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Editor: **Greg Warner**
Associate Editor: **Bob Allen**

Phone: (904) 262-8584
Fax: (904) 262-7745

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Texas Baptist volunteers return from refugee camps in Albania

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Texas Baptist relief volunteers returned home from Albania with the stench of squalid refugee camps still in their nostrils. But it was the look in the Kosovars' eyes they remember most.

"The physical suffering was obvious, but what we saw in the faces of the people stayed with me," said Dick Jenkins from Hunters Glen Baptist Church in Plano. "What you saw was the hurt in their eyes -- the pain of being yanked away from what they knew in everyday life, the pain of being separated from family, the pain of these clean people being put into the midst of this filth."

John Bullock, state director of children and youth missions and ministries for Texas Baptist Men, served hundreds of miles away at another refugee camp, but he came away with the same impression.

"There was such a sense of shock and lostness in the people's eyes," Bullock said. "We would watch the people as they would get off the bus, and they didn't know what they were doing or where they would go. That haunts me."

Jenkins and Bullock were among a dozen Texas Baptist volunteers who spent a week digging latrines and building relationships with refugees from Kosovo. Another team is scheduled to go to Albania in mid-May, said Jim Furgerson, executive director of Texas Baptist Men.

Texas Baptists responded to a request from the coordinator of refugee response for the Albanian Evangelical Association. Working in cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board, the Texas Baptist volunteers left Dallas on April 14, planning to set up refugee camps in Korca and train Albanian Christians in their operation.

The volunteers expected to purify water, distribute food and provide medical aid for refugees in one city. But once on the field, both the nature and scope of their mission changed.

The volunteers worked primarily at the "sports palace," an athletic facility being used as a ministry center for refugees. When the group arrived, about 150 refugees found shelter there. By the time they left, the number had grown to more than 1,000.

Jenkins initially tried "playing carpenter" by building examining tables, waiting-room benches and I-V poles for Doctors Without Borders, a non-governmental organization providing health care to the refugees in Korca.

But the whirring of his circular saw drew refugees like a magnet, he said. A couple of camp residents told Jenkins they were carpenters by trade, and he turned the job over to them.

"They had nothing else to do there, and they are a very industrious, energetic people," Jenkins said. "It gave them purpose."

After pediatrician Robert Mann discovered that others were available to meet immediate health-care needs in the refugee center, he went to residences of local families who had taken refugees into their homes.

"I was like a country doctor making house calls," said Mann, a member of Fielder Road Baptist Church in Arlington. "I would go into a home or apartment to see one person, and people would just start streaming in, bringing others."

Mann treated patients for exposure, kidney infections, respiratory ailments and skin conditions. He also cared for people with chronic health problems who left prescription medicines behind when they fled their homes in Kosovo.

He also treated a child with severe burns sustained when fire was set to her family's home. It was not the only evidence of atrocities the volunteers encountered.

"One woman came to a refugee camp hysterical," Jenkins reported. "Her baby had been taken away from her, beheaded right in front of her, and then its body handed back to her."

While the Albanians tried to meet the needs of refugees, there were too many for the impoverished people to handle, the Texans noted. Makeshift shelters were inadequate to meet basic needs.

Lacking other facilities, the Kosovars used floor gratings in the sports-palace showers as latrines until the Texas Baptists helped to build sanitary facilities for them.

Robert Mann said his son, Brad, accepted the "down and dirty" duty of cleaning out the showers and building latrines. The Albanians found it hard to believe that Americans would voluntarily take on such an unseemly job.

"We would tell people that when Christ comes to live in your heart, you have love for other people," Mann said.

Three other volunteers worked in Ereske, south of Korca, developing a sanitation and personal-hygiene system for about 500 refugees sheltered in a gymnasium.

One of the three, Joe Ragan, a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote in his journal about one extended family of 33 people living in a 12-by-16-foot room. Their sleeping mats lined all four walls, leaving only a narrow path through the room's center. The family had been forced at gunpoint to leave their home in Pristina with only the clothing on their backs.

Ragan visited with the oldest of five children, Gazmend Gashi. He was a fourth-year civil-engineering student who learned English primarily by watching television. One of his sisters was studying to be a pharmacist.

"Their desire is to return to Pristina someday, but the future looks doubtful," Ragan wrote. "My prayer is that the seeds that were planted will bear fruit, and with fruit comes hope for tomorrow."

Gary Smith of Midway Road Baptist Church in Dallas led a five-man team working near the Yugoslavian border in Shkoder, northwest of the capital city of Tirana.

