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## Disaster-relief funds earmarked for church in New York City

By Steve DeVane

CARY, N.C. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist North American Mission Board and Baptist groups in New York plan to use more than \$500,000 donated for disaster relief to start a church near the site of the destroyed World Trade Center towers.

A plan adopted by NAMB trustees, the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association and the Baptist Convention of New York calls for 15 percent of more than \$3.4 million donated for disaster relief following the Sept. 11 terrorists attacks to be used to start the church.

Martin King, a NAMB spokesman, said the decision was made after NAMB talked with New York Baptist officials about what was needed in the area.

"What we know is the people in New York said 'What we need is a long-term presence,'" King said. "That comes primarily from churches."

King said a plan has not been developed for how the money will be spent. He said it could be used to start more than one church and could be used over several years.

King said the owners of an apartment complex that was cleaned by Baptist volunteers have offered to let Southern Baptists use an apartment there. That apartment might be used for a Bible study to help start the church, he said.

Money collected for disaster relief following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks will be distributed according to an allocation plan called "Enduring Hope: Disbursing Disaster Relief Donations with Integrity and Impact," according to Baptist Press. The plan calls for 59 percent of the money to go to "victim benevolence and counseling ministry" and 41 percent to be used for the long-term "ongoing response ministry," a BP story said.

The funds for victims include 40 percent for "financial assistance through Southern Baptist churches and associations" in New York, Boston and Washington D.C., as well as to those in New York who lost their jobs because of the disaster. Twelve percent will fund a "resident chaplain" in New York and seven percent will assist state and local partners in funding traditional Southern Baptist disaster-relief efforts of feeding, childcare, cleanup of apartments and similar ministries.

The ongoing response ministry funds include 26 percent for securing a "strategically located center" to house volunteers working in the area in coming years. The other 15 percent will be used for church starting.

A task force that has been studying the issue since late September recommended the plan. The document has been submitted to state conventions as a possible model for disbursement of their own relief funds set up in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Richard Brunson, director of North Carolina Baptist Men, said the Baptist State Convention has never used disaster relief money for church-starting efforts.

"But I don't want to say we never would," he said.

Brunson said the church would have to be directly related to helping disaster victims with ministry such as counseling. He said he doesn't know a lot about the church being started by NAMB, but believes it might be involved in such ministry.

Brunson said the greatest needs near the site of the World Trade Center are spiritual needs.

"It's a different kind of disaster," he said. "What people need to realize is the greatest need is not to give money to those who lost loved ones.

"As far as what I know, that church is being started as a direct result of 9-11 and in an attempt to provide emotional and spiritual help because of 9-11."

Brunson said he might be opposed to NAMB using the money to start a church farther away from the disaster site, but in this case he thinks starting a church is a legitimate use of disaster relief funds.

"As terrible as (Hurricane) Floyd was, we didn't have the loss of life near what this was," Brunson said. "I really don't see a problem with them using funds to offer spiritual help on a long-term basis."

King said NAMB received about 2,800 gifts totaling about \$2 million for disaster relief. The other \$1.4 million was given to the Baptist groups in New York.

The gifts were designated in different ways, King said. NAMB officials talked with "a couple of dozen" donors about the intended use of the gifts, he said.

"They felt like they had an understanding of what the intent of the donors were," he said.

NAMB officials talked with Baptist officials near the Pentagon, who said the military was handling relief efforts there, King said. He said NAMB discussions with New York Baptists led to the allocation plan.

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-- Steve DeVane is managing editor of The Biblical Recorder.

## **Georgia Baptist colleges gain power to remove trustees**

By John Pierce

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The executive committee of the Georgia Baptist Convention approved bylaw changes March 12 giving trustee boards of Shorter College and Brewton-Parker College authority to remove one of their own with cause.

In early January, Shorter officials announced they had shifted the school's control to a self-perpetuating foundation board and cited the inability of trustees to take such action as the reason. President Ed Schrader said the board's lack of power to remove a trustee could affect their accreditation being reviewed by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

However, the board of trustees' executive committee rescinded the action on Jan. 23 after meeting with GBC leaders and jointly forming an ad hoc committee to seek solutions.

Ron Dempsey, Shorter's vice president of institutional advancement, said the latest GBC action is "the first hurdle" to resolving the issues being addressed by representatives of the school and the convention.

"We still have an issue over the selection of trustees," said Dempsey, noting that discussions on that subject are continuing.

