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**Divided Supreme Court cuts off  
Florida recounts, says no time**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Proving no less divided than the rest of the country, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that a Florida recount of the Nov. 7 presidential election was unconstitutional and not enough time remained to conduct a proper recount.

The high court reversed the Florida Supreme Court's order to begin recounting "undervotes" statewide. It then sent the case back to the Florida court for further proceedings but indicated that there would be no time for those proceedings.

The high court released its decision just before 10 p.m. Dec. 12.

The narrow defeat for Vice President Al Gore would appear to hand the White House to Texas Gov. George W. Bush. Gore suspended his recount committee and was scheduled to address the nation Dec. 13.

The unsigned opinion by the Supreme Court said that seven justices agree there are constitutional problems with the recount ordered in Florida. "The only disagreement is as to the remedy," said the decision.

A key issue in the ruling was the court's reading that Florida law requires electors to be in place no later than Dec. 12, the last day before they can be challenged by Congress.

In dissenting opinions, Associate Justices David Souter and Stephen Breyer indicated that they believe remedy efforts could have continued until Dec. 18, when the Electoral College meets.

The majority opinion, however, said it is the Florida Supreme Court that says the Dec. 12 deadline is unmovable and there would be no time to make all the necessary changes -- including a uniform standard to count votes.

"That date is upon us, and there is no recount procedure in place under the State Supreme Court's order that comports with minimal constitutional standards," the opinion said. "Because it is evident that any recount seeking to meet the Dec. 12 date will be unconstitutional for the reasons we have discussed, we reverse the judgment" of the Florida court.

The Supreme Court's opinion did acknowledge that punch-card ballot machines used in some Florida counties "can produce an unfortunate number of ballots which are not punched in a clean, complete way by the voter. After the current counting, it is likely legislative bodies nationwide will examine ways to improve the mechanisms and machinery for voting."

However, they said the lack of a statewide standard on how to determine voter intent in hand counts violated the Equal Protection clause of the U.S. Constitution. Some counties required that holes be punched through at least partially. Others counted dimpled or "pregnant" chads as legal votes.

Chief Justice William Rehnquist wrote a concurring opinion, joined by Associate Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas.

But the harsh divisions in the court became evident in four different sharply worded dissents written by Associate Justices John Paul Stevens, David Souter, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer.

Stevens wrote that "in the interest of finality," the majority "effectively orders the disenfranchisement of an unknown number of voters whose ballots reveal their intent."

"Although we may never know with complete certainty the identity of the winner of this year's presidential election, the identity of the loser is perfectly clear," Stevens concluded. "It is the nation's confidence in the judge as an impartial guardian of the rule of law."

Ginsburg chided the court's majority for suggesting the Constitution "impelled us to train a skeptical eye on a state court's portrayal of state law."

She specifically pointed to Rehnquist's use of a 1958 decision overriding an Alabama Supreme Court ruling against the NAACP. The Florida Supreme Court "surely should not be bracketed with state high courts of the Jim Crow South," she wrote.

And Ginsburg -- breaking with tradition -- ended with, "I dissent," instead of "I respectfully dissent."

Breyer said he feared that in order to bring this "agonizingly long election process to a definitive conclusion, we have not adequately attended to that necessary check upon our own exercise of power, our own sense of self-restraint."

Breyer said he would have preferred the high court permit the Florida vote recount to continue "under uniform standards."

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## **Supreme Court intervenes in presidential vote dispute**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Final results of the 2000 presidential election came down to what some were calling the most important U.S. Supreme Court decision since the 1857 Dred Scott ruling that upheld slavery.

Reporters filled the Supreme Court pressroom Dec. 12 awaiting a final word on the ruling to settle five weeks wrangling over contested votes in Florida, leaving Vice President Al Gore no legal recourse and allowing Texas Gov. George W. Bush to declare himself president-elect.

