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Young Christians oppose Bush energy policy

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A group describing itself as "young conservative Christians," founded by two young Southern Baptists, is challenging the president they helped elect over his environmental policies.

The new group, Christian Youth for Conservation, formed in opposition to President George W. Bush's plan to drill for oil in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Brothers Brad and Phil Taylor grew up as members of Pleasant View Baptist Church in Port Deposit, Md. Both attended Dayspring Christian Academy in Lancaster, Pa., where the younger is still a student. The older, Phil, is currently a student at Eastern College, a Baptist school in suburban Philadelphia. Both supported Bush's presidential campaign.

They started the group, they said, after coming under conviction in their prayers about stewardship of the environment.

In a February press conference at a church on Capitol Hill, the brothers said: "We have come to Washington to appeal to President Bush as fellow Christians, holding him accountable to the principles of stewardship in the Bible."

"Condemnation is not in our hearts," they said. "We worked hard to elect President Bush. We support Bush's presidency. However, we are dismayed by his proposed energy plan."

Environmentalists have assailed Bush's policies on the issue since he took office. Critics say they have less to do with saving the environment than with profiting large oil companies that supported him and Vice President Dick Cheney.

Most recently, critics targeted the White House's unilateral departure from an international treaty on fossil-fuel emissions. One of Bush's own top Environmental Protection Agency's regulators just quit over what he described as the administration's refusal to adequately enforce environmental laws.

Bush's plan to drill for oil in the Alaska national forest has particularly angered environmental groups. "Plundering the tundra in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge won't change gas prices one penny, yet the

president keeps pushing ahead with this key oil industry demand," said Sierra Club director Carl Pope. "Drilling the Arctic Refuge is yet another of the president's proposals that won't work."

Bush has said opponents of the drilling exaggerate the danger to the environment and that it is necessary for America's economy and security.

"We must ... reduce America's dependence on foreign sources of oil by encouraging safe and clean exploration at home," Bush said in a Feb. 23 radio address. Noting that he had recently visited Alaska, he added: "I met with many Alaskans, including native leaders who want to preserve the grandeur of their state while carefully developing the energy beneath a small fraction of it. New technology makes this possible."

A U.S. Geological Survey study, however, is less optimistic. It says drilling in the ANWR would provide only about six months' worth of oil for American consumers, and the oil drilled in the refuge wouldn't be available for consumption for as long as 10 years.

Representatives of Alaskan native peoples appeared at the press conference announcing the formation of Christian Youth for Conservation.

Sarah James, an Athabascan Indian and Episcopal Church leader, said her community could be devastated by drilling for oil. James, who lives in Arctic Village, Alaska, said her ancestral lands border the preserve. "We've been there and we're going to stay," she said. "We're the ones who are going to be impacted the most. We still hunt and fish -- maybe 75 percent of our diet is wild meat."

The Senate is considering energy legislation introduced Feb. 15 without provisions for drilling in the ANWR. However, Sen. Frank Murkowski (R-Alaska) is expected to introduce an amendment to the bill that would allow the drilling to move forward.

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Olympic ministry planners offer lessons for churches

By David Winfrey

SALT LAKE CITY (ABP) -- Your state might not be getting the Olympics any time soon, but that doesn't mean your church can't learn from the recent Christian outreach to fans at the Winter Olympic games.

More than 1,000 volunteers from 21 states were in Salt Lake City and the surrounding Olympic venues in February to participate in Global Outreach 2002, the Southern Baptist ministry for these events.

Several of the lessons learned through Olympic ministry can also be applied to special events in local communities, said Beth Ann Williams, director of GO-2002.

"There's a culture of openness during the Olympics because people are gathered together," Williams said.

But such special opportunities are not limited to one city for 17 days every two years during an Olympic event.

"There are all kinds of festivals. Anywhere people are gathered and they are excited and they are open, it's the same principle, basically, of meeting people where they are."

Williams offered three tips for churches looking to minister at special events in their neighborhood:

-- Look at what's going on. Nearly every community has a local fair, festival or event that draws people together, Williams said. The secret is looking around to see what ministry opportunities are available.

"One of the things we saw in Atlanta was, after the Olympics were over people said: 'Hey, we don't need the Olympics to do this type of ministry. We can do this at our local state fair or our local festival. We can do the face-painting or the balloon art to build a relationship to get to know people.'"

Such ministries give churches a "first touch" with their communities, she said, building a positive impression for both the church and the Christian faith.

"Put yourself in your community where people are," she added. "You're going to meet people at things like that and make those contacts with people who would never walk through your doors."

