



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

November 6, 2000

(00-101)

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Graham crusade draws nearly a quarter-million**
- Missouri pastors criticized for election-eve voter 'guides'**
- Illinois Baptists affirm 'family' statement, but don't make it part of their constitution**
- Baptist leaders respond to Carter in newspaper**

**Graham crusade draws
nearly a quarter-million**

By Bob Allen

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Nearly a quarter-million people came for what might be their last chance to see and hear Billy Graham during a four-day crusade in Jacksonville, Fla., but the famous evangelist tried to dispel speculation that he was about to retire.

"As long as God gives me breath, I'm going to continue to preach," Graham, who turns 82 Nov. 7, told one crusade crowd, asking them to pray for him as the decision is made about where he is to go next.

And while he said he never endorses candidates for political office, Graham all but endorsed George W. Bush for president. Graham met with Bush, who passed through Jacksonville on a campaign stop, for a private prayer breakfast.

"I don't endorse candidates, but I've come as close to it as any time in my life," Graham, a longtime friend of the Bush family told media while posing for photos with the Texas governor. "I have been praying for this critical election. I've been praying God's will will be done."

Graham, a registered Democrat, said he had already voted absentee in his home state of North Carolina. "You can guess who I voted for," he said.

Earlier, Bush and invited GOP leaders met for a private worship service led by five ministers, among them former SBC president Jerry Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church in Jacksonville.

Graham, who has been a spiritual adviser to many presidents over the years, was at one point in his career criticized for becoming too close to President Richard Nixon. Graham told the Jacksonville crusade audience that one thing the many leaders he has known from all over the world have in common is that "they all need prayer."

Organizers said about 242,000 people visited the Nov. 2-5 crusade at Jacksonville's Alltel Stadium. That exceeded the 227,000 at Graham's four-day crusade in Nashville, Tenn., last June. An estimated 10,000 people responded to closing invitations at the services to accept Christ.

Graham, who suffers from Parkinson's Disease and recently spent three months in a hospital, was helped to the pulpit each night but appeared strong and at ease as he spoke.

The meetings featured moments of nostalgia. Graham's longtime associates George Beverly Shea and

Cliff Barrows joined him for a light-hearted trio rendition of "This Little Light of Mine." Graham's part was to shout "No!" in response to Shea and Barrows' "Hide it under a bushel?"

Earlier, Shea stumbled while singing a solo of "It Is No Secret What God Can Do." He paused and told the crowd he had reached 91 years of age and sometimes forgot the words. Graham later marveled at how Shea is able to remember the lyrics to hundreds of songs and said playfully that he doubted the singer really forgot the words but was engaging in "showmanship."

But other crusade events targeted a younger audience. A Saturday-night concert by recording artists Jars of Clay, Kirk Franklin and dc talk drew the week's largest attendance. Estimated at 70,000, officials said it was the largest crowd ever to attend Alltel Stadium for a concert event.

About 21,000 younger children attended a Saturday morning "Kidz Gig," a musical drama for preschoolers and elementary children that has been part of Graham crusades since 1992.

In the opening session Nov. 2, Graham spoke about racial and religious unity. "One of the purposes we have is to bring a new union among the churches of all denominations here," Graham said. Another goal, he added, was to bring races together. "We ought to forget each others' skin color and just accept people as people created in the image of God."

In his second message, he spoke on the importance of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross for salvation.

Graham's organization was criticized in letters to the editor of the local newspaper for an advertising campaign that some said was insensitive toward Eastern religions. A commercial featured a portly man trying to contort his body into a yoga position in a vain attempt at finding "inner peace."

"There are people today who say everybody's going to be saved," Graham said in his Friday sermon. "Some say we're all going to heaven. No, we're not."

"There are so many roads. Religious roads, good roads, pleasing roads, wholesome roads -- but the only way to eternal life is that road that goes by the cross."

Saturday night Graham shared with youth about his own experience as a 16-year-old who was "searching for something, but I didn't know what it was." He urged youth to make a decision to be "born again" and to follow Christ. "God is speaking to you tonight," he said. "You know there is a voice deep inside of you that is telling you to come. That's the voice of the Spirit of God. You come."

