

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Baptist ethicist critiques reaction to missile attack**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Early reaction in Washington to the United States' Dec. 16 attack on Iraq contained "too much heat and not enough light," a Baptist ethicist observed the following day.

Robert Parham, executive director of the Nashville, Tenn.,-based Baptist Center for Ethics, said clear thinking and restrained speech are important when a nation resorts to warfare. With emotions on Capitol Hill already strained over talk of impeachment, those virtues were sorely lacking in early statements by U.S. leaders, he said.

Supporters of President Clinton expressed dismay at questions about his motives in deciding to attack Saddam Hussein on the eve of scheduled debate on the House floor concerning impeachment. Their protests "lacked a realistic appraisal of the distrust many Americans have for the president and the frailty of his moral authority," Parham said.

On the other hand, Parham said, the "visceral reaction" of many of Clinton's Republican opponents "disclosed both their hatred toward the president and utter lack of self-control."

Another Baptist ethicist supported the strike but said he was skeptical about its timing. Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said the attack was "long overdue."

Land, who earlier called for the president to resign in light of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, said the fact that anyone would question Clinton's motives in timing the attack indicates he no longer is able to lead.

"I really don't believe that a responsible, credible person can take anything that the president of the United States says at face value," Land said Dec. 17 on the agency's radio talk program, "For Faith and Family."

Parham said the missile strikes against military and security targets in Iraq meet most of the eight "just war" criteria used by Christians for centuries to discern whether a conflict is morally justifiable.

Parham said the 1990 Persian Gulf War did not measure up to the moral standard of "just intent," because it was motivated by oil. "Unlike the intent of the Persian Gulf War, oil is not the key factor" behind the current action, Parham said. "The intent is to degrade Iraq's ability to wage war and to create an ethos for a new Iraqi government."

## **The bishops are right, Baptist ethicist says**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The "bishops are right" in their recent call for Catholic lay people to pursue justice and peace in their everyday lives, says a Baptist ethicist endorsing the stance.

Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, Tenn., gave the National Conference of Catholic Bishops a "thumbs up" for their statement titled, "Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice," released in November.

Connecting worship on Sunday with work on Monday is a great challenge for Christians, the bishops said. "How is the gospel proclaimed not only in the pulpits of our parishes, but also in the everyday lives of Catholic people?" they ask. One way, they answer, is the sometimes overlooked or neglected "social mission of Christians in the world," to protect human life and seek justice for all people, particularly the poor.

"The most common and, in many ways, the most important Christian witness is often neither very visible or highly structured," the bishops' letter said. "It is the sacrifice of parents trying to raise children with concern for others; the service and creativity of workers who do their best and reach out to those in need; the struggle of business owners trying to reconcile the bottom line and the needs of employees and customers; and the hard choices of public officials who seek to protect the weak and pursue the common good. The Church's social mission is advanced by teachers and scientists, by family farmers and bankers, by sales persons and entertainers."

The bishops' letter closes with a "Jubilee pledge" for the new millennium which encourages Catholics to pray regularly for greater justice and peace; learn more about Catholic social teaching; reach across boundaries of religion, ethnicity, gender and disabilities; live justly in family life, school, work, the marketplace and political arena; serve the poor; give more generously; advocate public policies that protect human life and the environment and promote peace; and encourage others to work for greater charity, justice and peace.

Parham said as a Baptist he was given particular pause by the admonition to learn about the church's stance on social issues. He said Southern Baptists too often "issue hurriedly and reactively written" resolutions on social issues that are "quickly ignored" by those who don't agree. "So much for thoughtful moral teaching!" he observed.

"Add to this problem a decade-old trend within Southern Baptist life that seeks solutions to social issues in the arena of politics, instead of houses of worship," Parham continued.

Christian ethics in the 20th century has tended to focus on "macro-issues" such as hunger, war and abortion, while giving less attention to "seemingly routine and mundane activities" of ordinary Christians, Parham said.

Phenomena like the popular WWJD bracelets, meanwhile, indicate there is "a deep hunger for applying faith during the workday on Main Street," the Baptist ethicist said.

"As a lifelong Baptist with family roots back to a Virginia Baptist church in 1807, I eagerly sign their pledge," Parham said. "I hope they accept my commitment to their ethics agenda for everyday Christians."

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-- By Bob Allen

## **David Sapp named pastor of prominent Atlanta church**

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Virginia pastor and former Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission staffer David Sapp has been named pastor of Atlanta's prominent Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church.

Sapp will assume the pastorate of the 3,700-member Atlanta church Jan. 17, according to a news release. He comes from Derbyshire Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., where he has been pastor for more than seven years.

