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SBC president renews call for church to punish Clinton

By Bob Allen

ATLANTA (ABP) -- A Southern Baptist Convention leader renewed calls for an Arkansas church to exercise discipline against President Bill Clinton, in the wake of a June 11 White House resolution proclaiming June Gay and Lesbian Pride Month.

SBC president Paige Patterson called on Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock to consider action against Clinton, who is still a member of the congregation even though he now usually attends a Methodist church in Washington. Clinton's official proclamation calling on Americans to support gay rights is the latest in a series of efforts by the administration to end discrimination against homosexuals.

Patterson, a New Testament scholar and president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., called Clinton's statement "entirely inconsistent with his confession as an evangelical Christian and certainly as a Southern Baptist."

Patterson commented on the presidential proclamation June 14 in an interview on the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission's "For Faith and Family" radio program, which was broadcast live on the eve of the convention's annual meeting in Atlanta.

Richard Land, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission and host of the radio show, said Clinton's pro-homosexual actions are reported widely in the gay press but not in mainstream media.

"We're going to try our best to make it front-page news," Land said.

Patterson said 95 percent of Southern Baptists would likely disagree with Clinton's stance, but added: "Because of our unique ecclesiology as Southern Baptists, there isn't anything the convention can do about what happens in an individual local church."

"We do believe in local-church autonomy," Patterson said. "However, I would call once again on the church in which the president holds membership to take before them this proclamation he has made at the White House and make it the subject of church discipline."

Patterson and other SBC leaders previously issued a similar call in the wake of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, which prompted Clinton to write a letter to his home church apologizing for his actions. Clinton also has been meeting regularly with a small cadre of clergymen for spiritual guidance since the scandal.

Clinton's policies have been targeted frequently in SBC resolutions. In 1993, a messenger from the floor unsuccessfully challenged the seating of messengers from Immanuel Baptist Church, citing the Arkansas congregation's unwillingness to discipline Clinton for his policies supporting abortion rights and gays in the military.

Clinton's proclamation cited earlier actions his administration has taken to end discrimination against gays and lesbians and urged Americans to support gay-pride events in June.

Land said Southern Baptists oppose homosexual behavior but do not hate gays. "God's word tells us to hate the sin and love the sinner," he said.

Patterson said the fact that Clinton is president shouldn't make him different from any other Baptist.

"When a member of a Southern Baptist church has taken the position he has taken, in outright contradistinction to the word of God, that church should act to bring about church discipline," Patterson said.

In a related matter, an outspoken Baptist pastor well known for speaking out on controversial issues said he plans to recommend an SBC resolution criticizing Clinton's proclamation. The resolution, drafted by Wiley Drake, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Buena Park, Calif., said he planned to submit the resolution for consideration at the convention on Tuesday.

Drake's resolution says homosexual behavior is "contrary to God's law" and discourages Americans from observing the gay-rights emphasis "in any way, other than to pray for the repentance and salvation of those caught up in this sinful lifestyle."

Drake's resolution will be submitted to a committee, which may or may not recommend action to the full convention. The resolutions committee has heard from Drake before. He submitted the initial resolution that prompted the Southern Baptist boycott of Disney.

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First Southern-Baptist sponsored Kosovar refugees arrive in U.S.

By Dan Martin

CORSICANA, Texas (ABP) -- A Kosovar refugee family of four departed their American Airlines flight Feb. 10 and entered a new life in small-town Texas, half a world away from the war they were forced to flee.

The Krivaqu family is the first refugee family from Kosovo to be sponsored for resettlement by Southern Baptists, according to a spokesman for the North American Mission Board, which coordinates refugee resettlement for SBC-affiliated churches.

Ahmet Krivaqu, his wife Remzije, his 15-year-old son Albert and 22-year-old nephew, Gzim, flew into Dallas from Newark, N.J. They had been there for a month, staying at nearby Fort Dix, learning some basic information about the United States.

A smiling, flower-bearing reception committee welcomed them, led by Nannette Cole, missions committee chair at First Baptist Church of Corsicana, Texas. The congregation will be the family's primary sponsor as they resettle in the 25,000-population town in north central Texas.

Also on hand as a welcoming committee were representatives of co-sponsoring churches: St. John's Episcopal and Westminster Presbyterian.

"This is truly an ecumenical effort ... a community effort," said B.F. Risinger, pastor of First Baptist Church of Corsicana, which is about 50 miles south of Dallas. "Our church is providing the housing and serving as sponsor for the Krivaqu family, but others are joining with us to help provide for them."

An interpreter and a representative of Refugee Services of North Texas also met the family.

"The interpreter was with us for a short time," said Cole. The church will also have access to another interpreter who lives in Ennis, another small town between Dallas and Corsicana.

"We will be able to have him as needed, and he can do some interpreting for us over the phone," she said.

Cole said 15-year-old Albert already "understands a lot, and by the time we got to Corsicana, he was interpreting for his mother." The mother is determined to learn English quickly, Cole said, "because she has three older children who are in Germany, and she wants to be able to bring them to the United States."

Cole said the Krivaqus are "really a lovely family, and they are so pleased to be here, to have a home of their own again."

The family, she added, was really very pleased to see the farm land and open country between Dallas and Corsicana.

The first priority now will be to get the family settled into the mission house at Corsicana and to get them summer clothing, she said.

"They came in with seven or eight pieces of luggage, but I think it is mostly winter clothing. They had on heavier clothing when they came in, and I tried to tell them it was hot outside. When they took their first step outside -- into the 92-degree Texas afternoon heat -- they said, 'Oh, hot!' and started taking off their jackets," she said.