-- Consider teamwork. GO-2002 worked with a variety of other Christian ministries to maximize their efforts during the Winter Olympics. Partners included the Salvation Army, the Utah Games Network and Youth With a Mission.

"It's always harder to work together than it is just to go off and do your own thing, But working together has a strong impact," she said.

Evangelicals in Salt Lake have built relationships that will last after the games, Williams noted.

-- Listen to event organizers. Approaching an event with the heart of a servant will get a church ministry more success than marching in with an agenda, Williams said.

"Go to organizers and see what their needs are," she said. "Are [they] going to have a lot of kids there? We can do balloon animals or face painting. Are [they] going to have a lot of old people who will want to sit in the shade?"

That approach opened doors in Salt Lake City, she noted. A local upscale mall welcomed GO-2002 because last year a Baptist Student Union performance team entertained visitors with show tunes and other songs.

"Listen before you just go in and lay out some plan about what you want to do," she said.

David Buckner, a volunteer associate at GO-2002, said special ministry work isn't brain surgery.

"You figure out what works, what doesn't and adjust," said Buckner, who supervised singers, face painters and other creative artists and volunteers.

He encourages Christians wanting to offer creative ministries to focus on building God's kingdom instead of their own.

"The goal is not to get people to church," said Buckner, who was working at his fourth Olympics. "Figure out creative ways of simply sharing Jesus."

When done correctly, he said, creative ministries will contrast with other outreaches the same way a neon light contrasts with other bulbs. "They're different, they attract more attention and they last longer."

Buckner boiled down the strategy to one sentence: "Meet needs to earn the right to share yourself."

Meeting needs will attract positive attention, he said, getting people to slow down if only long enough to see what's being offered.

He recalled working at a church-sponsored block party in Georgia when a visitor said, "I never thought the church would do something like this."

"Then you do something eternal with that moment," he added. That's where sharing of oneself is important. "As Christians, if we're sharing about ourselves, we should be sharing about Jesus."

Creative ministries typically result in quick encounters with non-Christians, he said. "You never know how long you're going to get to talk to someone."

But a quick conversation won't be a wasted opportunity if Christians are ready and able to give a concise and clear explanation of what they believe. "All of our tools and materials, when they are presented correctly, can be presented in 30 seconds or less," he said.

Some people criticize such a ministry because there's little opportunity for follow up, noted Buckner, a student at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary near San Francisco.

"We lean on the verse that says, 'His word shall not return void.'"

News briefs from Associated Baptist Press

Baylor launches building boom

WACO, Texas -- Regents of Baylor University approved a \$200 million bond issue Feb. 22 to fund the largest period of construction in the university's 157-year history.

Planned construction includes the largest single building project in university history, a \$103 million, 500,000-square-foot science building.

Groundbreaking for the building, which will be located on what is now an intramural field adjacent to the McLane Student Life Center, is scheduled for May. It should be occupied by the fall semester of 2004.

It will feature laboratories, classrooms and faculty offices related to chemistry, physics, biology, geology, mathematics, neurosciences and psychology.

Although enormous, the new science building is just the beginning of numerous construction projects slated as Baylor gears up to implement its 2012 strategic plan. That plan calls for creation of 1,800 new beds in student housing, more parking structures, greenbelts around the campus, pedestrian walkways and refurbishing of many existing facilities.

A building spree of this type is "virtually unparalleled in American higher education," President Robert Sloan told news media after the regents meeting. (ABP)

Baptist pastor warns of scam

NOME, Texas -- A Baptist pastor in Texas is warning churches of a possible scam.

Lee Jacobson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Nome, Texas, said his church recently gave money to a man claiming to be in line to become chief over all Native American tribes. He also claimed to be a direct descendant of Geronimo, and said he converted to Christianity with a desire to take the gospel to the Indian Nation.

Jacobson said the man, along with his wife, stayed a few days with members of his church, who became suspicious of his story.

Police questioned the man but could not arrest him because of a technicality.

Jacobson said the man reportedly visited several churches in southeast Texas but apparently has left the area.

"We feel strongly that it is our duty to make this information known to all Baptist churches who will listen, so that they may be aware of these con artists and forewarned," Jacobson said. (ABP)

Graham criticized for remarks to Nixon

WASHINGTON -- Billy Graham, a Southern Baptist evangelist noted for a career absent a major scandal, is in hot water over anti-Semitic remarks on recently released tapes from the Nixon White House.

In a 1972 conversation with President Nixon, Graham is heard decrying a Jewish "stranglehold" on the media, which he said was destroying the country.

"This stranglehold has got to be broken or this country's going down the drain," Graham said, agreeing with comments by Nixon. Later on the tape, Graham said a lot of Jews were friends of his because of his support for Israel. "But they don't know how I really feel about what they're doing to this country."