Sapp replaces Jim Denison, who left the Atlanta congregation in March to become pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas.

Sapp previously served 10 years as a pastor in Atlanta at what was then called First Baptist Church of Chamblee but now is Johns Creek Baptist Church. He has a Ph.D. in ethics from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and worked 1976-1981 in Nashville, Tenn., on the staff of the Christian Life Commission, the ethics agency of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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-- By ABP staff

## **Norway's North Sea Baptist Church makes international ministry impact**

By Trennis Henderson

STAVANGER, Norway -- When Baptists from throughout Europe gathered in Stavanger, Norway, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the European Baptist Convention, it wasn't the week's only historic milestone. North Sea Baptist Church, the convention's host church, celebrated 25 years of English-language Baptist ministry in Stavanger.

Located on Norway's rugged North Sea coast, Stavanger has a rich history that dates back for centuries. From a pivotal Viking battle in 872 that united Norway to the city's official founding in 1125 with the construction of a medieval cathedral that still stands in the heart of the city, the Stavanger region is a vital part of Norway's culture.

Known for decades for its thriving fishing industry, Stavanger also is home to several major oil companies that operate off-shore oil rigs. Surrounded by majestic fjords that jut into the Norwegian coast, Stavanger today is a city of more than 100,000 people with an estimated 250,000 in the surrounding area.

As a small international congregation with a history of only 25 years, North Sea Baptist Church is still new by Stavanger standards. But members of the English-language church are determined to make a spiritual impact in their challenging ministry setting.

Charles and Sandy Smith, the pastor and wife team who have served North Sea Church since 1995, previously served churches in Italy and Alabama.

"The call of English-language work in Europe is our basic call," Sandy said. "There's a flavor of English-language churches that is the same in any setting. There's an openness and acceptance where everybody doesn't dress just alike or look just alike. You're more focused on Jesus than each other."

Founded by oil workers in 1973 as North Sea Baptist Mission, the congregation affiliated with the European Baptist Convention in 1975 and with the Norwegian Baptist Union in 1983. The current membership features a diverse blend of oil industry workers, military personnel, refugees and Norwegians.

Like most EBC churches, North Sea has a highly transient membership as internationals move from one country to another. "The first two months I was here, we lost three of our deacons," Charles noted. "In four years, we've had five treasurers."

Rather than a detriment, however, the Smiths view the congregation's rapid turnover rate as an additional ministry opportunity. The keys to success include mature Christians getting actively involved in the life of the church and intense discipleship of new believers.

Describing EBC churches as "a seedbed for missions," Charles explained, "All of these international churches are so transient, when people accept the Lord, you know they're moving somewhere else. It's a sending out of people to witness wherever they go."

Affirming "the sufficiency that the Lord provides," Sandy pointed out, "The church has been doing this for 25 years. It just seems so normal for us."

But church members aren't the only ones who come and go at North Sea and other EBC churches. Financial burdens often make it prohibitive for ministers to remain in one setting for more than a few years.

Norway's income tax rates -- targeted primarily toward high-paid international oil workers -- skyrocket after five years, forcing most internationals to transfer elsewhere. The Smiths are no exception.

"You accept as reality there is a date at which you will not be here," Charles said. "It's up to the Lord to provide another place for us to minister."

In the meantime, he and Sandy plan to accomplish as much as possible. In addition to the church's Sunday morning worship services held in a Lutheran facility, the Smiths' home -- known as the pastoral ministry center -- is a hub of church activity ranging from Bible studies to choir practice to informal fellowships.

During a recent small-group Bible study in their home, the Smiths were hosts to members and guests from Egypt, India, Sierra Leone and the United States.

Noting that such ministry efforts over the years have resulted in "building lifelong relationships with thousands of people," Sandy added, "You do what you do because of a sense of calling. It's being able to work in a very flexible way."

Among people the Smiths have relied on while in Norway are such members as Mike McClure, a U.S. Navy helicopter pilot assigned to NATO headquarters as a staff officer.

Currently midway through a three-year assignment in Stavanger, McClure explained, "When we arrived here, we found out what English-speaking churches there were. We prayed about it and selected North Sea for our church family and got to work."

Affirming that "the general Christian love we found here felt like home," he added, "I couldn't imagine moving somewhere that didn't have a place for us to worship."

"This is probably the most multi-cultural church we've ever been part of. We've experienced various types of worship, culture and tradition," McClure noted. "It's given our children a more international view of the church of Jesus Christ."

Billie Bowen, who works in human resources for Phillips Petroleum, grew up in the States as a Methodist. Contrasting church options in the U.S. and Norway, she explained, "In the States you have a church on every corner. When you're here, you have the choices of Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran or Baptist."