A 4-3 Florida Supreme Court decision earlier handed Gore a brief victory by ordering all Florida counties to manually recount ballots with so-called "under votes," but the nation's high court stepped in to stop the count. The action -- a boost for Bush in his effort to defend his narrow lead in electoral votes -- was rare for a court that has valued states rights, including the right of state courts to interpret state law.

U.S. Supreme Court justices held oral arguments in Bush vs. Gore Dec. 11. At issue in the case was whether there exists a reason under the U.S. Constitution to overturn the Florida Supreme Court's order for manual recounts.

Not more than two minutes into oral arguments, in a courtroom tightly packed with members of Congress, attorneys and more than 120 reporters, Associate Justice Anthony Kennedy raised a central question to Bush attorney Theodore Olson.

"Where's the federal question here?"

Olson replied that Florida's high court violated Article II of the U.S. Constitution and federal laws that require electors to be selected under the laws in place on Election Day.

Olson argued that the Florida court "issued a new, wholesale, post-election revision of Florida's election law" and "authorized extensive standardless and unequal manual ballot recounts in selected Florida counties."

Kennedy and Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor appeared to be the two justices most likely to be considered "swing votes" following a 5-4 vote to halt the recount and accept the case.

Justices pressed both sides on standards to determine whether a ballot indicates "clear intent of the voter" as required by Florida law, should a recount be allowed to proceed.

In response to a question by Associate Justice Stephen Breyer, Bush lawyer Olson said he believed punch-card ballots at a minimum should be penetrated.

David Boies, attorney for Gore, argued that the Florida Supreme Court did not change Florida law but was merely trying to interpret confusing statutes. Boies said the U.S. Supreme Court could only claim the Florida court changed the election laws "if you conclude that the Florida Supreme Court's interpretation of Florida law is either a sham or it is so misguided that it is simply untenable in any sense."

When asked what his standard would be for counting votes on ballots, Boies pointed to Texas law that requires counting not only penetrated punch cards but also those containing dimples and indentations.

Chief Justice William Rehnquist criticized the idea of a recount at such a late date. "Wouldn't that take a fair amount of time?" he asked.

Boies said, "We believe that it could be done in the time available." He added, "We are still entitled, under settled Florida law, to have our votes counted."

Outside the courtroom after oral arguments, a massive crowd had gathered supporting both the Bush and Gore positions.

Signs read: "A dent is an intent," "Gore Got More," and "Give it up, Al."

Because of the large, cheering crowds, police cut off access to the foot of the Supreme Court where interviews were taking place to only members of the media, Congress and a select few partisans.

Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Texas, told Associated Baptist Press she appreciated the questions coming from Kennedy and O'Connor that she said reflected a desire "find the answer to the fairness question."

She said Republicans seeking a ruling that overturns the Florida Supreme Court are abandoning their consistent call for states' rights. She said to them "states' rights is a moving target that is affable when it works and abandoned when it does not."

Sens. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, and Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., conducted a joint press conference to show their solidarity behind whatever the Supreme Court decides, even though they disagree on the merits of the case.

Jesse Jackson, founder of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, who has charged that civil-right laws were violated in the Florida election, told ABP that Bush supporters were being hypocritical in their arguments.

Bush supporters are arguing for voter intent over technicalities in the absentee-ballot cases, Jackson said, but they are arguing the opposite in Gore's contest to count the under-votes.

"They came to a fork in the road and they chose the fork," Jackson said.

"Gore believes he won so he wants the votes counted," Jackson said. "Bush believes Gore won and that's why he does not want the votes counted."

## Messianic Jews see special dimension in Hanukkah

By Michael Leathers

ROCHESTER, Ill. (ABP) -- The Arthur family will gather around the kitchen table in their duplex next week to light the shamash, the name for the candle in the center of their nine-pronged menorah, to observe the first day of Hanukkah. This Jewish holiday, however, holds an added dimension for this family that isn't part of the celebration for millions of other Jews also lighting candles at sundown on Dec. 21.