The 83-year-old evangelist issued an apology, saying he had no recollection of making the remarks but they don't reflect his views. (ABP)

Religious violence in India kills 500-plus

NEW YORK -- India's worst religious violence in a decade has left more than 500 dead in clashes between Hindus and Muslims.

The violence began after the World Hindu Council set out to build a temple on the site of a 16th century mosque that was torn down by radical Hindus in 1992, setting off riots that killed 2,000.

One of a series of trains carrying Hindus returning from a mission to build the temple was attacked Feb. 27 while passing through a Muslim neighborhood. A mob set fire to the train, burning 58 people to death in one car alone.

That set off a wave of violence, mostly aimed at Muslims.

Muslims number 150 million out of a national population of more than a billion.

Conspiracy theories abound about the cause of recent violence, but most blame fundamentalist activists on both sides. Some have criticized India's Hindu government for inaction.

Tension between Hindus and Muslims in India dates to the end of British colonial rule in 1947, but incidents of bloodshed are rare. (ABP)

Former Mississippi editor dies.

TUPELO, Miss. -- Guy Henderson, editor emeritus of the Mississippi Baptist Record, died March 7 of complications from heart surgery.

Henderson suffered a heart attack in late February while visiting family members in Tupelo. Doctors there performed bypass surgery but were unable to get him stabilized.

Henderson and his wife, Lois, who survives, were missionaries 25 years in the Philippines and South Korea. He later worked as the Mississippi Baptist Convention's stewardship director and evangelism director before becoming editor of the state paper. He retired in 1996.

Funeral arrangements were being handled by Lakewood Memorial Parks and Funeral Home in Jackson, with a memorial service set tentatively for Saturday, March 9. (ABP)

Reccord new Baptist Hour host

FORT WORTH, Texas -- Bob Reccord, head of the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board, has been named host of "The Baptist Hour" radio program. He will replace Mississippi pastor Frank Pollard, who is retiring from the ministry.

The program, first aired in 1941, has featured Baptist preachers including M.E. Dodd, George Truett, W.A. Criswell and J.D. Grey.

Reccord's first broadcast is scheduled Palm Sunday, March 24. (ABP)

Georgia educator receives award

CHARLOTTE, N.C. -- Priscilla "Prissy" Jones Tunnell, minister of faith development at First Baptist Church in Rome, Ga., received the Center for Christian Education's Jack Naish Distinguished Christian Educator Award March 5.

The award, presented at the group's annual workshop in Charlotte, N.C., honors the long-time minister of education at Wieuca Road Baptist Church in Atlanta. (ABP)

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-- By ABP staff

Midlife poses challenges to marriage relationship

By Charles Qualls

FREDERICKSBURG, Va. (ABP) -- "I know that neither one of us has anything left to give," a desperate Wendy Erwin told her husband, a New Jersey pastor, over the phone. "But I love you and we're going to make it."

With those words, she grabbed the lone thread that would hold her marriage together over the next few months.

For Wendy and Scott, their 11-year-old marriage had come to the brink. After a whirlwind romance and two storybook years of married life, a series of personal crises gradually dragged their relationship into despair.

First came a change in career direction, the first hint that things weren't going according to plan. Then came two ectopic pregnancies that resulted in miscarriages.

Then twin daughters were born, but both developed severe health problems. While Grace would overcome most of them, Katie was left with serious, multiple handicaps.

The resulting emotional, spiritual and financial stress pulled their marriage apart. Communication became almost non-existent. They stopped nurturing each other. "We were sleep-deprived, depressed and emotionally exhausted," Scott told Faithworks magazine.

Added Wendy: "It wasn't unusual for us to say, 'I love you, but I have nothing for you. I'm not angry at you, but I just can't offer you more than commitment. My resources are gone.' We lived that way for two-and-a-half years. We were dying inside, losing one another as partners, and staying together only because neither of us could do this alone."

Counselors agree that, more often than not, a marriage relationship doesn't flame out in a burst of betrayal or anger as much as it simply grows weaker over time. Opportunities to do maintenance are missed. Warning signs are ignored. Eventually the marriage is enveloped by the slow, encroaching darkness of alienation.

Many people have already given up on the ideal of lifelong marriage, as evidenced by increases in both cohabitation and divorce. Half of all marriages are disrupted by divorce or separation within 20 years.

So how does anyone make it to midlife with their marriage intact?

"The turning point as I see it was that we realized that we had to find a way to stay together," Scott recalled.

