

the added pressure the war may put on Christians in Middle Eastern and other majority-Muslim nations. "Pray for our brothers and sisters in the Middle East. They are a minority and need protection, encouragement and support," Lotz said. "Pray for the 600,000 Christians in Iraq and all other innocent people who are suffering."

The directors of Church World Service, the relief arm of the National Council of Churches, issued a statement March 20 that continued that group's critique of the war even as it called U.S. Christians to prayer. "In concert with ecumenical bodies across the U.S. and worldwide, Church World Service has opposed and continues to oppose this pre-emptive war against Iraq," the directors said.

"This war will have horrendous humanitarian consequences in terms of death and human suffering, and could potentially destabilize the entire Middle East, as well as have profound repercussions throughout the world," the directors' statement continued. "Our understanding of and respect for international law leads us to consider this action an illegitimate means of solving the current crisis and a serious violation of the United Nations Charter. We lament any misconception that this crisis reflects a conflict between Muslims and Christians."

However, the statement also called for prayers on behalf of all parties involved in the conflict. "Our prayers are with the Iraqi people, members of the armed forces, the leaders of our own nation, and the international community. The people of Iraq must be given hope that there are alternatives to both dictatorship and war."

Charles Wade, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, issued a less critical call to prayer. "Sometimes imperfect means must be taken to protect the innocent, resist evil and hold accountable those who would abuse others," Wade said, in a statement released by the BGCT's communications office March 20. "No act of violence is within God's perfect will, but we ask for his guidance and grace that innocent lives will be spared and that justice and mercy will be accomplished," Wade continued.

But Wade also asked Texas Baptists to continue their petitions for peace. "Pray also that in the midst of war we will not forget to pray for peace and work to that end, knowing that the Savior we serve is the Prince of Peace, and he calls us to that elusive goal."

Southern Baptist Convention Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission President Richard Land, who is one of only a handful of high-ranking U.S. religious officials to express support for the war, re-affirmed his commitment to Bush's plan in a March 20 statement. "America and the coalition of the willing have been waiting 12 years for Saddam Hussein to abide by the civilized world's demand that he dispossess himself of his weapons of mass destruction," Land said. "Finally, we come to a moment of last resort, and the United States is now leading a coalition of more than 40 nations from around the world that have not only perceived the danger but have the courage of their convictions to act upon them and disarm Saddam Hussein and liberate the Iraqi people."
-30-

CBF ready for ministry
to war victims in Iraq

By Lance Wallace

ATLANTA (ABP) - The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is poised and ready to minister to the thousands of refugees and other displaced people whose lives will be disrupted by the war with Iraq, and have initiated security procedures for the field personnel who will be impacted.

CBF global missions field staff have been meeting with partner state CBF

organizations, churches and groups such as the Baptist World Alliance and World Vision in recent months to determine the most effective way to minister during and after war in Iraq.

"We have been pre-positioning ourselves so that we can be responsive to the tremendous fallout of human suffering that the war will bring" said David Harding, emergency response coordinator for CBF global missions. "We intend to assist in meeting immediate needs like food and shelter but also directing funds with a long term perspective on how to restore people to productive living in the future once the war is over. We want to assist both internally displaced people and refugees that pour into neighboring countries."

From 1991 to 1996, CBF global missions field personnel worked in Northern Iraq until President Saddam Hussein forced western aid agencies from the area. Should there be a regime change in Baghdad, CBF is preparing to renew humanitarian aid in Northern Iraq through a number of anticipated construction, agricultural and technological infrastructure projects.

"I've had it on my heart for a year now, watching this impending storm on the horizon, to develop a plan and avoid some of the confusion and chaos that occurred after the first Gulf War," said the Kurdish Team strategy coordinator, who cannot be named for security reasons. "Our meetings formed a loose-knit coalition of Baptist agencies and friends of CBF who have trust and respect for one another's work. This group has set in motion the process of meeting the needs of the people in Northern Iraq."

"The war affects approximately 50 percent of our 150 global missions field personnel," said Gary Baldrige, co-coordinator of CBF Global Missions. "We anticipate that at least a few of our personnel in the Middle East/North Africa and Southeast Asia will leave their residence during the most intense periods of the war, and almost all will change their daily routines in some way. Each field team has evacuation plans that are reviewed regularly. Decisions on whether to evacuate temporarily or to remain on the field are made in consultation with team members and administrators. In many cases temporary displacement is advised, Baldrige said.

CBF is ready to receive funds for the Iraqi relief effort. If you wish to contribute, make checks payable to CBF, marked "CBF Relief and Development Fund #17000", specify Iraq and send to CBF, P. O. Box 101699, Atlanta, GA 30392.

-30-

Japanese Baptist minister
acts as 'human shield' in Iraq

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- As a Japanese citizen, Koichi Kimura has little at stake in the United States' decision to initiate a "pre-emptive" war against Iraq. But as a Christian and a Baptist, he said, he feels so compelled to oppose the war that he is doing so at the risk of his own life -- as a "human shield."

