



Associated Baptist Press

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June 25, 2002

**SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Nashville, Tennessee

(02-55)

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JUL 09 2002

Five killed in church bus crash

By Bob Allen

TERRELL, Texas (ABP) -- Five people were confirmed dead June 24 when a charter bus carrying teenagers to a church camp crashed into a concrete bridge abutment near Terrell, Texas.

One of two buses carrying youth from Metro Church in Garland, Texas, ran off the highway, tipped on its side and crashed head-on into a bridge pillar on Interstate 20 east of Dallas, according to media reports.

Most of the approximately 40 young people on the bus were injured, at least one critically. About 15 persons were reportedly life-flighted to nearby hospitals. A total of 19 victims were transported to five different hospitals.

Dave Eden, associate pastor of the church, told reporters he had been in contact with some of the passengers by cell phone. Three of his own children were on a second bus, which wasn't involved in the accident.

"The bus tipped over and hit the pole," Eden said. "Everybody was freaking out and screaming and just trying to get to the hospital."

Jimmy Council, fire chief of College Mound, Texas, was the first rescuer to arrive at the scene. "There was bodies laying all over the ground," he told the Dallas Morning News. "I've been a medic since '78. This is the worst I've seen."

The cause of the crash was unknown, but police were investigating the possibility that the driver fell asleep. Witnesses said the bus had been weaving just before the crash, and there were no skid marks.

The crash occurred at about 9:15 a.m., 30 miles into a 240-mile trip to Ruston, La. The group of about 100 sixth through 12th graders was bound for a weeklong student life camp at Louisiana Tech University.

A second bus carrying the rest of the students was diverted to First Baptist Church in Canton, Texas.

Metro Church, a 1,000-member congregation that started in 1993, is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, the Baptist General Convention of Texas and Collin Baptist Association.

The church's senior pastor, Scott Camp, is a graduate of Criswell College and is working on a Ph.D. at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, according to a bio posted on the church Web site. He was a featured preacher at the Southern Baptist Convention in 1992 and formerly was pastor of First Baptist Church in Saschse, Texas.

The church sponsored a blood drive for victims and invited members to pass on prayers and words of condolences via the church Web site.

Church turns to praise in midst of tragedy

By Ferrell Foster

GARLAND, Texas (ABP) -- Ten hours after a tragic bus crash took the lives of four teenagers and one adult, hundreds of people from Metro Church in Garland, Texas, -- along with fellow believers from other area churches -- gathered to sing praise choruses to God.

While the music focused on the joy found in Christ, people mingled around at the back of the sanctuary sharing hugs and tears.

Many of the teenagers who survived the crash showed up -- some bearing red wounds upon their faces, others hobbling on crutches, some wearing aqua hospital garb, and still others grasping teddy bears given out by the Red Cross.

A chartered bus carrying 47 teens to a camp in Louisiana had crashed into bridge supports along Interstate 20 near Terrell, east of Dallas, at about 9:20 a.m. June 25. Michelle Cheney, 14; Michael Freeman, 12; Lindsay Kimmons, 16; Amanda Maxwell, 13; and driver Ernest Sheldon Carter, 51, died. Many others went to seven area hospitals, and about 20 remained hospitalized late Monday.

Freeman, Kimmons and Maxwell regularly attended Metro Church, which is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, Baptist General Convention of Texas and Collin Baptist Association, said Joe Courrage, an elder and spokesman for the church. Cheney reportedly attended Arapaho Baptist Church and was going to the camp with a friend.

"They were great kids, just wonderful kids," Courrage said. He spoke of Maxwell singing before the church and of how she was an "aspiring young talent, ... an active, pretty young lady. She was very well liked by everybody." He described Freeman as a "young man, full of life."

Senior Pastor Scott Camp said Kimmons had "just come to know Christ" in the past few weeks.

"This is a great tragedy for our church," the pastor said, "but I've also experienced the love of Christ and the hope that only Christians can know at a time like this."

He met with parents of some of the deceased shortly after the accident and said he had seen the joy of the Lord in the midst of the sorrow and tears.

"We will just get through this," Camp said. "Tragedy makes you either bigger or better."

Harvey McCreary, a 17-year-old recent graduate of Naaman Forrest High School in Garland, was one of the survivors who attended the praise service. He wore hospital clothes and walked on crutches due to a deep cut in his foot. He had been sitting five seats from the back of the bus on the right side, the side opposite the main impact of the collision.

"All I remember was (the bus) running over the guardrail and hitting the seat in front of me. ... I woke up about 15-20 feet in front of the bus."

McCreary called his dad on a borrowed cell phone. Eddie McCreary, associate pastor at the church, said his son told him, "It's bad, Dad. It's bad." The elder McCreary "could hear screaming on the cell phone."

His daughter, Jenny, also was on the bus. Harvey McCreary told his dad on the first call, "She was alive when I saw her last." He later confirmed that she was OK.

A bright red abrasion on Kristan Grubbs' forehead also marked her as one of the victims amid the hundreds milling around at the service. The 16-year-old junior at Wylie High School had been sitting in the middle of the right hand side of the bus. She also blacked out upon impact and woke up lying in the grass near the bus. Her head was bleeding, and she thought it was a dream. Everything was "really fuzzy," Grubbs said. Then she "turned around and saw the bus."

Despite a bruised knee, cuts on her back and bumps on her head, Grubbs stood with others in a church foyer after the service.

Gene Grounds experienced the tragedy from another vantage point. He is executive director of Victim Relief Ministries, which is sponsored by Texas Baptist Men, a ministry of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

He was called about an hour and a half after the accident. Texas Baptist Men sent a disaster-relief mobile center to the scene, but it left by mid-afternoon because it was not needed.

Grounds' crisis counseling, however, was in demand. He and Eddie Traugher of Austin Street Church of Christ in Garland, coordinated the counseling to families and victims.

When they first arrived at about noon, the families of victims were at the church and no one knew the identities of the dead and injured. When the names of the deceased were confirmed, Grounds was among those who delivered the sad news to one set of parents.

Later in the day, the counselors worked with the surviving teenagers, seeking to defuse the "emotional trauma by allowing them to communicate what they saw, tasted and smelled."

"Today has been a very traumatic day in observing the pain and anxiety of families and a very rewarding day for the opportunity to provide emotional and spiritual assistance to all of these people," Grounds said late Monday.

Counselors came from a variety of agencies, including the Red Cross, the Texas Department of Public Safety, Garland police, Rapha, Irving Christian Counseling, Baylor Medical Center chaplains and other groups.

The Red Cross provided the teddy bears, which are part of a "therapeutic security process to give (the victims) something safe they can attach themselves to," Grounds said.

Pastor Camp noted an "outpouring of support and love" from Christians around the country. "Our hearts are broken, but there are four or five teenagers who are in heaven right now.

"This church has been through a lot together" in the past, Camp said. "I'll ask them ... to draw close together and close to the Lord. ... This is the time to be family."

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