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**Pastor walks Texas woods to pray over remains of Columbia crew
By Ken Camp
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DALLAS (ABP) – Baptist preachers don't perform last rites for the dying or offer prayers for the dead. But pastor Fred Raney spent nearly two weeks walking the woodlands of East Texas, reading Scripture and praying over the recovered remains of each of the seven Columbia space shuttle astronauts.

The goal was to treat the deceased with dignity and provide comfort for those left behind, said Raney, pastor of First Baptist Church in Hemphill, Texas.

"My main purpose in going was to be able to let the families know we were there for the people they loved – that we remembered them and honored them," he said.

Raney served as a chaplain for the workers who recovered the remains of the seven Columbia crew members. The recovery crews, ranging in size from five to 15 members, always included members of the FBI evidence-recovery team, local law enforcement, astronauts from NASA and Raney.

Speaking to the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board at its March 4 meeting, he said those 12 days leading on-the-spot memorial services in the pastures and woods of Sabine County changed his life.

Raney was summoned to each recovery site, where he read verses from both the Old and New Testament and said a prayer before the remains were moved.

"It was encouraging to see the dignity and respect at the scene. The FBI and everyone involved handled things in a very respectful, dignified way," Raney recalled later. He remembered the hushed tones and professionalism of the federal agents.

"Of course, they recognized that the astronauts were there to remember a colleague. For them, it was the death of a friend, even more than a friend."

Charles Wade, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, said Raney acted as the presence of Christ, allowing God to transform a scene of suffering into holy ground. "He was there for Jesus. The Holy Spirit met them there and created a chapel of grace everywhere they prayed."

Raney was at home on Feb. 1, when a sustained, resounding roar shattered the tranquility of a sleepy East Texas Saturday morning.

"My first thought was that a gas line had exploded," he recalled later. Somehow, that didn't seem right, he said, and he wondered for a moment if terrorists had attacked faraway Dallas or Houston.

Raney, who serves as a certified emergency medical technician with the Hemphill Volunteer Fire Department and as chaplain for the Sabine County Firefighters Association, listened to his radio as a dispatcher relayed reports from around the county. "Things were falling from the sky," he said.

Soon he learned from television news reports that the space shuttle Columbia had exploded, and debris was falling from Dallas southeast to the Louisiana border. "We were really at Ground Zero," Raney said.

He joined other volunteer firefighters and local law enforcement officers in searching the pastures and woodlands of Sabine County to collect debris.

"I carried a little yellow Civil Defense radioactivity detector," he said, recalling his own anxiety when he first heard the machine go "click, click, click."

A short time later, the searchers heard an unsettling report. "They said our detectors wouldn't detect what needed to be detected. I wanted to know what it was that made mine go off," Raney said.

But those concerns soon seemed minor as searchers discovered that more than shards of metal and pieces of foam fell to earth.

"At that point my responsibilities shifted," Raney said. Officials asked that a chaplain be assigned to the team recovering the remains of the Columbia crew.

"From that point forward, we prayed that all seven members of the crew would be found -- that they would be accounted for," Raney said.

"God worked a miracle. First, it was a miracle that no one on the ground was injured when the debris fell. Then it was a miracle that we were able to recover all the astronauts."

The experience profoundly changed all those involved in the search, he said. He recalled early in the recovery process, when an FBI agent asked him to read his favorite scripture, Romans chapter 8, verse 28.

That day he read, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose."

He read the same verse 12 days later when searchers recovered the remains of the final crew member.

"God used this event to touch lives," Raney said. "Even though I already knew it, it brought home to me that life is like a vapor -- literally. It caused people to search their hearts and examine their faith -- to think about life and about eternal life."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Photo available from ABP.



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BWA launches campaign to offset proposed SBC cut

By Trennis Henderson

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WASHINGTON (ABP) – Calling it a matter of "the survival of the Baptist World Alliance," the BWA is launching a "Make Up the Difference" fund-raising campaign to offset the anticipated annual loss of \$125,000 from the Southern Baptist Convention.

In a March 3 letter to BWA supporters around the world, Alan Stanford, BWA's regional secretary for North America, said the campaign "is not an ordinary fund-raising appeal."