GBC Executive Director Robert White, in a news release, expressed his desire to continue the convention's relationship with the college. "Georgia Baptists have given \$22.8 million through the Cooperative Program to Shorter College since 1959," said White. "We wish to continue our relationship and invest in the lives of our Baptist students."

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## **Christians finding soul mates on the Web**

By Jodi Mathews

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Christians may be unwilling to subject themselves to the likes of TV's latest dating shows, "Eliminate," "5th Wheel," "Blind Date," "Dismissed," "Change of Heart" or "Temptation Island." But, when it comes to finding the perfect mate, Christians have many options on the Web.

With sites like [EquallyYoked.com](http://EquallyYoked.com), [SingleandChristian.com](http://SingleandChristian.com), [ChristianCafe.com](http://ChristianCafe.com), [ChristianSoulMates.com](http://ChristianSoulMates.com) and [AdamMeetEve.com](http://AdamMeetEve.com), Christians are not limited to finding that special someone at church picnics or Sunday school singles groups. Jane and John can meet, get to know one another and fall in love -- all without ever meeting face-to-face.

Christian Dating Service International claims to be a "ministry of 'helps' in the body of Christ."

Its Web site, [www.christiandates.com](http://www.christiandates.com), includes glowing endorsements from ministers.

"For years we have taught Christians in general and Christian youth in particular, to find Christian partners. Now we have a vehicle for facilitating this process in a creative and responsible manner," Benjamin Alicea, chairman of the Coalition of Hispanic Leadership in New York, said of the organization.

"Concurrent with our moving closer together with our speed of travel, intercontinental satellite capability etc. ... and our closer involvement with each other by means of on-the-spot world-wide TV reporting etc. ... a paradoxical problem has apparently arisen: that of loneliness, of isolation, it is expressed in the hunger for real contact with another human being. CDS is attempting to meet some of those needs," wrote Lt. Col. John Durham, U.S. Army chaplain.

Like most Christian dating sites, CDS is nondenominational and offers free trials of its services. But when these free trials are over, wannabe daters could pay anywhere from \$15 to \$60 per month for the privilege of surfing for their soul mate.

AGAPE Christian Singles site reports that its goal is to "glorify God, and to provide an edifying environment for single brothers and sisters in Christ."

"For those who wish to pursue relationship responsibilities," AGAPE has its own dating service called Christian Singles Connection. Here, one can browse an online photo gallery of participants, participate in a live photo chat and sign up to create a free profile.

And when it comes to profiling, the Christian Singles Connection asks for it all: age, weight, height, eye color, physical build, yearly income range. The site also asks participants about their church involvement, favorite Bible book, drinking habits and political interests.

"Christian singles looking for love, romance, friends, dating, relationships, personal, classified, matchmaking and dating services" should check out ChristianCafe.com. Or at least that is what ChristianCafe.com thinks.

ChristianCafe.com provides a tour of the site for "guests," where one can get a glimpse at how the whole process works. Members can search a database of over 50,000 available singles.

For instance, if you are looking for a male in the northeastern United States, between the ages of 36-40, who attends a nondenominational church, you might be interested in CARDIOB183. He makes between \$60,000 and \$80,000, has never had kids, describes his body type as "toned-athletic" and drives a luxury car. You can also find out his height and weight.

For those who wish to go deeper, they can click to see how CARDIOB183 describes his Christian faith, his personal goals and what he is looking for in a mate.

AdamMeetEve.com claims to have over 30,000 participants. This site also provides articles and advice about dating.

"Do you believe in your heart that God (the best Matchmaker of all) has created someone in this world who is not only compatible with you, but someone who is your perfect compliment, your 'soul-mate'?" AdamMeetEve.com asks.

Sveta, from Russia, may believe that God is "the best Matchmaker of all," but she is helping herself along by making herself available on the Web.

"Hello, my name is Sveta and I am a Born Again Christian. I am 31, single and seeking a long-term relationship," she wrote in an open letter on AdamMeetEve.com. "I am white, slim, I have no children and do not drink or smoke."

ChristianSoulmates.com tells viewers, "You may be just a few clicks away from your soul mate."

Whether it's matchmaking or ministry, Christian dating services on the Web provide a sneak peak at who's available.

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-- Jodi Mathews is communications director for the Baptist Center for Ethics. This story is copyrighted by EthicsDaily.com, an imprint of the Nashville, Tenn.,-based BCE. It is reprinted with permission from the Web site, [www.ethicsdaily.com](http://www.ethicsdaily.com)

## **Church-state separation faces post-Sept. 11 challenges**

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Six months ago, "God Bless America" captured the spirit of renewed patriotism and religious fervor in a forever-changed United States.

