



Nashville, Tennessee
**Associated
Baptist Press**

Editor: Bob Allen
Executive editor: Greg Warner

Phone: 800.340.6626
Fax: 904.262.7745
E-mail: bob@abpnews.com

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Florida megachurch pastor dies from cancer complications

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- The pastor of the nation's second-largest Southern Baptist church died Feb. 13, nine days after being diagnosed with lymphoma.

Homer Lindsay Jr., 72, was pastor of the 26,000-member First Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla., for 31 years. He shared that role with co-pastor Jerry Vines, a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, the last 17 years.

Lindsay had recently announced retirement plans. He was scheduled to preach his last sermon March 26.

Lindsay reportedly learned he had cancer of the immune system Feb. 4, just one day after a funeral for his 38-year-old son, Homer Lindsay III, who suffered a fatal heart attack Jan. 28. The elder Lindsay attended the service in a wheelchair.

Lindsay started chemotherapy Feb. 6 but declined quickly. Vines told church members Sunday, Feb. 13, that Lindsay had been taken to the hospital early that morning and described his condition as "extremely grave." He died that night.

Vines told a local newspaper the congregation was shocked by the suddenness of Lindsay's death. "I don't think any of us realized just how sick he was," Vines told the Florida Times-Union.

Lindsay is survived by his wife of 48 years, Shirley, and three daughters.

Lindsay joined his father, Homer Lindsay Sr., as co-pastor of the historic downtown church in 1969. Together, they continued a turnaround begun when Lindsay Sr. took over the church in 1940. During the next 19 years, Sunday-school enrollment grew from 2,385 to 14,172, and the church bought or built a total of nine buildings.

Growth continued to spiral after Vines came as co-pastor in 1982. The congregation moved into a 9,200-seat auditorium in 1993. The church campus now consists of 14 buildings covering nine square blocks, in addition to a 155-acre campground out of town.

The church recorded 860 baptisms last year and was listed in 1998 statistics as the second-largest church in the Southern Baptist Convention, with membership totaling 25,459.

The church is probably best known in Southern Baptist life for its annual Bible conference and pastors' school. This year's conference, the 14th, held Jan. 28-Feb. 1, attracted an audience of more than 6,300 people from about 38 states.

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-- By Bob Allen. Linda Lawson contributed to this report.

Stockholm conference launches effort to end ethnic cleansing

By Kenny Byrd and Robert O'Brien

STOCKHOLM, Sweden (ABP) -- Despite the plaintive vow, "Never again!" that marked the end of the Jewish Holocaust, the theme of the last half of the 20th century instead degenerated into "again and again" with regard to ethnic cleansing, said participants at a recent international conference.

"The 20th century was the bloodiest in human history," said Greg Stanton, director of the Washington-based Campaign to End Genocide. Stanton estimated conservatively that 170 million people were murdered by their own governments in the last 100 years. "We've just got to make the 21st century different," he said.

Forty-four participants from a variety of nations, religions and ethnic backgrounds gathered Jan. 29-31 in Stockholm, Sweden, for a first-time conference on "Reverence and Reconciliation: A Healing Response to Ethnic Cleansing."

Conference coordinator Doug Tipps, a Baptist pastor in Texas, convened the meeting to explore how people of faith can act to end ethnically motivated dehumanization and violence.

Among actions proposed by the group are a second meeting this summer and production of a document on ethnic cleansing and reconciliation. Participants named two of the three individuals who will draft the "Stockholm Accords," which will be circulated for editing and then signed in a public ceremony probably in mid-August.

"The Stockholm Accords will be the first document of its kind in the 21st century," said Tipps, president of Global Strategies, an international organization working for personal and civil liberties. The public signing will be followed by signings by governments, organizations and individuals around the world, he said.

Tipps, who is also pastor of First Baptist Church in San Marcos, Texas, said the Stockholm Accords would be "a document of the people" that will also be posted on the World Wide Web, allowing individuals to endorse it around the world. He said a yet-to-be-named Web site would be created in March and linked to the Global Strategies Internet page at www.globalstrategies.org

"Some may think we're foolish to say we can solve this problem," said Derek Davis, director of Baylor University's J. M. Dawson Institute for Church-State Studies, which co-sponsored the event along with Global Strategies.