Graham's closing message, to a crowd estimated at 65,000, spoke of God's judgment at the end of the world. "Our God is speaking to us in our century," Graham warned. "He's warning us that judgment is going to come. Christ is going to come back, ... and when he comes, he's going to bring all his powerful angels with him."

"Yes, we're guilty," Graham continued. "We're guilty of our false sense of security. We're guilty of sinful pleasure. We've become satiated. We now want brutal, sadistic pleasure."

More than 650 churches from 51 denominations took part in organizing the crusade, which was nearly a year in planning and had a \$2.8 million budget.

Among crusade volunteers were a 7,000-voice choir, counselors and 750 volunteers to compile statistics and see that each person responding to an invitation receives a personal letter. Volunteers also worked at a pre-crusade homeless ministry and in praying individually over each of the stadium's 73,000 seats.

"We are seeing a city coming together," said Mark Wilbanks, pastor of Southside Baptist Church in Jacksonville and a member of the crusade steering committee. "We are seeing lives transformed and we are seeing an outpouring of the Spirit of God as never before."

Though Graham began his preaching career not far from Jacksonville as a student at a Bible college more than 60 years ago, this was his first crusade specifically in the northeast Florida city. With a population of 1 million, Jacksonville had until now been the largest U.S. city to never have been host for a Graham crusade.

Missouri pastors criticized for election-eve voter 'guides'

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Critics were crying foul over the distribution of voter guides in Missouri just before the Nov. 7 elections that criticize -- and some say distort -- views of Vice President Al Gore and the late Missouri Gov. Mel Carnahan.

A tax-exempt group called the Missouri Pastor Council planned to deliver 200,000 voter guides for distribution in churches on the Sunday before Election Day.

The pastor council is an affiliate of Vision America, a 501c3 group headed by a conservative Texas Southern Baptist pastor, Rick Scarborough. Vision America's advisory board includes other Southern Baptist religious leaders, among them Jerry Falwell, Paul Pressler and Adrian Rogers.

According to Vision America, between 1,500 and 2,000 churches throughout Missouri would be receiving the Missouri Pastor Council voter guides.

But critics -- including the Gore campaign, Missouri Democrats and the Interfaith Alliance -- say the guides misrepresent the positions of Democratic candidates in order to aid Republicans. They find particularly troubling the attributing of "no response" on several issues to Carnahan, who died recently in a plane crash, along with his son and a longtime aide, while running for the U.S. Senate.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State said it will likely file complaints to the Internal Revenue Service against Vision America, its affiliate and Missouri churches that distribute the guides.

Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United, said the guides are "clearly partisan and way over the line." He said, "This is worse and more dishonest than the Christian Coalition's voter guides, which is saying a lot."

"To unleash this partisan and misleading attack on a man who is deceased and cannot even respond to it is shocking," Lynn added. "I can't imagine a religiously motivated group that would put out an attack like this."

But Dave Welch, executive director of Vision America, said the questionnaire was mailed to candidates in September and Carnahan had already missed the deadline before his death.

Welch said Vision America prefers to have candidates answer the survey, but when they do not, the group uses voting records and public statements to answer it for them when possible.

But in some instances, Welch said, even a candidate's verbal campaign stand will not make it to the voting guide if it is contradicted by other information.

For example, the Missouri Pastor Council says Gore is opposed to preserving "traditional marriage" and eliminating the "marriage tax penalty." But Gore -- on his Web site and in debates -- has stated the opposite.

Gore campaign spokesman Dag Vega said, "We hope that voters will look to a variety of sources to learn about Al Gore's agenda before casting a vote on Election Day."

And Roy Temple, executive director of the Missouri Democratic Party told Associated Baptist Press: "Where they did state [Carnahan's] position, they misrepresented it. And to say 'no response,' on others is a bit absurd given the circumstances."

Temple said Republicans have told him that "nearly all of their get-out-the-vote efforts have been coordinated through churches."

But Welch said the pastors' group has not coordinated any of their efforts with Republican officials.

Beyond legal questions, Welton Gaddy, executive director of the Interfaith Alliance, said he was more concerned about the religious ethics of the effort days before an election.