But did another famous motto -- the "separation of church and state" -- suffer post-Sept. 11?

Some observers think so.

From proposed school-prayer amendments to the Constitution to county commissions voting to post the Ten Commandments in their chambers, church-state activists describe an alarming increase in challenges to the First Amendment's Establishment Clause.

"The September 11 tragedy and the atrocities of the Taliban provide an extreme example of what can happen when religious zeal is combined with coercive power," said Brent Walker, director of the Washington-

based Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. "Americans now should be even more insistent upon upholding the wall of separation that has served us so well."

The words "separation of church and state" aren't in the Constitution. Instead, they were introduced in a letter written by one of its framers describing his views about what the First Amendment implies.

Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter Jan. 1, 1802, to a Baptist association in Danbury, Conn. It read in part: "I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between church and State."

Baptists historically supported the separation of church and state on religious grounds, and the concept has been upheld in courts. More recently, however, some have challenged a strict separationist view, claiming the First Amendment allows more latitude for accommodation of religion.

Such voices have stepped up efforts since Sept. 11:

-- Weeks after the terrorist attacks, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution encouraging the display of the words "God bless America" in public schools.

-- Religious Right leaders Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson said the attacks indicated that God was punishing America for supporting the principle of church-state separation, as well as tolerating homosexuality and abortion. Falwell later apologized to gays and abortion-rights supporters, but not to church-state separationists.

-- In November, the House passed another resolution that said "schools in the United States should set aside a sufficient period of time to allow children to pray for, or quietly reflect on behalf of, the Nation during this time of struggle against the forces of international terrorism."

-- Dozens of municipalities across the country have voted to display the Christian version of the Ten Commandments in civic buildings, such as city halls and courthouses. One of the largest was the Knox County Commission in Knoxville, Tenn.

-- In January, Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.) for the third time in the last four years introduced into Congress a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would, for the first time, insert a reference to God into the Constitution. Critics say it would encourage government-sanctioned school prayer and endorsement of religious documents.

-- A public school bus driver in Carroll County, Md., was removed from her route after refusing to stop her practice of leading the students in morning prayers. She told the Washington Times she began doing it because of President Bush's call to pray for the nation after the Sept. 11 attacks. She is suing the school district for alleged violation of her constitutional rights.

-- Most recently, on March 7, U.S. Rep. Robert Aderholt (R-Ala.) introduced his "Ten Commandments Defense Act." It would allow government religious displays and instruct federal courts to find such displays constitutional. Aderholt attempted to pass a similar piece of legislation in 1998, but it failed.

-- Several states have passed laws allowing or encouraging schools to post the words "In God We Trust" -- the U.S. national motto. When Melissa Killingbeck, a teacher at Central Elementary School in Flushing, Mich., decided to post the words in her classroom, she told the Flint Journal that she didn't feel the stating of the words were unconstitutional because, "It was even upheld in court that this is not a religious symbol."

Despite his concerns about such activity, Walker said some positive aspects of America's commitment to religious liberty have also emerged in the wake of Sept. 11.

"I think we've done a pretty good job here too, post 9-11," Walker said. "Many -- including President Bush -- have stepped forward to defend the rights of American Muslims so much that the president has been attacked by some on the far right as being too sympathetic to Islam."

Indeed, Christian expressions are not the only ones that critics say have crossed the church-state line in recent months.

Last month, a school district in California came under fire from Americans United for Separation of Church and State over a seventh-grade course on understanding Islam that required students to wear Muslim garb and adopt Islamic names.

But challenges to church-state separation coming from Christians continue to be the most frequent post-Sept. 11 worry of separationist groups. In the January issue of Americans United's magazine, "Church and State," an article examined the history of Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptists and the use of his phrase in American history.

Robert O'Neil, head of the Jefferson Center at the University of Virginia and a legal expert on church-state issues, told the magazine he thinks attacking church-state separation is the wrong response to terrorist attacks.

"One of the things that has troubled me in recent weeks," O'Neil said, "is that we haven't made enough of the extraordinary fact that Osama bin Laden and others like him hate us so much and are so angry in part because we are a secular state."

"There are apparently a number of grievances from these individuals," continued O'Neil. "But clearly one of them -- and they've said it -- is that we are a secular state, church and state are separate and religion does not drive government. Insofar as that is seen as one of the things they despise and find alienating about us, I think we should pick up on that. I am very disappointed that we have not. We have always been and will remain a secular state."

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