"But I think we're cowards if we don't do something," Davis told conferees from Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Argentina, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Zambia, Kenya, Australia, Germany, Singapore, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States.

Conference organizers admit the accords won't mean much unless signers are committed to abiding by them. "It's one thing to sign documents and another to uphold them," said Lonnie Turner, a representative of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship who works with the diplomatic community in Washington, D.C.

Turner noted that 80 percent to 90 percent of conventional weapons used around the world are provided by the big five nations who sit on the United Nations Security Council. "It's easy to sign a document, but where are the weapons coming from?" he observed.

Tipps emphasized that the Stockholm Accords will not end with words decrying ethnic cleansing.

"We hope the document will provide compassionate leverage for us in urging governments, organizations and individuals to help us work in specific areas of crisis and conflict to bring about ethnic reconciliation," said Tipps.

"We want to work with every sector -- religious, political, educational and economic -- to launch dialogue, education and direct action to de-legitimize ethnic cleansing as a political tool for conflict resolution," Tipps said.

Selected so far to draft the accords are Charles Smith of Seattle, a Washington State Supreme Court justice and grandson of slaves, and John Jonnson, who is originally from South Africa and now teaches at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

By the close of the conference, participants had debated the meaning of "ethnic cleansing," wept, hugged and shared moving stories of genocide, ethnic cleansing and oppression.

Stories of oppression spanned the generations from a 78-year-old Holocaust survivor to a Japanese man born in a World War II internment camp in the United States. Modern-day survivors described murder and oppression in the Balkans, and South Africans of all races told how their "truth and reconciliation" process overcame apartheid-spawned hatred with forgiveness.

The conference ended after the group held hands in a circle and sang "We Shall Overcome," a song sung during America's civil-rights struggle and by freedom seekers around the world.

The conclusion illustrated the common humanity of the diverse mix of black, white and Asian males and females, aged pre-World War II to Generation X, and identifying themselves from such backgrounds as Protestant, Catholic, Jew, Muslim and others.

Participants included several government leaders, such as Albanian Ambassador to Belgium Ydriz Basha and U.S. Ambassador to Sweden Lyndon Olson Jr. They also came from non-governmental, religious, educational, humanitarian and social-justice organizations. They were politicians, diplomats, journalists, lawyers, business people, missionaries, professors, pastors, and humanitarian workers.

Ruben Richards, assistant to Bishop Desmond Tutu on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, told how the commission allowed perpetrators of atrocities and their victims to come forward with truths of the past.

In short, Richards said, the commission was designed to "look into our grisly apartheid past, facilitate healing of our memories and past experiences and facilitate a process of amnesty and national reconciliation" for those who would accept it.

Richards said he sometimes reflects and thinks: "We must have been out of our minds to do what we did. It is only by God's grace and mercy that we survived both as a commission and as a nation struggling to lay to rest the ghosts of our past."

Joe Ozawa told how his sister died in an internment camp for Japanese-Americans in World War II. Fearing enemy infiltration, American officials gave Ozawa's family two-day notice to liquidate their belongings before being loaded into cattle cars and imprisoned.

"I was born behind barbed-wire, because I am Japanese," said Ozawa, now a psychologist and government official in Singapore. "This happened in the USA."

Holocaust survivor Martin Selak from Yugoslavia described tearfully how 750,000 of his Eastern Orthodox people, including 35 members of his family, died in the Holocaust. He was rescued just before he was scheduled for extermination.

Now a Chicago businessman and evangelical Christian, Selak said he was reluctant to talk about the past, wanting to remain positive and "thankful for what God has done for me." But, as the meeting progressed, he said he realized he should remind present generations about past atrocities as a warning for the present and future.

"We must leap into the future and become the conscience for society -- rejecting aggression, even if we're just a little voice in the wilderness," he told the group.