Terry and Diane Arthur, along with their three children, attend Petah Tikvah, a Messianic Jewish congregation that's part of the Capital City Baptist Association in Springfield, Ill. Their youngest son, 10-year-old Zachary, described his faith best when he explained how school friends have a hard time understanding his beliefs. "A lot of times, I don't think they understand that if you're a Messianic Jew, you believe that Yeshua, Jesus, is the Son of God."

That inability to understand isn't limited to schoolmates. Messianic Jews face misunderstanding from both ends of the religious spectrum. Their evangelical brothers often don't see the need for them to embrace their Jewish roots, and other Jews do not consider Jesus Christ to be the promised Messiah.

The heart of Messianic Judaism is about reaching other Jewish people for Christ, according to Mike Copen, the rabbi at Petah Tikvah, which meets Friday nights at Prairie Streams Christian Church in Springfield. "We are not separating ourselves," he said. "We believe Yeshua (the Hebrew word for Jesus) is the Anointed One of God, that he was born of a virgin. We just don't follow the Christian calendar."

The priority for many Messianic Jews is to "first bring other Jews to the knowledge that Yeshua is the Messiah." And that's a hard sell because Jewish people are skeptical of those who follow the Christian faith, Copen said, often with sound reason. History is filled with examples where people, most notoriously Adolph Hitler, have persecuted Jews while claiming to do so in the name of Christ.

Jewish leaders have been highly critical of efforts by Southern Baptists to target Jews for evangelism. Last year, an International Mission Board prayer guide focusing on Judaism that coincided with Jewish High Holy Days set off a firestorm of criticism. Southern Baptist leaders defended the approach, saying the gospel is for everyone, but urged sensitivity in witnessing to persons of another faith.

Messianic Jews are careful to avoid terms like being saved, which immediately turn off another Jewish person. They refer to the entire Bible as the Torah, and the cross as an execution stake, Copen said. They persuade other Jews that they do not have to walk away from their heritage to be a follower of Jesus.

In that sense, for Messianic Jews, Hanukkah fulfills their heritage and puts the focus on Christ, according to Steve Barack, rabbi for B'nai Ohe Beth Tefilah, a Messianic Jewish congregation that meets in a Lutheran church in Lindenhurst, part of the Lake County Baptist Association, north of Chicago. "We see Hanukkah as a very spiritual event. We can be overjoyed with the fact that God has dedicated himself to us, even to the point that he sent his Son to die for us."

Hanukkah, also known as the Feast of Dedication and as the Festival of Lights, is celebrated for eight days, starting on the 25th day of Kislev on the Hebrew calendar and ending on the second of Tevet. That first day will be Dec. 22 this year, but because all Jewish holidays begin at sundown, the first candle is actually lit on the evening of Dec. 21.

A common misconception about Hanukkah is that it is the Jewish counterpart to Christmas, perhaps because the two holidays are celebrated about the same time of year. While exchanging gifts is popular during both winter holidays, Hanukkah had taken on this gift-giving custom when Jews tried to assimilate themselves into a gentile society, Copen said.

The Arthurs do not exchange gifts during Hanukkah, preferring to focus on the holiday's spiritual dimension and not be distracted by commercialization. "People come to think of this time of year as a season to bring gifts. If they have any thought of Jesus, He's been shoved in the background."

The origin of Hanukkah traces back to about 165 years before Christ's birth when Antiochus IV desecrated the Jerusalem temple when some Jews continued to refuse to convert to Hellenism, the ethical system of ancient Greece, and abandon their distinctive culture. As the story goes, an army of Jewish rebels led by Judas Maccabeus drove out the Syrian forces and recaptured the temple. During the temple's rededication, they fixed the broken menorah, a symbol for the light of God, but found only enough specially prepared oil for one day. About eight days would be needed to prepare new oil. They lit the menorah, and its oil miraculously lasted for the full eight days.