Noting that her church choice in Stavanger was based on "fundamental needs for a church grounded in Scripture," she said North Sea Baptist was the obvious answer. Citing an "overwhelming sense of family," she added, "I never even visited anywhere else."

With up to 20 different nationalities in the church, Bowen said, "Everyone's tradition is different. We get down to the basics and a simple way of worshiping. We have people who love the Lord and who give what they have. We're here to glorify God."

Reflecting North Sea's diversity, other active members include Edward Alinyoh, a political refugee from Sierra Leone, and Sam Olsen, a research chemist from Norway.

Alinyoh and his wife were attending a church growth conference in Norway when a military coup threw Sierra Leone into chaos. Stranded as a political refugee and assigned to a refugee camp, Alinyoh met the Smiths at a fellowship held in the camp.

"Pastor Charles and his wife have been a tremendous blessing to our family. They are just like mother and father to us," Alinyoh shared. Although facing the confusion and frustration of being a refugee in a foreign country, he added, "At times I look at it that all things work for good -- God has a plan. Blessedly for us, we were able to find North Sea Baptist and knew this was our place."

Olsen, who said his "faith was low" after years of spiritual searching, was attracted to North Sea by the church's "good teaching and use of the English language."

Now a deacon, Sunday-school teacher and cell-group coordinator, Olsen said, "God opened this door here. Slowly my faith built up again. I've been involved and grown."

Assessing the future of North Sea and other English-language international churches, Olsen concluded, "English-language church is a phenomenon all over the world as the world opens up to business. It is a mission field that definitely must be used."

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## **Gospel quartet founder Brian Free keeping 'success' in perspective**

By Stacey Hamby

DOUGLASVILLE, Ga. (ABP) -- For a relatively new quartet, Brian Free and Assurance have come a long way. Every song they've released has appeared in the Top 10. Their song, "For God So Loved," was named the 1998 Southern Gospel Music Association Song of the Year. They've been on the NBC Today show.

But their popularity is not leader Brian Free's measure of success. "Success in the eyes of the public and success are two different things," Free said. "It has to be God's will -- no group can buy their way into the people's hearts.

"God can be blessing your music and you, and it not necessarily be reflected by sales or popularity," he added. "There are a lot of groups who may never walk across a stage and receive an award, but they're leading hundreds -- even thousands -- to the Lord each year. That's success."

Before Free started Assurance five years ago as a trio, he sang tenor for Gold City for 15 years. Two years after Assurance formed, Free's dream of a quartet became a reality.

"Southern gospel needed another male quartet," he explained. "They're not as plentiful as they used to be. Twenty years ago, I'd say about 80 percent of gospel music was male quartets. Now, I'd say about a third is."

The quartet is made up of Free, Jon McBroom, Bob Caldwell and Randy Crawford. Free, who received the 1998 Fan Award for Favorite Tenor, is a native of Georgia.

He lives in Douglasville, Ga., with his wife, Pam, and sons, Ricky, 15, and Bryce, 6. Pam, who was Brian's high school sweetheart, is the group's office manager.

"The hardest part about what we do is leaving our families," Free said. "The second hardest part for me is managing being a father, husband, and on the bus, we're friends, but I'm also their employer. We live together, eat at the same time and sleep at the same time. It's a hard balance to keep."

So when he wants to relax, he visits ... Mayberry? Free, an avid fan of the old Andy Griffith Show, has a collection that includes all 289 episodes on video, lollipop stands with lollipops named after the characters, and autographed pictures from Don Knotts and Andy Griffith. "I keep about 100 episodes with me at all times," he confessed. "I could probably quote verbatim the dialogue of about 100 of the 289 episodes."

Ask him about it the next time you see him.

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-- Photo available on request from Word and Way.

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**CLARIFICATION:** In the Dec. 10 ABP story "Moderate church-planting network splits over leadership dispute," please delete the 11th paragraph.

The paragraph is based on a report written by Friends of New Churches executive director Will Carter, which he provided to Associated Baptist Press in response to a reporter's request for a comment about a Dec. 3 meeting of the organization's board. The statement said that after defeating a vote to remove Carter from his position, the board then adopted a separate motion affirming his leadership. After the story was published, board secretary Judy Gaddy told ABP there was only one vote on Carter's leadership, the one that failed. ABP contacted Carter, who said the original report was his understanding of action taken by the board in an executive session, which he did not attend. Board chairman Ray Graves confirmed that Carter's report describing a separate affirmation vote was in error.

**CORRECTION:** In the same story, please correct the spelling of a last name in the 17th paragraph to Steve Holland of Jeffersonville, Ind.

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