Stanford said the international Baptist organization "is facing a crisis as a result of the controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention, along with the challenge we face with today's economic downturn."

"Because of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's pending application for membership in the Baptist World Alliance, the Southern Baptist Convention's leadership has determined that they will reduce their current \$425,000 annual contribution by 30 percent," he wrote. "This is very unfortunate because the BWA wants to work with all Baptists."

Action on CBF's membership application is expected to take place in July during the BWA's General Council meeting in Seoul, Korea.

Citing a current operating deficit of more than \$600,000 as well as the proposed SBC cut, Stanford told the Western Recorder of Kentucky: "It is a very critical situation. We're talking about the survival of the Baptist World Alliance.

"We don't want to do anything to inflame the situation [with SBC leaders]," he added. "At the same time, we feel like it would be irresponsible to not ask people to make up the difference."

The BWA Executive Committee, meeting March 3-5 in Washington, also approved a 20 percent cut in this year's budget, reducing planned expenditures from \$2.11 million to \$1.69 million. The annual budget funds BWA's work among 206 Baptist conventions and unions around the world.

The proposal to reduce the SBC's financial support of BWA came during last month's SBC Executive Committee meeting in Nashville. The recommendation, which will be presented for action by SBC messengers in June, calls for the SBC to reallocate \$125,000 from BWA support to initiate an international network of "like-minded Christian bodies."

Emphasizing that the BWA "is the original and only recognized Baptist world fellowship," Stanford's letter noted, "Many of the Baptist conventions and unions it represents are persecuted minorities in their homelands who depend on the strength of the united Baptist world family to be their voice for religious freedom and human rights."

In addition to seeking one-time financial gifts from individuals and churches, the campaign includes a focus on enlisting "BWA Global Impact Churches" to provide ongoing financial support.

Stanford, who also serves as BWA's director for global impact, said BWA leaders have "formulated a strategy of beginning a network of mission-minded churches around the globe to be directly involved in the ministry and support of the BWA.

"This is not anything new," he added. "We've always had supporting churches. We're just trying to have more churches support us."

Churches that pledge to contribute at least \$1,000 annually will be designated Global Impact Churches and churches that give at least \$5,000 annually will be "William Carey Global Impact Churches."

BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz said his goal is to enlist 1,000 Global Impact Churches to undergird the BWA's long-term financial stability.

"The Baptists in the Third World love the Baptist World Alliance," Lotz added, "but they are currency restricted."

If SBC messengers approve the plan to reduce BWA funding, he said, "I would hope that thousands of Southern Baptist churches and millions of Southern Baptist believers will accept the challenge of supporting the Baptist World Alliance in other ways."

BWA President Billy Kim, pastor of Central Baptist Church in Suwon, Korea, noted that the SBC "has been a vital part" of the BWA's ministry since its founding in 1905.

With the pending SBC vote on reduced funding, however, "now is the time for Baptist conventions, unions and fellowships all over the world to join together in support for the Baptist World Alliance," Kim said.



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BWA leaders discuss loss of funds, relationship with Southern Baptists

By Robert Marus

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FALLS CHURCH, Va. (ABP) – Despite shadows cast by denominational controversies, budget crises, the threat of war, and religious persecution, leaders of the Baptist World Alliance heard encouragement about God's work around the world in a Mar. 3-5 meeting.

The group's executive committee met at its suburban Washington headquarters to hear updates on finances and future plans for BWA, an umbrella organization of more than 200 national Baptist conventions, unions and associations worldwide.

In February, the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee approved a plan to reduce SBC funding of BWA from \$425,000 to \$300,000 and use the savings to create an international organization that critics say will compete with BWA.

The SBC's conservative leaders disapprove of BWA's plan to admit the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as a member body. The CBF is a group of moderate Baptist churches and individuals opposed to the conservative takeover of the SBC. The CBF now funds its own missionaries, seminaries, retirement plan and other ministries.

Because most churches that support CBF traditionally have been Southern Baptist churches, SBC leaders regard CBF as a "splinter" group that siphons off funds that rightfully belong to Southern Baptists.