Disappointed with life and frustrated with God, the young couple clung only to their commitment to stay together. Finally, their breakthrough came in late 2001 with a change of jobs and location. "We moved to Virginia and not only reduced the financial pressures, but got a new start," Scott said. "Slowly we started to talk with each other. We would turn the TV off and figure out who we were."

"Only after we got to some level of healthy interaction could we really stir God back into the mix," he continued. "For a while, God was a hiding place or a pawn we used in arguing. We began to pray together and we discovered that it's pretty tough to stay frustrated with a person you're sharing prayer time with. Then, we noticed that we were beginning to think of each other first in some things. I saw that Wendy needed me to be at home and to help out. I couldn't just be a pastor and then come home and sit down."

"Eventually we began to date again. We've fallen in love again. And that's weird because we're totally not the same people who met on the beach all those years ago. It's a true starting over, figuring out who we are and where God fits into that equation. I wouldn't say we're where we want to be in communication, role negotiation and other important skills. We still have moments of intense grief, as you will when you have a special-needs child. But we aren't in crisis now by a long shot."

Few marriages that last remain unchanged. On the contrary, counselors say being able and willing to change is a key to marriage survival.

If a couple is willing to work on building and maintaining a solid relationship, they can arrive at midlife -- and survive it -- with a strong, healthy marriage. But the journey starts even before the wedding, and it involves daily attention.

To simply conduct a wedding and then send the newlyweds out to fend for themselves is a dangerous way to start a marriage, said Robert Herron director of the Presbyterian Counseling Center in Greensboro, N.C.

Herron spearheaded a 1996 dialogue among clergy in the community about the problem of failed marriages. It resulted in a covenant committing the ministers -- and all couples they married -- to a waiting period before the wedding, counseling sessions, an in-depth analysis of each relationship, enrichment opportunities for the couples, and a support network to mentor the newly married. By 1998, more than 70 churches had signed on.

Herron said efforts like the one in Greensboro help couples anticipate the issues they'll face and develop sound practices to maintain the marriage partnership.

Bo Prosser, an associate pastor in Charlotte, N.C., has been involved in marriage counseling and marriage enrichment for years. "When I prepare a young couple for marriage, I stress to them that they're not just two people anymore. We're three now. I can't be with them everywhere they go, but they can call me anywhere I am, anytime of the day or night, if they get in trouble. They have to know that there are others who will support them and have gone where they're going."

Prosser said communication and commitment are the two stackpoles around which everything else in a marriage falls into place. Communication involves both skill and constant care, he said. "You have to practice it every day."

"They have to understand that the person they married at 25 isn't the same anymore at 45," said Wade Rowatt, director of the St. Matthews Counseling Center in Louisville, Ky. Adjusting to those changes is some of the hardest work in marriage, Rowatt said.

"We change as individuals, but somehow we expect our marriage relationship to continue to operate on the same practices and rules," Rowatt said. Those personal changes are easily overlooked when assessing a marriage relationship.

Wendy Erwin sees now that she and Scott had different expectations of marriage, shaped by their different family backgrounds. "As we grew, we grew into our own patterns. . We worked constantly to please one another but never stopped long enough to step back and realize that we had different lenses on."

As with the Erwins, a deep commitment to preserve the marriage -- above all else -- is the essential ingredient in overcoming a lifetime of changes and challenges, Rowatt said.

"Commitment has to be both intellectual and emotional in nature or it won't be balanced enough to see us through," he added. On the days when the romantic side of the marriage doesn't seem real, the fact that you once loved a person enough to marry him or her may be the only beacon to follow out of the darkness.

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Experts say life's ups, downs can take toll on relationships

By Charles Qualls

DALLAS (ABP) -- Midlife particularly can test a marriage relationship, counselors say. Grief over the death of a parent or even a child, dreams not realized and opportunities missed can cause one or both partners to question their purpose in life.

In a society that puts increasing value on the worth and fulfillment of the individual, a dangerous dilemma can emerge: How do I find "me" without giving up "us?"

Gail and Steve Brookshire of Dallas work hard to find the balance.

"Steve helps me to be an individual while we're being a couple," Gail said of her husband of 19 years. "He's made it a priority for me to be able to advance professionally and personally.. He helps me to have time by myself to go on retreat or pray. He helps me to have the time away to rejuvenate. Most spouses might not even feel that they could be away."

Yet, Gail added, their marriage also has been strengthened by what they do together -- especially learning and laughing.

"We love to learn together -- art galleries, poetry, stuff that's totally different from what our backgrounds are," said Gail, a genetics counselor. "We haven't ever gotten to the place where we're at a dead-end. It keeps it fun."

