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**Christians more likely to divorce
than non-Christians, survey finds**

VENTURA, Calif. (ABP) -- Born-again Christians, and particularly Baptists, are more likely than non-Christians to have experienced a divorce, according to a new survey by the Barna Research Group.

According to a Dec. 21 report, 25 percent of all American adults have gone through at least one divorce in their lifetime. Among born-again Christians, the figure is higher, 27 percent, compared to 24 percent who are not born again.

Barna researchers said the difference is significant, given a large sample size of 4,000 adults.

Baptists are the Christian denomination whose adherents have the highest likelihood of divorce. According to the survey, 29 percent of Baptists are now or have been divorced. The only Christian group with a higher rate is non-denominational churches, with 34 percent of adults reporting at least one divorce.

Lutherans and Catholics have the lowest percentage of divorced persons, 21 percent, while atheists and agnostics are below the national norm, also 21 percent. Mormons, known for their emphasis on family values, fare no better than the national norm, 24 percent.

George Barna, president of the Ventura, Calif.-based firm that conducted the study called the national statistics "alarming" but said they have remained unchanged for half a decade.

Barna said the report raises questions about how well churches are ministering to families. "The ultimate responsibility for a marriage belongs to the husband and wife, but the high incidence of divorce within the Christian community challenges the idea that churches provide truly practical and life-changing support for marriages," he said.

Kansas-Nebraska Baptist paper ceases publication in December

TOPEKA, Kan. (ABP) -- The Baptist Digest, the monthly news journal of the Kansas-Nebraska Southern Baptist Convention, published its last issue Dec. 13.

The newspaper, published since 1953, will be replaced by two publications. One will target pastors and other church leaders. A second lay-oriented piece will emphasize evangelism and missions.

John Hopkins, the Baptist Digest editor for 21 years, will lead an editorial committee in publishing the "Heartland Leadership Journal," which will appear monthly beginning in January. Randy Cowling, an associational director of missions and former newspaper editor, will lead a similar team to develop "Images of the Heartland," a quarterly missions magazine for Southern Baptists in the two states.

Hopkins said he supports the change, recommended in a communications study. "While it is exciting to be involved in the creation of one of the new publications, there is a touch of sadness as we cease publication of The Digest, which has served the convention for so long," he said.

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Federal judge invalidates Cleveland voucher program

By Larry Chesser

CLEVELAND (ABP) -- A federal judge has ruled that Cleveland's school voucher program violates the constitutionally required separation of church and state.

But Judge Solomon Oliver Jr. delayed the effect of his 61-page opinion, pending an appeal the case to the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The Cleveland dispute is but one example of a growing national debate over the use of tax-funded vouchers to pay tuition at religious schools. Church-state observers say the issue will ultimately have to be settled by the U.S. Supreme Court, which in the past year has declined to review several voucher disputes.

Oliver's Dec. 20 ruling noted that religious schools dominate participation in the Cleveland program. Of the 56 schools registered for the program, 46 are sectarian schools, Oliver said, and 96 percent of the 3,761 students participating in the program attend a sectarian school.

Because so many of the schools are "religious in nature," Oliver said, students in the voucher program "have no meaningful choice" between church and non-church schools. He said it is important that students not be "steered toward a religious institution" in choosing between schools in a state-sponsored project.

"Because of the overwhelmingly large numbers of religious versus non-religious schools participating in the voucher program, beneficiaries cannot make a genuine, independent choice of what school to attend," Oliver wrote. "A program that is so skewed toward religion necessarily results in indoctrination attributable to the government and provides financial incentives to attend religious schools."

Oliver also said the Cleveland program lacked adequate safeguards to ensure that funds are used for secular, not religious, purposes.

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Born (again) to be wild? Baptist reaches out to bikers

By Tim Palmer

ST. LOUIS (ABP) -- Randy Windham always thought someone ought to share the gospel with people who sport tattoos, ride motorcycles and hang out in "biker" bars. He just never thought it would be him.

Windham, education and family minister for Cross Keys Baptist Church in St. Louis, was initially reluctant to seek out bikers. "I pictured 'em wearing all their leather stuff and picking their teeth with a switchblade," he recalls.

But his friend Jim Davis, a biker who had joined the church after accepting Christ in 1994, encouraged him.

Davis felt compassion for his lost friends after they responded generously to his girlfriend's murder. So many turned out for a benefit event that they raised \$17,000 for her children.

Davis thought: "Look at these bikers here. Look at all my drunken buddies; look at all my dope-addict buddies. Those are the people who need to be saved, because they deserve to be in heaven."

Windham started a Bible study in Davis' home in the spring of 1997. On the first night, 10 people attended and three made professions of faith. The group continues to meet monthly.

Next, Windham organized a bikers' rally. He advertised it in nine bars, two Harley-Davidson dealers and a tattoo parlor.

When the tattoo-parlor manager had a crisis involving a friend's suicide attempt, he called Windham. Windham began to visit the business weekly.

Soon, owner Tim Lococo, though skeptical, agreed to let him lead a Bible study there. "Personally, I thought Randy was barking up the wrong tree."

But since the first Bible study in June 1998, seven people -- some who came in just for a tattoo -- have made professions of faith.

Windham and Davis also have shared the gospel at two "strongman" competitions, both in the parking lots of bars. Competitors try to outdo one another in feats of strength such as pulling an 18,000-pound dump truck.

Operating a "Bible quiz booth," Windham lets people who take the four-question quiz choose as a prize either a water bottle or a "Jesus" video.

As a result of one such contact, a woman went to the biker Bible study and made a profession of faith.

Windham described his approach to sharing his faith with those in the biker/bar lifestyle. "You go in, you get a rapport with people, and through that relationship, they open up to the gospel."

He has seen hearts soften in people who were at first indifferent or hostile to spiritual matters. "I have earned the right to talk to them about the gospel," Windham said. "That's what Jesus did when he was here."

Another outlet for Windham's ministry is a wildlife conservation organization. "I like animals, but that's not why I joined it." The group's mostly non-church-going members see him as their pastor or chaplain. He has done two funerals and a wedding for them.

Windham said his church and pastor have been supportive of his ministry, which he calls "Have Bible, Will Travel."

Church member Sue Lail said of Windham: "He is a low-key, hardworking man of God."

Jim Davis said there ought to be more people like Randy Windham. "Too many Christians bury their nose in the fact that they're Christians, and they just cut it off right there," Davis said. "It's easy to go to church. It's hard to approach a person you know doesn't believe in God or have a Savior."

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