Just as the temple was rededicated, those who observe Hanukkah also rededicate themselves to the Lord. As the shamash is used to light an additional candle each night after sundown, many families spend that time of about 30 minutes in quiet reflection.

The Arthurs -- their other two children at home are 13-year-old Nathanael, who had his bar mitzvah in August, and less-than-a-month-old Rebekah -- usually spend that time around their kitchen table reading a passage from the Old Testament followed by a discussion.

Copen and his wife, Ginger, will "darken everything in the house and just sit and watch the candles." It's an ideal time to shed the fast and furious pace of life and focus on God with your family, he said. "Sometimes, it takes me half of those candles before I can get my mind to concentrate on God," comparing it to a vacation where a person needs the first one or two days to forget all that happens at the office. When the point arrives where he can zero in on God, "it's marvelous, it's beautiful," he said.

Steve and Maureen Barack teach their two children that lighting each candle is a reminder that God calls them to be the light of the world and to keep the hope of Christ alive. It's a spiritual meaning to the holiday that Steve Barack said he didn't grasp until he accepted Christ as Messiah 16 years ago. He and his wife have embraced Messianic Judaism for the last nine years.

Most Jews in today's secular society don't make the connection with the spiritual significance behind Hanukkah, Barack said, just like most gentiles cast aside the religious meaning of Christmas. But he has learned as a Messianic Jew that God has fulfilled what he has promised. "He's made a place for us to have a very close relationship with him. And that's what Hanukkah means to me."

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-- Bob Allen contributed to this story.

## **Church nativity collection displays treasures of old and new traditions**

By Barbara Denman

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- There may have been no room at the inn for Jesus in Bethlehem, but one Florida church welcomed the Christ child with a massive collection of nativity scenes exhibiting depictions of the holy night by artisans from around the world.

The 41 manger sets lined the walls of the prayer chapel at Southside Baptist Church in Jacksonville this Christmas season -- treasures telling of new and old traditions that were acquired during distant travels and as handcrafted gifts from loved ones.

Appropriately named, "No Room at the Inn," the crèches were loaned to the church by its members and offered a visible reminder of the real meaning of Christmas.

While the church did not charge admission to the exhibit, visitors donated \$400 earmarked for the I.M. Sulzbacher Center for the Homeless where the church provides an on-going ministry, said Cindy Graves, who coordinated the project.

"We thought helping others who have no place to sleep was an appropriate and beautiful way to honor the one who laid in a manger because there was 'no room at the inn.'"

Many of the sets have belonged to church-members' families for decades and served as the centerpieces of their Christmas celebrations. They were made from various materials -- porcelain, papier-mâché, plaster, stained glass, metal and clay.

Some of the nativity scenes were quite valuable, said Graves, "But almost all of them are priceless."

Next to the Lladro figurine of the Holy Family and Hummel nativity set was a handcrafted scene created from clay by the fourth-grade Sunday school class. A 300-piece display of Fontanini collectibles depicted the city of Bethlehem at the time of Christ's birth. Nearby, a child's Playmobile set and a simple wooden-block set told the same gospel story.

Many of the crèches demonstrated the mission mindset that has characterized the Jacksonville church throughout the years.

Retired foreign missionaries James and Jerri Darnell offered a crèche from their years of ministry in Ivory Coast. This nativity was made of baked clay in a factory in Kerhogo operated by nationals, said Jerry Darnell. "Although the dominant religions are Islam and animism, Christian missionaries are making small inroads there."

Two scenes were made from olivewood and purchased from the Holy Land. Others depicted Africans, Mexicans and Eskimos as the Christ Child and his family.

The newest donation to the display was a nativity scene from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where newly appointed missionaries James and Jennifer Lyles will spend their first Christmas away from home. Jennifer Lyles is the daughter of Faye and Eddie Lockamy, minister of music at Southside.

