reason we rebuilt is we are convinced that there is a vital need for a vibrant New Testament church glorifying God and reaching others for Christ, and we want to be just that kind of church."

Jim Freedman, executive director of Nashville Baptist Association, brought the afternoon message.

Freedman told Edgefield members he could relate with them because Nashville Association also had extensive damage to its facility a few blocks away.

"We know what you've been through. God is good. He took what was bad and turned it into good," Freedman said.

-30-

---

END