"We laugh together," she continued. "We reflect on where we've come from -- our families. Nothing's so sacred that we can't laugh about [it]."

But Gail and Steve have an advantage over some couples. "We have a common Christian faith that we share that matters a lot between us," she said. "It's not true always as a bond for relationships to share. It has reoriented everything, including how we spend our money and our time."

The Brookshires are committed to working on "the rough spots" in their personalities, which requires a lot of trust, Gail said. "We have an environment where it feels safe with each other."

"Folks go in and out of relationships like changing socks, and they don't want to do the work that it takes. . You have to be ready to do the work."

Predicting when marital conflict might hit is difficult. But counselors agree there are points along the way that stress relationships in particular. Some of them come surprisingly early, while others arrive later.

For couples with adult children, a period that hits about two or three years after the nest empties can be tricky. Suddenly, the couple is alone with each other. If they haven't been staying in touch along the way, it is treacherous to suddenly have to become reacquainted. This person who only resembles your original marriage partner is now your only roommate. Vulnerability to frustration and romantic affairs springs from unresolved issues in the relationship.

In the bestseller "The Bridges of Madison County," author Robert James Waller portrays a woman dealing with the disappointments of her rural Iowa farm life. Along the way, she and her husband have fallen

into sloppy communication and very low maintenance of their romance. With her husband and children gone for a few days, she engages in a brief affair with a National Geographic photographer, portrayed in the movie version by Clint Eastwood. Her new lover offers her the chance to leave it all behind and travel the world with him. But she chooses to stay, keeping until her death the secret of her torrid affair.

Counselor Robert Herron said "the romantic mirage of Madison County" poses problems for couples in all stages of life, but particularly those at midlife. "Frequently, it is the marriage that is judged defective, rather than the mirage," he said.

If couples are to grow as persons and in their marriage, Herron said, partners have to give up the simplistic, magical notions and replace them with maturing, grounded love and commitment.

If you haven't made it to Madison County yet, "be happy about it," Herron said. "In the real world, which is the only world we have, we don't have to love perfectly at midlife. Love is not a four-day extravaganza. It's a lifelong process of learning."

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-- Charles Qualls is associate pastor of Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta.

Counselor offers warning, vital signs for marriages

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Half of all first marriages end in divorce or separation by the 20th year, according to a 1995 study by the National Center for Health Statistics.

When are marriages most vulnerable? Statistics are less clear about that. There are too many variables that make each marriage unique. Developmental changes or personal crises can expose weaknesses in a relationship at any time.

But counselors like Wade Rowatt agree there are some hotspots, which tend to occur around specific life experiences. They are:

-- The first three years of marriage. Divorces are a little more likely during this period, when issues of incompatibility, disillusionment and conflict often surface.

-- Year seven -- for no known rational reason.

-- The first two years of the "empty nest."

-- The first few years after the death of a parent of either spouse.

Every marriage is different. But most marriages show warning signs long before trouble erupts. And all marriages can be improved by attending to certain vital signs.

Rowatt, a marriage counselor in Louisville, Ky., identifies some of both, based on years of counseling and research. He says they are not guarantees of failure or success but solid indicators. If even one of the warning signs is evident, give it attention now, he advises. The help of a pastoral counselor may keep your marriage on track.

Seven warning signs:

-- Frequent disinterest in what your spouse is doing or saying.

-- Sudden, prolonged attraction to a co-worker, friend or fellow church member.

-- Unexplained, sudden anger at your spouse.

-- Disinterest in sex.

-- Over-involvement with children at the expense of the marriage.

-- Depression.

-- Not wanting to be touched by your spouse

Seven vital signs:

-- Talk and listen to each other daily. Listen actively, beyond the level of thought. Share feelings, dreams and emotions. The three years past empty nest are key. Develop this skill now.

-- Spend "couple time" each day. That's 30-60 minutes with the TV and computer off. Talk, touch and be present.

-- Address problems in their infancy. They grow like a cancer when kept silent. Work especially on disappointments, unmet expectations and power imbalances.

-- Commitment must be both emotional and intellectual. When the honeymoon stage is over, this will be the staying power. Partners must stay in touch with the idea that "I wouldn't dare trade my spouse in for another model."

-- Flexibility is essential. Partners change, so do vocations and circumstances. Like an oak, we must be able to bend without breaking.

-- Tend to the romance. Little things matter -- back rubs, a touch, a smile, gifts, regular dates, doing favors without being asked.

-- Cultivate openness. It let's you face problems early and head-on. Openness comes from a solid faith, so constant renewal that is individual, yet shared, is important. This will impact parenting, grief, work decisions, lifestyle and economics.

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-- By Charles Qualls

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