Many of the handcrafted sets had been received over the years as gifts. Ceramic sets -- lovingly poured in molds, fired in a kiln and painted -- were labors of love. A son and daughter-in-law had carved and painted one set made of wood. One church member shared one of a dozen sets she had made to keep her mind and hands busy while her husband dealt with a life-threatening illness.

The unique stained glass set was made for Graves by a high school friend -- a self-proclaimed agnostic. "She has been on my 'Operation Andrew' list for a long time," said Graves, referring to the Billy Graham Crusade emphasis designed to pray for spiritually lost friends. "This nativity represents a gift of friendship on her part, but it is my prayer that someday she will come to understand that the greatest gift of all is God's love."

Pastor Mark Wilbanks donated the nativity set that is kept in his office. Each year, as Southside's preschoolers visit his office to bring their handcrafted decorations for his Christmas tree, he has used the Department 56 nativity scene to illustrate the Christmas story for the youngsters.

"'No Room at the Inn' has proved to be so meaningful and has been so well received," he added, "we know this will become an annual tradition at Southside."

## Christian-themed toys gaining in popularity

By Sue Ann Miller

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Hey parents, looking for some last-minute Christmas gift ideas for your kids? You may not have to look any further than your neighborhood Christian bookstore.

Christian-oriented toys are a new market niche in toyland that's catching on like wildfire -- much to the delight of parents and grandparents in search of Christmas toy items.

Until recently Christian-oriented children's toys have played a minor role in the billion-dollar toy industry. That is until the introduction and phenomenal reception a few years ago of Veggie Tales -- a video series featuring adorable, animated, vegetable-like characters that promote Christian beliefs through biblically oriented stories and songs.

Mark Miller, owner of the Carpenter Shop Christian Bookstore in Birmingham, Ala., says he has seen an increase in the number of Christian toys, games and videos throughout the past 18 years he has been in business.

"Fifteen years ago you didn't see the type of toys with a Christian theme or message like you have available today. Back then -- at best -- we could offer puzzles and books."

Today the rise in popularity and availability of toys with a Christian emphasis has resulted in Miller offering an entire section in his store dedicated to children's toys. On his store shelves are toys and games geared to boys as well as girls.

Perched in a decorative box is a dark haired, Barbie-doll size figure that represents Ruth, Esther and Mary in the "Women of the Bible" series. The one figure comes with mix-and-match outfits that are interchangeable, and according to the doll's instructions, "girls can pretend the doll is any one of these courageous and faithful women of God."

For girls with an artistic flair there are Bible craft kits that feature tapestry, sand and bead art.

A myriad of toy choices is available for boys ranging in age from young toddlers to preteens.

A recent newcomer on the market is the "full armor of God play set." The seven-piece set includes a breastplate, helmet, shield, belt, sword and shin guards and is made of play-safe plastic. The set is promoted as being a "great teaching tool for kids about spiritual warfare" and is based on a Scripture passage located in Ephesians 6.

Other toys for boys include David and Goliath action figures that can complement a regiment of soldiers, horses and chariots -- to a Noah and the ark playset for younger children. The playset, which helps kids learn the story of Noah's faith and obedience through play, is featured as a biblically correct, 81-piece set suitable for ages 4-10. The set comes with a parent's guide that recommends activities that promote Bible learning and Christian values.

Young tikes and toddlers are not overlooked in this expanding market. A series of toys known as the "Baby Bible" collection features such items as Baby Bible pals, which are plush stuffed characters depicting biblical personalities and animals such as Mary and a donkey, Daniel and a lion and Jonah and a big fish. These items are also available in squeakable versions, as well.

Another line in this series is the Baby Bible video TV that includes two interchangeable video cartridges that play to the tune of the children's Sunday school song, "Jesus Loves Me."

A cuddle toy for youngsters ages 3-5 is Pauly Panda the Bible Bear. This toy is described as "a charming bear that depicts the character traits of the apostle Paul. A story on the package helps illustrate the point of learning not to give up in the face of obstacles. Pauly Panda helps give an example of a Bible character who faced many difficult situations yet continued to persevere."