"After a couple of days of serving food at the sports palace, a need for toilet facilities was identified at an old tobacco factory which was being turned into a refugee camp," Smith recalled.

Each of the teams working at the different sites in Albania said they saw miraculous answers to prayer.

"There was one time we ran out of lumber," Bullock recalled. "We gathered some of the people from Kosovo around and prayed with them. About the time we finished, this Armenian guy pulled up with a truckload of lumber. He wouldn't even let us pay him." The refugees, most of them Muslims, wept openly, Bullock said.

They also wept when the Texas Baptists said goodbye. As is their custom, the Albanian Kosovars kissed the Americans. But instead of one polite buzz on each cheek, they kissed the Texans -- whom they had only known for a few days -- twice on each cheek.

"That's the sign of a dear friend," Bullock explained. "I won't forget that."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Photos to accompany this story are available on request from Ken Camp at the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Persons wishing to contribute to Texas Baptists' ongoing relief effort may send designated checks, made payable to "Baptist Executive Board" to the Treasurer's Office, Baptist General Convention of Texas, 333 N. Washington, Dallas 75246-1798.

Campolo urges Arkansas CBF to care, heal, proclaim Christ

By Russ Dilday

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (ABP) -- Noted author and speaker Tony Campolo urged participants in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Arkansas' seventh annual general assembly to care for the poor, heal the sick and proclaim the message of Christ in order to "Be the Church in the 21st Century."

Campolo, a professor at Eastern College in St. David's, Pa., made his comments during the Saturday session of the April 16-17 meeting at Second Baptist Church in Little Rock.

He reminded the crowd that Jesus, in declaring the Year of Jubilee, called his disciples to first care for the poor, adding there are "over 2,000 verses in Scripture that call us to respond to needs of the poor."

"I've heard Baptists get upset over every issue except this one," Campolo said. "This is the greatest social issue of our time -- poverty -- the suffering, the beating down of the downtrodden. Jesus says, 'If you're going to be my disciples, you must respond to the needs of the poor.'"

Campolo urged listeners to provide ministries through churches that will create jobs for the needy to "help the poor to escape poverty with their dignity intact."

He also urged them to concentrate on "deliverance" of the sick. "This Fellowship ought to commit itself to be a fellowship of healing -- that every church every Sunday ought to have a healing service," he said.

"I guarantee you that people who don't come to church will show up because they are hungry for healing," he emphasized. "Why do they have to go to New Age medicine men? ... Why can't they come to the church of Jesus Christ and experience the healing of our Lord?"

The church of the 21st century also must tell the world about "the good news that Jesus can make us alive in the Holy Spirit," he said, urging the audience to carry on Christ's work "not for the titles, but the testimonies."

In an interview, Campolo said he accepted the Arkansas Fellowship's invitation to speak because "what it is doing is very important, and I want to lend my support to the development of this ministry of people who really want to carry on the true traditions of the Baptist movement."

"I hate to see movements that are sectarian and patriarchal stand against what I think is the real flow of the Baptist movement in the world today," Campolo continued. "I feel that the CBF is really endeavoring to pick up the tradition of Baptists and being part of the journey Baptists are on into the 21st century."

While the state Fellowship group is small, Campolo noted that "the kingdom of God does come as a mustard seed."

"The real question is not whether it's large or small, but where it's going and what it's doing," he said. "I feel that the problem you guys have down here in the South is that you're so used to bigness, you cannot adapt easily to smallness. That's going to be one of the great problems with CBF."

"Instead of bemoaning this, you are going to have to go back to the first chapter of First Corinthians and realize that that's the kind of group Jesus liked to identify with -- not the powerful, not the rich, not the prominent -- but, in a sense, those who have been rejected," he said.

"The people who are in CBF are not so much people who have chosen to separate themselves from the Southern Baptist Convention," Campolo said. "As a matter of fact, most of them have chosen not to. They're people who are kind of being disinvited to the party."

What CBF must do, he added, "is to begin to look at your negatives as positives." Among them, he said, are "the advantages of being small."

"It was fun being around here," he said. "Nobody was playing politics. You're too small to play politics right now."

One negative that CBF must address, though, he said, is the fact it is attracting mostly older people. "As the CBF moves into the 21st century, it ought to, instead of trying to recover the past, which I sometimes get the feeling that they're trying to do ... they really must come to grips with [a younger generation's] hunger for spirituality."