Since communication was difficult initially, it took some time to determine Gzim was a nephew and not a son. Basic facts about the family indicate the family was from Pristina, the capital city. Ahmet was a truck driver; his wife a shopkeeper and the young men were students.

Reports say the family is Muslim, but Cole said she believes the designation is "more ethnic than religious. I would say that these are not particularly religious people."

Richard Robinson, immigration-ministries specialist at NAMB, commended Baptists for quick response to disaster-relief for the Kosovar refugees but noted that the concern for disaster relief "has not yet carried over to the resettlement of refugees in the United States."

While peace accords have been signed calling a halt the bombing, Robinson said, "peace agreements throughout history have had a way of falling apart."

"It is far, far too early to call off resettlement. We are proceeding with the resettlement efforts," he said.

Even with the stop to the NATO bombing and the withdrawal of Serb troops, it will take "months and months" to restore Kosovo to livable conditions, Robinson said. "Kosovo is in shambles. There is no water, no electricity, no sanitation. Many of the homes and buildings have been destroyed."

He also said that refugees who have been brought to the United States might not automatically return to Kosovo. In fact, he said, some may opt to remain in the U.S. permanently.

The need continues for additional Southern Baptist church sponsors, either to assume full sponsorship for a refugee family or to serve as a cosponsor with a family member living in the United States.

Although no other refugees from Kosovo currently are being sponsored by Southern Baptist churches, two churches have been approved: Porter Memorial Baptist Church in Lexington, Ky., and First Baptist Church of Greenwood, S.C.

The Kentucky church will sponsor an individual from Kosovo, according to Robinson, while the South Carolina church will serve as cosponsor for a refugee family. The church will allow the family to live in its missionary home and provide other assistance.

NAMB's office of immigration ministries helped resettle 689 refugees representing 213 families from 18 countries in 1998. With the help of 70 sponsoring Southern Baptist churches, 108 people made professions of faith, 55 were baptized and 625 were enrolled in Bible study.

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CBF relief gifts exceed \$368,000

By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (ABP) -- With gifts ranging from \$10 to \$100,000, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has received \$368,455 for on-going relief efforts among Albanian refugees.

First Baptist Church of Greenville, S.C., gave a jump-start to the fund by collecting \$16,000 in one weekend. CBF-affiliated churches in Kentucky, meanwhile, are collecting "quarters for Kosovo" to raise money for the relief work.

CBF missionaries Arville and Shelia Earl, who live in Gostivar, Macedonia, have bought medicine with the funds. The public-health doctor for the Gostivar region had distributed all available medicine at a free clinic for refugees when the Earls arrived with new supplies.

At refugee camps, the Earls' ministry is mostly listening. One elderly couple told the Earls two of their children were killed in front of them as they fled Kosovo.

The mother said talking to the Earls was the first time she had told anyone what happened, because there were 50,000 refugees in that camp with their own stories. "She was grateful to tell someone who could understand her, in Albanian, so we just listened," Shelia Earl said.

The Earls, Texas natives, have been CBF missionaries among Albanian people since 1994.

All money contributed to CBF's Albanian relief fund goes to the mission field, said Tom Prevost, global missions associate for the Atlanta-based Fellowship. Of the total, \$202,000 has gone to CBF missionaries and volunteers working in refugee camps, local churches and a medical clinic. The remainder has been given to Albanian refugee ministry led by other Christian groups such as the Baptist World Alliance relief program and Baptist groups in Germany, Hungary, Croatia and Italy.

Tony Buessing, a Florida layman and former missionary in Albania, has been a CBF volunteer in Tirana, Macedonia, since late April. He primarily oversees the kitchen staff and feeding program in the camp, which fed 207 families in May.

A Finnish doctor observed a peculiar atmosphere at the camp where Buessing worked. "Her conclusion is that the camp is manned by Christians, and that has to be the difference," Buessing said.

As political peace is being discussed in the region, CBF continues to seek prayer as well as financial and clothing contributions. "Principle needs now are prayer, especially that peace may truly come to this troubled region, and financial contributions to provide food, clothing, and medical supplies," Prevost said. Global missions leaders are also developing strategies for long-term ministries, supported by Baptist volunteers and financial assistance, among displaced Kosovar Albanians.

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Missouri moderate group hires full-time coordinator

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- A 24-year-old Baptist journalist has been named full-time coordinator of a group formed recently to counter fundamentalist efforts in the Missouri Baptist Convention.

The Jefferson City-based Mainstream Missouri Baptists organized recently to protect the state convention from being taken over by "fundamentalists," according to a press release.

"Our state convention has been a powerful example of Christ's love in action in Missouri for more than 160 years," said Rob Marus, who becomes responsible for day-to-day operation of the moderate organization July 1. "We do not want to see it transformed into a simple farm team of the fundamentalist-run Southern Baptist Convention."

Marus currently is a news writer for Word and Way, the state convention's weekly newspaper. A native of Little Rock, Ark., he is a graduate of Rhodes College in Memphis, Tenn.

"We are delighted that Rob has accepted this task," said Doyle Sager, president of the Mainstream Missouri Baptists board. "We believe his gifts and background make him a perfect fit for the job."

Sager, who is also Marus' pastor at First Baptist Church in Jefferson City, Mo., noted he has personally observed Marus' "love for Christ, his dedicated churchmanship, and his commitment to historic Baptist ways."

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-- By ABP staff

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