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Stages of genocide, dehumanization overcome natural inability to murder

By Kenny Byrd

STOCKHOLM, Sweden (ABP) -- Genocide unfolds in eight predictable stages and, at each stage, preventive measures can be used to stop it, according to the director of the Campaign to End Genocide in Washington, D.C.

The third stage on the genocide scale -- "dehumanization" -- is where humans begin to overcome their natural aversion to murder, Greg Stanton told participants at a conference on "Reverence and Reconciliation: A Healing Response to Ethnic Cleansing."

"We are first of all human," Stanton told government, humanitarian, educational and religious leaders gathered from around the globe in Stockholm to launch international accords and direct action against ethnic cleansing.

"Our creator made us all human, and genocide is a denial of that," he added.

Several conference participants lamented that while religion has too often contributed to the problem of ethnic and religious division, it could become a part of the solution by seeking to "re-humanize" those that might become victims of ethnic cleansing and other atrocities.

Stanton described the stages of genocide and preventive measures as follows:

(1) Classification -- All cultures have categories to distinguish people into "us and them" by ethnicity, race, religion or nationality. "Bipolar" societies that lack mixed categories, such as Rwanda and Burundi, are the most likely to have genocide.

The main preventive measure at this early stage is to develop institutions for all people that can transcend ethnic or racial divisions, actively promote tolerance and understanding and provide new classifications that transcend divisions.

(2) Symbolization -- Names or other symbols are given to the classifications. People are labeled "Jews" or "Gypsies" or are distinguished by colors or dress. When combined with hatred, symbols may be forced upon unwilling members of pariah groups: the yellow star for Jews under Nazi rule, the blue scarf for people from the Eastern Zone in Khmer Rouge Cambodia.

Governments can legally ban hate symbols to combat symbolization, but this approach will fail if it is not supported by popular cultural. When widely supported, however, denial of symbolization can be powerful. A case in point is Denmark, where many Danes chose to wear the yellow star, depriving it of its significance as a Nazi symbol for Jews.

(3) Dehumanization -- One group denies the humanity of the other group. Members are compared to animals, vermin, insects or diseases. As a result, oppressors lose their natural aversion to killing them. At this stage, hate propaganda in print and on hate radios is used to vilify the victim group.

In combating dehumanization, officials must be able to distinguish between protected speech and incitement to genocide.

(4) Organization -- Genocide is always organized, usually by the state and sometimes by terrorist groups.

To combat this stage, membership in these militias can be outlawed and their leaders denied foreign-travel visas. The United Nations should impose arms embargoes on governments and citizens of countries involved in genocidal massacres.

(5) Polarization -- Extremists drive groups apart. Hate groups broadcast polarizing propaganda. Laws may be created to forbid intermarriage or social interaction.

Prevention may mean security protection for moderate leaders or aid to human-rights groups.

(6) Identification -- Victims are identified and separated because of their ethnic or religious identity. Death lists are drawn up. Members of victim groups are made to wear identification symbols. They are often forced into ghettos, concentration camps or confined to a famine-struck region and starved. This is the stage where killing becomes inevitable.

The United Nations Security Council should be mobilized.

(7) Extermination -- Mass killing, legally called "genocide," begins. It is "extermination" to the killers, because they do not believe their victims to be fully human. When it is sponsored by the state, the armed forces may work with militias to do the killings. Sometimes the genocide results in revenge killings by groups against each other, as in Burundi.

At this stage only rapid and overwhelming armed intervention can stop genocide.

(8) Denial-- This final stage always follows genocide. The perpetrators of genocide dig up mass graves, burn bodies, try to cover up the evidence and intimidate the witnesses. They deny that crimes were committed and often blame what happened on the victims. Perpetrators block investigations and flee into exile. They remain in exile with impunity, like Pol Pot or Idi Amin, unless they are captured and a tribunal court is established to try them.

Stanton said the Campaign to End Genocide supports ratification of the treaty creating an International Criminal Court, which has not been ratified by the United States.

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'Reclaiming California' conference seeks to mobilize Christian voters

By Mark Wyatt

HIGHLAND, Calif. (ABP) -- The host pastor for a "Reclaiming California" conference said the Feb. 5 event was intended to raise churches' awareness about important issues on the ballot for the state's primary election next month.