"Baptists are afraid of anything mystical," he said. "But there's a hunger for a mystical encounter with Jesus. If this group can get a hold of that, then they'll have a glorious future in the state of Arkansas."

Also during the meeting, participants approved "adoption" of an Indonesian ethnic group for prayer and missions support, adopted a record budget and installed Ray Higgins as its 1999-2000 moderator. About 350 participants from 76 churches attended the sessions.

During ceremony in the Saturday morning session, participants approved the adoption of the Minangkabau, a predominantly Muslim Indonesian people group. Higgins, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Little Rock, along with outgoing moderator Norma Caldwell, a member of First Baptist Church in Pine Bluff, signed a three-year covenant pledging to pray for and support missionaries to the Minangkabau.

Higgins said he planned to emphasize three goals for CBFA during his tenure: "building relationships with Baptists in the state of Arkansas," "continuing to develop and provide resources and services for churches in Arkansas" and "maintaining a strong emphasis this year on reaching the Minangkabau."

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Southern Baptist agency renews commitment to school in Northeast

By Dan Nicholas

NEWARK, N.J. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist North American Mission Board has renewed its commitment to a decade-old consortium for theological education in the Northeast.

Leaders of the mission board based in Alpharetta, Ga., decided to contribute \$200,000 to the Northeastern Baptist School of Ministry over the next three years rather than allow its current financial agreement to expire in 2000. The extension will allow the school to proceed with plans to develop new programs and open new training centers, said David Flumbaum, the school's executive director.

The ministry school was launched in 1988 by Southern Baptists in the Northeast to permit ministers to receive training in a contextualized setting and without leaving the area to attend seminary. The NAMB and its forerunner agency, the Home Mission Board, have given a total of \$600,000 for the venture to date.

The new financial agreement was announced April 23 by Jack Johnson, NAMB's representative to the NeBSM board of directors, which met for two days in Newark, N.J. Johnson read from a letter from Michael Day, vice president for strategy development and organizational services at NAMB.

"We are delighted to have the privilege of supporting the Northeastern Baptist School of Ministry in this manner," said Day's letter. "We trust that God will multiply this contribution as he multiplies the numbers of lives impacted by your ongoing ministry."

The revised financial agreement will provide the school \$50,000 in 1999 and \$75,000 in both 2000 and 2001.

Flumbaum expressed "deep appreciation for the renewal" of NAMB's financial agreement, calling 1999 a "critical year for results" in his report to directors.

Flumbaum said ministry-training centers are opening in Baltimore, Buffalo, Boston and Philadelphia, and new programs are being developed at other centers.

Flumbaum said the funding extension does not fulfill all the school's financial needs and leaders will continue to seek funding from foundations and Southern Baptist individuals and churches.

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Hate-crime legislation stirs controversy with opponents

By Ashlee Ross

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A bill that would broaden the federal government's power to prosecute hate crimes is drawing fire from religious conservatives who say it could burden free speech and free thought.

Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Texas, and Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., are sponsoring the Hate Crimes Prevention Act. The law would strengthen federal jurisdiction in hate crimes committed because of race, color, religion or national origin. The bill also adds gender, sexual orientation and disability to the list defining hate crimes.

Most hate crimes currently fall under state and local jurisdictions. Federal jurisdiction applies only when such crimes are committed in six specific activities: while attending a public school or college; participating in a government activity; applying for a job or working; serving as a juror; traveling or using a facility of interstate commerce; and using public accommodation.

Enactment of the Hate Crimes Prevention Act would expand the federal government's power to prosecute all hate crimes, not just those in one of the federally protected activities. "Current federal laws are clearly inadequate," Kennedy said when introducing the bill in the Senate. "It's an embarrassment that we haven't already acted to close these glaring gaps in present law. For too long, the federal government has been forced to fight hate crimes with one hand tied behind its back."

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said the act will "close the loopholes" in current laws.

"Current law targets hate crimes that are committed against victims who are performing a federally protected act, like voting, or eating in a restaurant," Wyden said. "But a hate crime is a hate crime, regardless of what the victims are doing when they're attacked."

Critics of the measure include conservative religious leaders, who argue that it could lead to increased number of court cases and could jeopardize individuals who hold religious or moral objections to homosexuality.

It brings "an intrusion on state's rights," said Steven McFarland, director of Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom. "It would clog up the courts like crazy." He said removing sexual orientation from the legislation would probably make religious conservatives more receptive to the bill.