"As a pastor, I am ashamed of seeing this kind of dirty political involvement on the part of pastors,"

Gaddy said. "The distribution of this kind of partisan material by pastors represents the worst of the mixing of politics and religion. It harms the political process and compromises the integrity of religion."

"This is the kind of material that compromises a congregation's ability to minister to all people," said Gaddy, a former pastor.

In the Missouri pastors' guide, the group lists only six issues for the presidential and the Senate races. They sent candidates a longer list of issues to answer.

One issue listed is whether the candidate would "prohibit partial birth abortion." The voter guide says Texas Gov. George W. Bush and Sen. John Ashcroft, R-Mo., support the prohibition but Gore and Carnahan do not. A more complete answer would be that both Gore and Carnahan support a ban on the late-term abortion procedure as long as there is an exception for the health of the mother.

The group also said neither Gore nor Carnahan responded to where they stand on "student-led prayer at school events," even though statements show Gore supports student-led prayer as long as it is not government-endorsed and promoted.

"We don't feel any great need to describe the question in such detail," Welch told ABP, a national news service based in Jacksonville, Fla. "We like to think that the candidates are sophisticated enough to understand what the issues are."

Welch also said that frequently a candidate will support a position verbally but the record shows something different. For example, he said the reason they defined the homosexual marriage issue as "traditional marriage" instead of "same-sex marriage" is because Gore has supported a Vermont measure legalizing "civil unions." Welch said, "You can't have it both ways."

But the Gore campaign also took issue with the pastors' voter guides charging that Gore has "no response" to the following: "restrict Internet porn in libraries." Gore supported the Children Online Protection Act, which included safeguards against children having access to inappropriate online material in public facilities.

In a related issue, the Missouri Baptist Convention adopted a watered-down resolution of sympathy for Carnahan and his family but only after bitter exchanges in the resolutions committee. Some leaders present in the hearing said that while the resolutions committee members did not engage in any attacks, other participants said the convention should not be sending sympathy to a "baby murderer" -- a reference to Carnahan's pro-choice views on abortion.

Nevertheless, the convention ended up passing a brief resolution of condolence to the Carnahan family. It said, "Missouri Baptists have lost a prominent public servant and fellow Missouri Baptist churchman. We call upon Missouri Baptists to uphold this family in prayer concerning their loss."

Though Carnahan was a lifelong Southern Baptist and a deacon at his church in Rolla, Mo., some of his political views are out of favor with conservatives that now control the Missouri Baptist Convention. For the third straight year, candidates backed by the conservative Project 1000 network were elected to the convention's top leadership post, despite opposition this year from a moderate group, Mainstream Missouri Baptists.

David Fulk, a Baptist layman from Second Baptist Church in Liberty, Mo., told ABP he supported the resolution and appreciated members of the committee for approving it. But, he said, "It really turned into an ugly session ... where lots of hateful things were said."

"I expected opposition, but I did not expect hateful, un-Christlike comments to be made," he said. "It was obvious that they did not know Gov. Carnahan."

Illinois Baptists affirm 'family' statement, but don't make it part of their constitution

By Michael Leathers

QUINCY, Ill. (ABP) -- A vote to add the "Baptist Faith and Message's" 1998 family amendment to Illinois Baptists' constitution fell just short of a required two-thirds majority. Despite that, messengers to the Nov. 1-2 Illinois Baptist State Association annual meeting later affirmed in a separate vote the language that says, among other things, that wives should submit to their husbands.

The proposal to amend the state's Southern Baptists' constitution gained a 65 percent majority at the meeting in Quincy. The later vote, which needed only a simple majority, passed by a wider margin.

The family amendment, which attracted national media scrutiny and criticism from some Southern Baptists for its call for a wife to submit herself graciously to her husband, had been incorporated into the "Baptist Faith and Message" two years ago at the Southern Baptist Convention in Salt Lake City. The document, which underwent further revisions this year, is a non-binding statement of faith regarded as the core of what many Southern Baptists embrace.