Kimura -- a Japanese Baptist minister and former missionary to Indonesia -- arrived in Baghdad March 14 to serve as one of approximately 70 human shields. The shields are anti-war activists from around the world who have gone to Iraq to live near civilian facilities such as power plants that they consider illegitimate targets in a war with Iraq. Their aim is to discourage U.S. and allied forces from taking aim at those targets. However, U.S. military officials have repeatedly implied they will not hesitate to strike at such shielded facilities if they are considered strategic to the war effort.

"I am terrified of dying, but I am more fearful of God's judgment, of eternal punishment that would fall upon me," Kimura said, in an e-mail interview shortly after his arrival in Iraq, prior to the March 19 initiation of hostilities by American forces. Kimura, who is from Maebaru, Japan, cited Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats in Matt. 25, where God condemns those who did not help the poor and oppressed but ushers into heaven those who showed compassion to "one of the least of these."

"War is not a natural disaster but something that is wrought by human beings," Kimura continued, explaining his decision. "This is why the church and Christians can resolve international conflict through human wisdom and peaceful means. Not only do Jesus and the gospel testify this path, but so does international law."

Kimura also said he is protesting the war because he fears it will -- rightly or wrongly -- be perceived by worldwide followers of Islam as a religious conflict.

"Whatever the White House may say, this policy will only serve to strengthen the antagonistic 'Christianity versus Islam' structure," Kimura said. "It will force more misunderstanding and hatred to take root between Christians and Muslims, just as the Crusades had done in the Middle Ages. As a Christian, I cannot overlook the fact that many brothers and sisters of Islam have been injured and killed by Christians. As a minister, I believe that I have the responsibility to stand up against this erroneous path and, as an atonement, to be with not only our Christian brothers and sisters in Iraq but also with our Muslim brothers and sisters."

Kimura acknowledged that Iraq presented a significant problem. "There is no doubt that Iraq has been violating the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council for the past 12 years. The [Iraqi] government is also suspected of hiding weapons of mass destruction," he said. "But this is exactly why the United Nations has persistently carried out inspections throughout the country."

Kimura said the inspections regime U.N. officials were attempting to use to disarm Iraq was working sufficiently -- and that pre-emptively attacking Iraq before U.N. inspectors had declared Iraq sufficiently uncooperative violates international law. "Meanwhile, has Iraq shown any signs of taking military action that would be equivalent to the kind of imminent threat to which international law concedes the path to war? The answer is obvious."

U.N. inspectors have acknowledged that Iraq has been less than fully cooperative in allowing inspections and verification of disarmament. But that doesn't convince Kimura as a sufficient reason for going to war now. "I cannot see anything other than fine Iraqi oil and the founding of [a] 'Pax Americana' in the Middle East to be the great causes for this war."

American and allied officials have strongly condemned the use of human shields, saying the Iraqi dictator is simply using them. Kimura acknowledged that understanding. "Some people say that the human shield is only encouraging the Hussein regime. Perhaps it is so," he said.

But Kimura said that is not a Christian way to view the human shield's role. "I consider this view to be one that is too limited in its context of national security," he continued. "What is needed for the mission of the church is a paradigm shift in security -- shifting the focus of security from the state to the 'least' of the people, who are always the ones who suffer the worst in any conflict. The human shield sends out this message to the world and to the church."

Kimura said he was sent with the blessing of his congregation in Japan, Ito Baptist Church. As of the time of his interview, he did not know yet which of five locations he would be placed at. He said his location could be at a power plant, or at one of two power substations or two reservoirs.

Kimura's daughter, Hanako, said she received word that her father had participated with other religious leaders of several faiths in a peace action called "Bridge of Light and Hundreds of Lanterns on the Tigris [River]" on March 17, just 48 hours before the beginning of the U.S. attack. Attempts to reach both Koichi and Hanako Kimura since the fighting began have been unsuccessful.

-30-

News briefs from ABP's Washington Bureau

By Robert Marus

Court stays pledge ruling as Congress affirms 'under God'

WASHINGTON -- As the "Under God" case headed almost certainly to the U.S. Supreme Court, Congress weighed in with strong support for the religious language remaining in the Pledge of Allegiance.

On March 4, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals delayed implementation of its own ruling that declared the addition of the words "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional and prohibited public-school teachers from leading students in the pledge. The court had announced Feb. 28 that it would not review its ruling from last June that declared the phrase and its endorsement by public schools a violation of the First Amendment.

Had the court not issued its stay, then on March 17, recitation of the pledge would have become illegal in the nine western states covered by the 9th Circuit. The case originated in a Sacramento-area school district sued by atheist Michael Newdow, who claimed his elementary-school-aged daughter's religious freedom was violated when she was forced to listen to her classmates and teacher reciting the pledge with the offending religious reference.

On March 5, the Senate voted 94-0 to disapprove of the court's decision not to review its ruling. On March 20, the House followed suit, on a 400-7 vote.

Resolution opponent Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.), in debate on the House floor, said, "the Supreme Court for the last 40 years in its jurisprudence on school prayers has said that we cannot ask schoolchildren to recite a prayer or a belief in God in the classroom setting, even if we allow the dissenters to walk out of the room; but that is exactly what asking them to say the Pledge of Allegiance with that phrase 'under God' is."