Andrea Aulbert, Concerned Women for America's legislative coordinator, said the legislation would create "classes of crimes."

"If sexual orientation is added to hate-crime laws, the unproven claim that sexual orientation is innate -- rather than chosen behavior -- is legitimized," stated a CWA press release. "Potentially, those who hold religious or moral objections to homosexuality could be prosecuted for 'hate.'"

Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said recently that hate-crime legislation is an attempt to normalize homosexuality and a way to take away people's rights to preach the Bible.

"As for me, for my house, the United States government has no right and no authority to tell me I can't quote scripture and that I can't explain scripture whenever and wherever I want to do so," Land said.

Patrick Anderson, coordinator of Florida's Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and a criminology professor at Florida Southern College, said the law would only apply "when hateful words are put into actions."

"The hate-crimes bill prohibits violent acts involving guns, bombs, arson, kidnapping and aggravated sexual abuse," Anderson said. "How religious conservatives construe this to be a threat against their preaching is a mystery."

"The First Amendment still allows verbal hate, including preaching."

Supporters said the act is not intended to prosecute all rapes or all domestic violence, and the act will result in "only a modest increase" of hate crimes prosecuted by the federal government.

"The intent is to ensure that the federal government will limit its prosecutions of hate crimes to cases that implicate the greatest federal interest and present a clear need for federal intervention," according to a sponsors' summary of the legislation.

Oliver Thomas, special counsel for civil and religious liberties at the National Council of the Churches of Christ, said the Christian faith teaches believers to show justice and mercy to all people.

"This is not about whether you approve or not of a particular lifestyle but whether or not all Americans have the right to be free from criminal misconduct," Thomas said.

The sexual orientation language is not the only reason some oppose the act.

McFarland also cited the concern that the entire background of someone accused of assault would be scrutinized. He said the assaulter's church, religious beliefs, reading materials and friends could be used to prosecute a hate crime.

"It literally is punishing thought, not the criminal action," McFarland said. "It would criminalize human thought and motives, and that is extremely dangerous."

The American Civil Liberties Union says that issue could be resolved by adding a provision to clarify that evidence proving membership or beliefs of a defendant suspected of a hate crime is not admissible to a case.

Congress-directed land sale to archdiocese draws criticism

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., has secured a congressional measure making it the only eligible purchaser for 49 acres of land that Congress says must be sold, prompting charges that the deal violates the separation of church and state.

The land is owned by the Soldiers' and Airmen's Home in northern D.C., a facility run by the U.S. Armed Forces Retirement Home Board. The home is losing nearly \$10 million a year. Congress has told the board to dispose of the undeveloped parcel by "sale or otherwise."

The 148-year-old home, an independent federal agency, houses more than 1,000 veterans representing every war from World War I to Vietnam. While Congress approves the home's budget, its funding comes exclusively from a trust fund.

Officials from the Soldiers' Home began discussions with a private real-estate firm to negotiate a plan to develop and lease the land, providing the home with a substantial annual income. Joseph Ross, director of support at the home, said the development deal would have raised \$49 million over 35 years.

But the development plan was scrapped after Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., added an amendment to the 1999 Defense Authorization Act requiring the land be sold. He also added language that effectively directed the sale of the land to the Archdiocese of Washington.

The provision states that the sale of the land "shall be made to a neighboring nonprofit organization from whose extensive educational and charitable services the public benefits and has benefited from for more than 100 years."

A fact sheet distributed by the Archdiocese of Washington said the 49 acres are part of a neighborhood "completely occupied by Catholic educational and service non-profits." Nearby agencies include the Catholic University of America, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and the John Paul II Cultural Center, which is under construction.

In a statement released at a March Senate subcommittee hearing, Santorum said Catholic officials approached him about buying the parcel "at fair market price." In addition to maintaining the financial stability of the Soldiers' Home, Santorum said, "I wanted to make certain that the Archdiocese of Washington would have the opportunity to purchase this much land, land that borders important cultural and educational facilities."

Bob Manhan, assistant director of the Veterans of Foreign Wars' national legislative service, said leaders of the archdiocese were involved early in the planning of the development deal, because they were neighbors. But as the discussions continued, the church stopped coming to meetings and would not answer correspondence. Then, out of the blue, came the Santorum amendment nixing the development plan and ordering sale of the land to the archdiocese.

Manhan said the veterans and the board are frustrated that the amendment precluded them from at least presenting the development proposal to Congress. "I mean these are veterans, people who defended this country," he said.