Opponents to the constitutional change cited several concerns. One man said it excluded blended families, where the parents have remarried. He also said the "Baptist Faith and Message" was becoming increasingly creedal. Another called it Scripturally flawed, because the Bible teaches Christians should submit themselves to each other, and not just wives to husbands. A third said the passage in Ephesians, used as one of the biblical references for the amendment, is regularly misinterpreted by some men to justify abuse and to beat down their wives.

Supporters also made their case. One pastor from a blended family said the addition of the amendment will help keep families on track. Another called the amendment a clearly Christian statement about the biblical roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives, both of whom are equal before God. He said it was important for Southern Baptists to make a united stand about the biblical model of a family in a nation that has been redefining what constitutes a family.

Another pastor said the amendment's defeat could cause the media to incorrectly conclude that Illinois Baptists support these redefinitions, including homosexual couples. In a related matter, Illinois Southern Baptists unanimously approved in a later session a resolution opposing recognition of civil unions of homosexual partners.

The family statement was resurrected by a supporter of the defeated amendment who made a motion to affirm the article on the family as worded in the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message." This year's revisions to the faith statement did not change any of the language of the 1998 amendment, and it was not clear why the motion referred to the 2000 statement and not the 1998 amendment.

The motion passed with 70 percent approval in a 224-97 vote. It does not alter the constitution and required only a simple majority to pass.

The IBSA constitution will continue to use the wording of the 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message," but that could change by 2002. A constitution-and-bylaws committee next year is expected to review this year's revisions to the "Baptist Faith and Message." If committee members recommend its adoption, the first reading would be held November 2001 in Peoria and a vote taken after the second reading in November 2002 in O'Fallon.

Baptist leaders respond to Carter in newspaper

By John Pierce

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Former President Jimmy Carter's recent announcement that he no longer considers himself a Southern Baptist has drawn varied responses from three prominent Baptist leaders in separate articles in two Sunday editions of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

In an Oct. 29 opinion piece, Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., dismissed Carter's announcement as a "post-presidential publicity stunt" seeking to influence state convention voting. Mohler said Carter's announcement came late -- in that Carter began distancing himself from the Southern Baptist Convention years ago.

Mohler is a primary drafter of the revised "Baptist Faith and Message" statement that Carter cited as influencing his departure from the Southern Baptist Convention. He claimed that "on issues ranging from homosexuality and abortion to the nature of the gospel and authority of Scripture, Carter is out of step with the majority of Southern Baptists."

The following Sunday, Nov. 5, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Coordinator Daniel Vestal came to Carter's defense in the Atlanta newspaper. He called Mohler's article "a misguided attack" on Carter and his wife, Rosalynn. Vestal added that Mohler's article reflects "the kind of negative spirit that has led the Carters and thousands of others to distance themselves from the convention they have loved and supported."

The CBF leader wrote that Mohler "falsely claims that Carter 'made abortion rights a priority' during his presidency." Vestal pointed to a recent interview with Baptist Press in which Carter said he never believed Jesus would approve of abortions, and as president he "never made abortion rights a priority."

Vestal also claimed that Mohler's "characterization of Carter's view on homosexuality" was off target. He noted that Carter acknowledged that homosexual practice is sinful as is "adultery, fornication and lust" in that same Baptist Press interview.

"Perhaps most troubling," Vestal wrote, "is Mohler's suggestion that Carter questions the veracity of Scripture," noting that the former president is a long-time student and teacher of the Bible who has expressed his belief in the miracles of the Bible.

"The truth is that the Carters, like many other Southern Baptists, have become increasingly uncomfortable with the actions of the Southern Baptist Convention," Vestal added.

That same Nov. 5 edition of the Journal-Constitution carried an unrelated article on the retirement of Nelson Price, the long-time pastor of Roswell Street Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta, who offered prayers at Carter's inaugurations as both Georgia's governor and as president.

Price served with Mohler on the committee that revised the more restrictive faith statement approved this past June by SBC messengers in Orlando, Fla., but he was more gracious toward the president's decision when asked by a reporter for comment.

"I wish (Carter) would have called before he did that," Price said, adding, "I don't believe that we Southern Baptists have always been as supportive as we might have been."

-30-

END