Rob Zinn, pastor of Immanuel Southern Baptist Church in Highland, Calif., joined several other speakers at the one-day conference in exhorting churches to support Proposition 22, the California ballot initiative that defines marriage as "between one man and one woman."

"March 7 is not going to be an insignificant vote," Zinn told some 235 fellow pastors and guests attending a dinner on the eve of the conference. "If Prop. 22 is defeated you won't recognize this state in five years."

Zinn said pastors need to encourage church members to register and vote yes on Prop. 22 and other pro-morality issues and to defeat several gambling issues on the ballot.

"The homosexuals are not going to be happy just defeating (Prop.) 22," Zinn said. "Their agenda says they want to redefine marriage (and) bring in a whole new set of principles. If Christians don't vote, aren't in the political process, who's making the policy for our country?" Zinn asked.

Other conference speakers and breakout sessions dealt with other moral issues including abortion, pornography, gambling, public education and parental rights.

An activist who says America's founders never intended the modern understanding of the separation of church and state echoed the call for churches to become more active in the electoral process. David Barton noted that only one in four Christians voted in America in 1998.

"If we don't stand up as salt and light, God won't bless," declared Barton, founder of WallBuilders, a Texas-based organization dedicated to restoring what he describes as America's founding values through education and legislation.

"What happens in California affects the rest of us, every state in the nation," Barton continued. He appealed to Christians in California to turn back the growing push for special rights for homosexuals.

"Do us a favor," Barton pleaded. "Get this thing beat here. This doesn't need to go across the country."

James Kennedy, a Presbyterian minister and head of Coral Ridge Ministries in Coral Gables, Fla., addressed the gathering in a videotaped message. Kennedy said churches must address "the great moral issues of our time," because "government has obtruded itself into the realm of the spiritual, ecclesiological and moral issues as never before."

As a result, Kennedy added, "There are millions of Christians who are looking for a pastor with the intestinal fortitude to stand up" against immorality in government and society. Working to pass Proposition 22 is one way to do that, he indicated.

Homosexuality is not a civil right, a niece of slain civil-rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. told the gathering. Alveda King of Atlanta, founder of King for America, explained: "Human sexuality is not a civil right or a civil issue, but an issue dealt with by the individual in the context of the family."

King, a former state legislator in Georgia, told of being vilified by homosexuals for advocating traditional morality. She finally left politics when she realized it was "full of corruption." King said she grew tired of being constantly criticized for telling homosexuals to accept responsibility for their behavior instead of claiming they were "born that way." Eventually, she tried a new approach.

"Okay, so you were born that way; get born again!" King said.

A self-described "former homosexual" also disputed opponents' claims comparing the battle over Proposition 22 to the struggle for civil rights.

"This is not a gay-rights issue," Keno Rogers said emphatically.

Besides supporting Proposition 22, Rogers said Christians also should reach out to homosexuals with the love of Jesus Christ. "Do everything you can to tell the gay community, 'We love you,'" he said. Christians "are supposed to love" homosexuals, Rogers continued, "but you have a responsibility to tell them that they're wrong."

Barton said virtually all of the nation's founders shared values including fervent belief in God and respect for the Bible's moral authority. The founders' original intent, however, has been twisted in many cases, he continued, including what he termed the frequently misunderstood doctrine of church-state separation.

"Separation of church and state was never meant to keep God out of government," Barton said. "It was meant to keep government out of the church."

Attorney Brad Dacus said churches too often shy away from issues of public morality because their leaders fear reprisals from government agencies. He said churches "are entitled to use up to 5 percent of your resources" on matters related to public elections without jeopardizing their tax-exempt status.

Churches can even sponsor and host political meetings, he added. "Your church cannot formally endorse or reject candidates but can invite candidates to speak in the church," Dacus said.

"There are many opportunities, and yet we see there is greater intimidation against Christians and the church," Dacus lamented. He encouraged those attending the conference to resist intimidation and to overcome ignorance about the rights of churches in society.

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