"We're not for or against any particular religion," Manhan said. "We are pro-veteran, and we want to make sure the best possible deal can be cut for veterans."

At issue is how much the veterans will now receive for the land. An independent appraisal will determine its fair market value. But home officials are concerned the archdiocese will rely on a 1995 estimate of \$8 million to \$12 million and not a higher value suggested under the more-recent development proposal.

Other critics cite church-state concerns.

Baptist Joint Committee General Counsel Brent Walker said it "does not violate the separation of church and state to sell property to a religious organization as long as others have a fair opportunity to purchase the property, usually through competitive bidding."

Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said the arrangement "smacks of preferential treatment."

Lynn said it is "an obvious case of one religious group getting a tremendous benefit from the government -- a benefit that is not available to any other religious or secular group. It's a clear violation of the separation of church and state."

Susan Gibbs, a spokeswoman for the archdiocese, denied there is a church-state conflict. "The fact that we're religious doesn't matter," Gibbs said. "We're the natural buyer because we completely surround the land and because we're the best stewards of the land." She noted that the Catholic church gives more than 40,000 hours of volunteer service to the city and has provided nursing care for the veterans at a reduced rate.

Gibbs also said the church has not released the amount of an offer but was prepared to pay fair-market value for the property, even though it's "pretty typical that government land is sold to nonprofits, educational facilities and local government entities at reduced price or at no price."

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Bauer announces run for Republican ticket

By Ashlee Ross

NEWPORT, Ky. (ABP) -- If elected president of the United States, religious conservative Gary Bauer pledged to pass federal legislation allowing the Ten Commandments to be posted in government buildings and prayer in public schools.

Bauer announced his candidacy April 21 in his boyhood home in Newport, Ky.

While running for the presidency, Bauer said he "will not hedge on any issue."

"I will not be guided by polls that show what would be best for me," he said. "I will be guided by the principle of what is best for America."

In announcing his candidacy, Bauer criticized the American Civil Liberties Union for filing lawsuits to keep the Ten Commandments from being posted in public schools.

"We've got drive-by shootings, babies in trash cans, out-of-wedlock births, the American family under fire, and the ACLU is wondering if some child in America may be reminded where their liberty came from," Bauer said. "I say to the ACLU -- pack it up and go back to where you came from. We don't need you here."

On his Web site, Bauer said he would strengthen the family by permitting "voluntary prayer in public schools" and passing "federal legislation to permit state facilities to post the Ten Commandments."

Tim Goeglein, Bauer's communications director, said in an interview that Bauer would attempt to put voluntary prayer and the Ten Commandments in public schools.

"There would be a legislative initiative that would allow a designated time where students could pray," Goeglein said.

This would be more than a moment of silence and less than a teacher leading the prayer, Goeglein said. Students would be specifically asked to pray during this designated time.

Goeglein said humans are inherently spiritual beings and should be allowed to pray in schools. Goeglein said Christian and Jewish majorities lose rights to the minority on issues such as school prayer. He criticized the ACLU for working "overtime to make sure that children do not have time to read the Ten Commandments."

"I think they have very unfortunately but very successfully worked to take God out of the classroom," Goeglein said.

Bauer describes his policy as "pro-growth, pro-pocketbook, pro-family."

Bauer said he advocates giving unborn children the same rights as people spelled out in the 14th Amendment. He criticized the U.S. Supreme Court for its 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision that protects women's right to privacy in abortion decisions.

"They said that our unborn children have no rights that the rest of us were bound to respect," Bauer said.

In other legislation, Bauer said he would propose a 16-percent flat income tax.

"I believe it is time to begin advancing American values again," Bauer said. "I am asking fellow citizens all across our land to join this great cause."

Bauer served as domestic-policy adviser to President Ronald Reagan. Currently, he is on a leave of absence from his post as president of the Family Research Council and as chairman for the Campaign for Working Families.

Bauer is a graduate of Georgetown College, a Baptist-affiliated school in Kentucky, and holds a law degree from Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C.

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CORRECTION: In the April 27 ABP story "Virginia Baptists to study ties with University of Richmond," please correct information in the seventh paragraph to read as follows:

Three years ago several churches separated from the BGAV to form a separate state convention. More than 200 churches are now associated with the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia -- 164 are aligned with only the SBCV, and 48 are dually aligned with both the SBCV and the BGAV. One stated rationale for starting the new convention was a charge that the BGAV is too soft in its stance against homosexuality. The conservative group continues to repeat the charge in efforts to recruit new churches.

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