And when it comes to card and board games for kids the options would rival any selection found in secular stores.

For instance, there is Bible bingo and Bible dominoes. There's also Bible Categories -- a Christian version of Scategories that can be played with the entire family.

The Bible Challenge board game is a compilation of 2,100 Bible-trivia questions that focus on the life of Christ, people, places and Old and New Testament quotations.

And for families that enjoy animated fun -- there's a Bible Charades game.

The abundance of children's books, videos and tapes is impressive in its own right with one Christian children's catalog featuring more than 150 authors targeting infants to teens.

For older children there is the popular "dangerous devotions series" by Jackie Perseghetti. It is hyped as a "study guide of the New Testament with a hiker theme and a unique approach." There is also the book, "Devotions from the World of Sports," by John and Kathy Hilman that takes a devotional approach of sports heroes from the past and present.

And what's the general consensus of givers and recipients?

Eight-year-old Britton Ethridge who lives in Oxford, Ala., received a Bible-trivia game from a friend for his birthday. "I love playing it," he said. "It's lots of fun," he added, explaining that he really enjoys trying to stump his father, Ron Ethridge, who is pastor of the First Baptist Church.

"He knows all of them, but I almost got him on one. I had to give him a couple of chances but he finally got it," the game enthusiast said.

Britton's mother, Pam, said the entire family has enjoyed playing a game that Ron brought home called the "Un-game" which is a game about Christian values. "The purpose of the game is to get a deeper understanding of yourself and others," she said.

"Our kids really like it and are always enthusiastic when we decide to play it. "I just wish they had these type of Christian games and toys when we were children," she said, mentioning the popular Veggie Tale series. "Ron even likes to sing their songs."

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-- Sue Ann Miller writes for The Alabama Baptist

## **News briefs from Associated Baptist Press**

### **CBF promotes missions offering**

ATLANTA -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is urging church members to "get personal" about missions this year.

The "get personal" theme for promotion of this year's Global Missions Offering highlights the Atlanta-based Fellowship's united focus on home and foreign missions described as a "world without borders." One method is for a local church to "adopt" a people group for focused ministry, study and prayer.

Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas adopted the Albanian people group, leading not only to a missions trip to Macedonia but also the realization there were ethnic Albanians in their own community.

"The work of our missionaries and the work of our churches are the same work," said CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal.

The goal for this year's offering is \$5.5 million. (ABP)

### **Mercer breaks ground for nursing school**

ATLANTA -- Mercer University has broken ground on its Atlanta campus for a new home for the Georgia Baptist College of Nursing. The Macon-based university approved acquisition of the school in April after Georgia Baptist Convention leaders voted to transfer it from the Georgia Baptist Health System, citing the prohibitive cost of building a new facility in downtown Atlanta.

The new 60,000-foot building is expected to cost \$9 million and to open in December 2001. (ABP)

### **Mainstream Missouri Baptists changes focus**

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. -- Mainstream Missouri Baptists will continue to exist but with a new focus. Instead of trying to defend the Missouri Baptist Convention from fundamentalism through political efforts, the group will now offer a way for churches and individuals "to support statewide ministries that still honor Baptist principles and heritage."

According to the organization's newsletter, The Baptist Voice, conservatives now control the process for appointing state convention leaders and will likely gain majorities on boards of trustees in two years.

"We haven't changed in beliefs or principles, but we are changing in focus," said Doyle Sager, MMB president. The moderate group's board of directors has appointed committees to study ways to implement a new mission statement. (ABP)

### **Franklin Graham takes over father's organization**

MINNEAPOLIS -- Billy Graham is turning leadership of his 50-year-old evangelistic association to his son, Franklin. Graham said in November that he plans to continue to preach but no longer wants day-to-day administrative responsibility. (ABP)

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