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**Gore concedes presidency;
Bush pledges bipartisanship**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President-elect George W. Bush pledged unity and bipartisanship in an acceptance speech before the Democratic-dominated Texas House legislative chamber Dec. 13.

"Our nation must rise above a house divided," Bush said. "Americans share hopes and goals and values far more important than any political disagreements. Republicans want the best for our nation. So do Democrats."

Earlier, Vice President Al Gore conceded the closest presidential election in a century and called off his five-week court battle for a recount. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 against proceeding with recounts in contested counties, and Gore rejected advice by lawyers to plead his case one more time before the Florida Supreme Court.

Gore congratulated Bush on "becoming the 43rd president of the United States."

"The Supreme Court has spoken," Gore said. "Let there be no doubt, while I strongly disagree with the court's decision, I accept it. This is America, and we put country before party. We will stand together behind our new president."

Gore alluded to his faith that God watches over and guides the nation. "This has been an extraordinary election," Gore said. "But in one of God's unforeseen paths, this belatedly broken impasse can point us all to new common ground, for its very closeness can serve to remind us that we are one people with a shared history and a shared destiny."

Gore also recalled the words of his father, a longtime Senator from Tennessee, spoken after an election defeat that many attribute to his firm stand for civil rights. "As my father once said, no matter how hard the loss, defeat might serve as well as victory to shape the soul and let the glory out."

He also left open the possibility that he may run for office again. He said his only regret was "that I didn't get the chance to stay and fight for the American people over the next four years, especially for those who need burdens lifted and barriers removed, especially for those who feel their voices have not been heard. I heard you, and I will not forget."

Bush and Gore planned to meet together in Washington Dec. 19.

The election marks only the third time that the presidential candidate with the most popular votes nationwide lost the Electoral College.

Reacting to both speeches, Robert Parham of the Baptist Center for Ethics said Gore "spoke like a statesmen" with words that would both comfort his supporters and "win over fair-minded Republicans."

Parham said Bush "extended an olive branch" but "faces an enormous burden" in repairing the breach that divides the nation.

"On one hand, he must reach out to those who doubt the legitimacy of his election and question his political agenda," Parham said. "On the other hand, he must keep at arm's length those congressional Republicans and Religious Right leaders who support neither his commitment to inclusiveness nor his promise of compassionate public policy for the poor."

"President-elect Bush must show the wisdom of Solomon," he said.

Religious and civil-rights leaders were split on the Supreme Court's decision to effectively give Bush the presidency and other issues surrounding the election.

Ralph Neas, president of People For the American Way, said the Supreme Court "threatens its own credibility as well as the principle that elections should be determined by the voters. This ruling reinforces the concern expressed by millions of Americans that future Supreme Court vacancies should not be filled with the likes of Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas."

Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, offered a different perspective on the Supreme Court decision. In a press release, Land described the ruling "the correct one, that you can't have votes being counted by different standards in different counties and even [at] different tables in the same canvassing board recount."

"Clearly, you have a very closely divided court, but that's not news to anyone who follows the court," Land noted. "Look at the Boy Scout decision. Look at the partial-birth abortion decision. There were approximately 50 decisions in this last cycle of the Supreme Court that were 5-4 decisions. This just happens to be a particularly high-profile one."

Religious leaders from the opposite political spectrum, however, particularly those concerned about racial-discrimination issues surrounding the election, vowed to fight on.

Jesse Jackson, founder of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, said the U.S. Civil Rights Commission is holding hearings in the coming weeks on problems such as voter intimidation and voters wrongly being labeled felons and thus turned away from the polls.

Jackson said his organization is in the process of using the Freedom of Information Act to get access to all the contested Florida ballots. He vowed to lead a peaceful demonstration in the week leading up to the Jan 20 Inauguration Day in honor of Martin Luther King Day Jan. 15. He also vowed to register minority voters like never before.

"Our lesson today is that the fight that our parents and grandparents fought, a fight that many of us remember participating in, must never cease. In order for justice to prevail, the civil rights struggle must continue," Jackson said.

James Dunn, professor of Christianity and Public Policy at Wake Forest Divinity School in Winston-Salem, N.C., said, "Conscientious Christian citizens face some perilous narrows in the light of the court decision and the final determination of the election."

"We face difficulty between our respect for the law and our contempt for the character and consistency of court justices," Dunn said. "We want desperately to seek reconciliation. But even more important than a happy face and nice feelings is the rule of law and the right of every American to see to it that his or her vote is counted. These basic principles have clearly been violated."

Colorado native tapped to lead state's Baptists

By Allen Spencer

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (ABP) -- Colorado native Mark Edlund will be recommended as the next executive director-treasurer of the Colorado Baptist General Convention.

Born in Denver, Edlund currently works as an administrative associate in the Western Pacific Region of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. His home is Seoul, Korea.

He has a bachelor's degree from Baylor University and a master's degree from the University of Denver. He has also completed course work at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Denver Conservative Baptist Seminary.

He's worked as a teacher, athletic director, assistant principal and other education-related administrative roles in Colorado, Belgium and Japan. In 1984, he was appointed as a career missionary of the IMB. In 1991, he became mission administrator in Tokyo, Japan, and moved to his present role in 1997.

Currently, he helps oversee and direct the work of 380 IMB personnel in the Western Pacific Region (Korea, Japan and the Philippines) and manage IMB regional properties, including the construction of two new major development properties in Japan and a new office complex in the Philippines. He administers a field budget of \$6.8 million and the distribution of relief and humanitarian funds. He provides pulpit supply in local churches and trains personnel in areas including missiology, strategy, teaming and administrative matters.