BWA bylaws prevent a member body from being a subgroup of another Baptist convention. Because of this, BWA's membership committee deferred action on CBF's initial application for membership in 2001. CBF reapplied last year with more supporting documentation claiming their independence from the SBC and gained a more favorable hearing from the committee. In July, committee members informed CBF and the organization's general council that the committee would be inclined toward accepting its application if CBF declared itself as independent and separate from the SBC.

The CBF's Coordinating Council declared the organization officially separate from the SBC late last year, although CBF does not consider itself a "denomination" or "convention" because of objections to that terminology.

When the CBF's application was presented to BWA's Executive Council last July, SBC Executive Committee president Morris Chapman, a council member, said the BWA membership committee's action departed with normal protocol. He called it a "swift and needless action" that may have caused the SBC-BWA relationship to become "damaged beyond repair." SBC leaders particularly objected to the membership committee making public their deliberations about CBF's application prior to giving a final recommendation.

In the most recent meeting, BWA membership committee chair Ian Hawley publicly apologized to Chapman and other SBC leaders for any hurt feelings that resulted from that action, saying it was entirely unintentional.

"We did not anticipate at that time that the course of action we were taking with good intentions would end up in being an embarrassment in causing hurt to our Southern Baptist brothers and sisters," Hawley said. However, he also noted that the membership committee had "reaffirmed the process adopted on this matter" and that the committee would present a recommendation on CBF membership to the BWA General Council meeting in Seoul, South Korea, in July.

The SBC funding cut comes at a difficult financial time for BWA. The organization took in \$634,810 less than it spent last year. The budget committee said this was because contributions from many of its member denominations have not come close to keeping pace with expectations.

"We're at a bare-bones budget," BWA general secretary Denton Lotz told committee members. The committee passed an amended 2003 budget that reduces expenditures by 20 percent. The cuts anticipate \$31,250 less from the SBC, the portion of the SBC's allocation that will affect BWA's current fiscal year.

Lotz asked for better support from member bodies. "What is a fair and reasonable share? This is what we're confronted with all over the world," Lotz said.

Lotz noted that often the world's largest and wealthiest Baptist denominations give the lowest per-capita contributions to the BWA. "When you realize that the Austrians give one dollar per person, whereas many North American conventions give less than one cent per person, you see the disparity," Lotz said.

Lotz also highlighted the increasing difficulty that many Baptists in heavily Muslim countries have in practicing a faith often associated closely with the United States.

"Sept. 11 has highlighted the whole situation of the clash of civilizations, which is a clash of religions," Lotz said. Saying a strong proclamation that Christ is the only way to salvation is just as necessary as ever, Lotz also cautioned against causing unnecessary offense to Muslims.

"We need to make sure that we have a Trinitarian basis to our faith, but we also need to make sure that we don't communicate that with a triumphalist theology of the sword, but with a theology of the cross."

Theo Angelov, regional secretary of the European Baptist Federation, had stronger words. Some of the churches under Angelov's care are located in majority-Muslim countries in the Middle East. Angelov said last fall he met with Jordan's prime minister shortly after derogatory "comments from people who call themselves Baptists about Islam and about specifically the prophet Muhammad" made international headlines – apparently a reference to comments from Southern Baptist leaders Jerry Vines and Jerry Falwell.

"Of course, it made the situation of our Baptist constituency there very difficult," Angelov said.

The prime minister asked him what was his relationship with Baptists in America, Angelov said, and he replied, "You have to know that in America that there are a lot of other Baptists" who disagree with the tone of those statements. "But some inappropriate statements are bringing a lot of harm to people who are living there, who are suffering there because of the situation."

Angelov added that, despite the contention by many American evangelicals that Islam is an intolerant religion, most of the intolerance he sees in his territories comes from professed Christians.

"Our problem continues to be not so much with the Muslims or other religious groups as with Christians," Angelov said. "I was disappointed to hear from our friends in the Middle East countries that they enjoy relative tolerance from the governments."

Angelov cited several instances of Eastern Orthodox and Catholic leaders pushing laws through Eastern European legislatures that placed heavy burdens on Protestant and other minority religious groups, in some cases effectively outlawing them altogether.