He and his wife, Kristy, have a 19-year-old son and a 13-year-old daughter.

Search-committee chairman Lewis Adkison said Edlund was one of four candidates interviewed for the job in a process spanning several months. He said the search group would "unanimously and enthusiastically recommend" Edlund at a called business meeting of the state convention Jan. 25.

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Missions group gets bargain on coats for Serbian children

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- The Texas Baptist Men missions organization has shipped 10,000 coats to the former Yugoslavia, with the goal of making the New Year happier and the winter warmer for many Serbian children.

But the mission group received an early Christmas present of its own when leaders found a project originally expected to cost \$50,000 could be done for \$13,000 and meet even more needs than originally planned.

At the Oct. 31 Texas Baptist Men Convention in Corpus Christi, the mission organization's executive board voted to participate in the "Koats for Kids" project. The men were told that the Bread of Life ministry would distribute coats in early January to children and youth throughout Serbia. Southern Baptist missionaries work closely with Bread of Life in humanitarian efforts.

TBM leaders expected to be able to buy each coat for less than \$5 by purchasing in large quantities. But when Jim Furgerson, TBM executive director-treasurer, began checking with suppliers in Europe, the best price he could find initially was about \$7.

However, a contact in Amsterdam asked if reconditioned coats would be acceptable. After an assurance that the coats were "like new" after being reconditioned, Furgerson asked how much they would cost.

"Seventy-five one dollars, American," his source replied, in stilted English.

Initially, Furgerson thought he meant each coat was \$75 dollars. But the supplier quickly explained that he meant the cost per coat was 75 cents. Furgerson immediately placed an order for 10,000 coats, which already have been shipped to Belgrade.

With about \$13,000 already contributed toward the project, Texas Baptist Men was able also to purchase not only the coats, but also a large container filled with heavy, long underwear for the Serbs.

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Hunger offering helps Bedouin hear gospel

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- For the Bedouin people of the Middle East, the land doesn't flow with milk and honey, and visions of green pastures and still waters are seldom seen. But Baptists are helping to change that.

In the last three years, the Texas Baptist World Hunger Offering has provided \$184,900 to start development projects among the desert dwellers. Through those projects, Baptist workers are building relationships that make it possible to present the gospel quiet ways to an unreached people group.

The Bedouin traditionally were a nomadic people, herding camels in the desert regions of the Middle East and North Africa. But in recent years, many have adopted a more settled lifestyle and traded their camels for goatherds.

Agricultural mission workers with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship have focused primarily on the more sedentary Bedouin people. To protect the safety of the Baptist workers and those with whom they minister, neither their names nor exact locations are revealed.

Baptist agricultural-development specialists have helped develop water resources and have taught the Bedouin how to conserve water using drip irrigation for home gardens.

With about \$46,000 from the Texas offering, the Baptist workers improved the efficiency of a spring as a water supply, restored a cistern dating back to the Roman Empire, and built five small cisterns for the Bedouin people. The water projects serve about 170 families.

Forty-six Bedouin families received drip irrigation kits, training in the method and seeds for vegetable gardens. The drip irrigation technique minimizes water loss from evaporation or run-off. By using the method, two 15-liter buckets of water can support up to 100 plants.

The Baptists also helped the Bedouin improve their herds by distributing more than 50 genetically improved goats as breeding stock. When the improved stock mate with the local breed, the hybrid offspring generally retain the disease resistance and toughness of local goats while offering better milk and meat production.

"The cost-share arrangement in this project is for payment to be made by giving back one or more offspring which can be distributed to other needy families," a Baptist agricultural mission worker explained.

The agricultural specialists helped 90 Bedouin families start raising chickens. The Baptist project provides nine hens and one rooster as a starter flock for each family, along with an initial supply of feed and the training that is needed.

"The kids are encouraged to eat one egg a day as part of their diet. The remaining eggs can be hatched to increase the size of the flock," a Baptist worker said.

The Baptist workers also have introduced the Bedouin people to beekeeping in an area where honey is considered a rare delicacy. The workers provide hives, bees, basic equipment and training in management and honey production.

Tending orchards has become a relatively common practice for both the nomadic and the sedentary Bedouin. Some nomads tend olive trees but continue to migrate seasonally with their flocks, traveling back home by pickup truck to check on their orchards. Baptist workers have provided 20,000 olive tree saplings to more than 1,000 Bedouin families.

"Through these projects, we get access to the people," a Baptist agricultural mission worker explained. "That gives us the ability to show them God's love and grace."

Bedouin people who settle in urban areas may be able to turn from their Muslim heritage and embrace Christianity. But new believers in Christ in the rural villages and migratory caravans would face persecution -- possibly even death -- if they made their faith known.

"In the villages, a public church is just not viable at this point. Local village leaders would not allow it," the Baptist worker said. "It is more reasonable to have quiet, two- or three-person gatherings of new believers."

An Arabic tutor who helps a Baptist agricultural worker three times a week is typical of these new believers.

"He doesn't want his family to know about his faith at this time," the Baptist explained, noting that "honor killings" are not uncommon in the culture when a family member disgraces his relatives by rejecting Islam. "We whisper when we talk about matters of faith."

But while his tutor continues to say his daily prayers, he no longer offers those private prayers to Allah as revealed in the Koran. He continues to display the 33 prayer beads that devout Muslims use as reminders as they recite the 99 names of Allah.

"But now when he prays, he uses them to remind him of the 33 years in the earthly life of Christ," the Baptist worker said.

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