But several regional BWA leaders told of dramatic growth among Baptists and other evangelicals in Third World countries.

In an interview, BWA president Billy Kim said he hoped BWA could continue to represent all of the world's major Baptist bodies, including the SBC.

"I have always been appreciative of Southern Baptists, of what they have done, and I will continue to appreciate their leadership," Kim, a South Korean pastor, said. "Whatever they do, whatever we do, and whatever CBF does, we all have to answer to God when we get to heaven. So I'm still praying that those two groups can work together, not necessarily on customs or theologies, but on reaching the world."

South Korean BWA president urges US response to North Korea

By Robert Marus

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FALLS CHURCH, Va. (ABP) – Billy Kim knows a lot about global conflict. In his work as president of the Baptist World Alliance, he has seen and heard about wars and oppressive governments all over the world.

But now, as a pastor in Seoul, South Korea, he's at ground zero for what has the potential to escalate into a nuclear war. A standoff between the United States and unpredictable nuclear power North Korea has caused much fear and trepidation in Kim's country. North Korean leaders could easily attack Seoul, only a short flight from the country's northern border, with nuclear missiles.

Kim, in the Washington area for a recent BWA executive committee meeting, had a piece of advice for President Bush: Stand up to North Korea.

While he thinks "war is not a solution" in Iraq or anywhere else, Kim commended Bush's strong stand against Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. "We pray that somehow, God will intervene in the hearts of men that we could solve [the conflict between the U.S. and Iraq] without a war," Kim said. "But I have strong conviction if there is an evil man who makes their people have no religious freedom, no freedom of speech, [if] they live much below the regular standard of the human being, and if in that particular country, the people have no will to fight, or change or reform, somebody needs to help, like the U.N., like NATO, like a coalition of the free world, to put the pressure on some of those regimes."

But Kim said the same standard needs to apply to North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il. "I think the U.S. has taken a strong stand [with Iraq], and I'd like to see that strong stand against North Korea," he said, in an interview with Associated Baptist Press.

Noting he was "baffled" by the worldwide anti-war protests, Kim expressed his overall agreement with Bush's position on Iraq. "I think there will be a lot of problems and misunderstandings," he said. "Even if you get U.N. support, I think war still brings tremendous suffering, and also reaction from the country on the other side of the war – like Iraq, and behind Iraq you have the Muslim world."

But, Kim added, "I think the Arab world – the Muslim world – should have solved this problem way before the U.S. got involved. They should have confronted [Saddam Hussein] a long time ago. But they haven't done it, the U.N. hasn't done it, so now the only superpower in the world feels they have to do something about this."

Kim said confronting Iraq was necessary for dealing properly with the North Korean threat. "If the U.S. will not stand strong against Saddam Hussein, I think the North Korean government will look down on the U.S.," he said, "because everybody wants to have nuclear [weapons]."

But Kim and South Korean Baptists are resilient in the face of a serious threat. Seoul is the planned site for the BWA's General Council meeting July 7-13. In a March 5 presentation to BWA leaders about the meeting, Tom Song, music minister at Kim's church, encouraged them to come to Seoul despite their fears. "Many have been wondering if we can hold this meeting in Korea given the problems with war and nuclear war. The answer is, 'No problem,'" Song said.

"Don't worry about the Korea war and nuclear problem," Song implored, speaking to a room full of Baptists from around the globe gathered in the Washington suburbs. He added, to peals of nervous laughter from the group: "[Besides,] the missile is aiming to Japan and the United States!"



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CORRECTION:**By Staff****Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com****March 6, 2003****Volume: 03-24-3485**

In the Feb. 24 ABP story "CBF cuts budget for this year in response to giving drop," please replace the 14th paragraph with the following:

Also during the council meeting, Bob Setzer, pastor of First Baptist Church of Christ in Macon, Ga., was announced as the nominee for moderator-elect of the Fellowship. If elected by the general assembly, he will succeed Cynthia Holmes, a lawyer from Clayton, Mo., who will succeed Martin as moderator this summer.



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