But resolution supporter Rep. Steve Chabot (R-Ohio) said the court was not relying on sound jurisprudence in making its original decision or declining to review it. "It is clear that the Ninth Circuit's amended Newdow ruling contradicts any reasonable interpretation of the First Amendment," he said. (ABP)

U.S. Islamic group issues 'safety kit' to Muslims

WASHINGTON -- Anticipating a higher rate of anti-Muslim harassment and persecution with the advent of war against Iraq, an American Islamic group has issued a resource kit to Muslim communities across the nation.

The Washington-based Council on American-Islamic Relations released its "Community Safety Kit" March 17.

The kit contains advice to local Muslim communities on how to be cooperative in reporting suspicious activity in Muslim communities to authorities, as well as information on how to educate Muslims and their community groups about their civil rights and recourses should an incident of harassment or persecution take place.

It also includes a guide to improving security at mosques.

The group said the kit is designed for use not only for Muslims, but also for "Arab-Americans and those perceived to be 'Middle Eastern' who may face religious or ethnic profiling and hate crimes during a war with Iraq."

The group's board chairman, Omar Ahmad, said, "It is important that local Muslim communities take steps now to promote the safety and security of our nation and to defend against anti-Muslim hate during any war with Iraq." (ABP)

Robertson urges church-state separation in new Iraq

WASHINGTON -- In what church-state observers characterized as a turnabout, Religious Right leader Pat Robertson encouraged President Bush to make sure a secular government with separation of church and state is established in a postwar Iraq.

Speaking on the March 17 broadcast of his "700 Club" television program, the Christian Coalition founder said, "The thing that the president of the United States has got to keep in mind is, under the Ba'ath party, Iraq was a so-called secular state. That's why many of the Islamic nations don't like [Saddam Hussein]. If the United States tries nation building, it's got to [have] at the very top of its agenda a separation of church and state. There has to be a secular state in there and not an Islamic state."

Robertson has derided the American concept of church-state separation in the past, often asserting that the doctrine was found in the old Soviet Union's constitution, but not in the United States'.

Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, welcomed what the organization termed "Robertson's turnabout" on church-state issues. "Pat's conversion shows there is hope for even the most wayward soul," Lynn said, noting it had prompted him to send Robertson an AU membership application in the mail. But, he added, "I'm not sure that Pat intends to apply his newfound enthusiasm for church-state separation to the United States as well as Iraq." (ABP)
-30-

Congressman to receive ABP award
for defense of religious freedom

By Toby Druin and Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Rep. Chet Edwards isn't your typical "God-and-guns" Texas Democrat. The term -- used in Washington to describe moderate Southern Democrats who vote with their conservative Republican counterparts on gun-control and church-state issues -- describes Edwards only to an extent. The congressman has gained notoriety on Capitol Hill and elsewhere for his steadfast defense of religious liberty and what he considers to be its essential corollary -- a strict separation of church and state.

Edwards will be recognized for his defense of religious liberty when he

receives the 2003 Associated Baptist Press Religious Freedom Award. The honor is given annually to individuals who ABP's directors believe have made unique contributions to the defense and advancement of religious freedom. Past award winners have included pioneering Baptist civil-rights activist Will Campbell, retired Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs head James Dunn, and former New York Times religion correspondent Gustav Niebuhr.

"I want to play a role in educating members of Congress and the American people to the fact that church-state separation was designed to protect religion, not harm it," Edwards said, in an interview. "It seems that every generation in Congress makes an effort to assault the role of separation of church and state. It requires re-education that the reason our founding fathers believed in church-state separation was that they felt religion should be on a pedestal far above the reach of politicians and government. They erected the wall of separation out of reverence for religion, not animosity against it."

But that belief has led him to take positions on particular issues that don't endear him to some Texas voters. For instance, Edwards fought strenuously against a 2002 bill that would have allowed churches to engage in partisan political activity while retaining their tax-exempt status. The bill enjoyed strong support among Southern House members and Religious Right leaders pushed hard for its passage. The bill failed, but gained more votes than many church-state separationists had anticipated.

But to Edwards, championing church-state separation is worth the political points it sometimes costs him. "One only has to look at reports from the Middle East, Afghanistan, Sudan, Pakistan, India, etc., to realize that whenever you mix the power of government with the power of religion, it's not a good thing for government or religion," Edwards said. "I consider my efforts in behalf of church-state separation to be the single most important cause I will ever have in public service. Religious freedom is the first freedom, and if it is put at risk, all the others--freedom of speech, association, etc.-- are endangered."

Supporters of policies that Edwards has viewed as threats to church-state separation contend they are fighting against the secularization of America and merely want an equal place for religion in the public sphere. But Edwards said those convictions are misguided and he would like to bridge the gap between rabid secularists and the Religious Right. "The reason there have been so many attacks on the wall of separation is that there is a rightful sense that we need to return to core religious values and truths," Edwards said. "That is the right end, but getting government involved in the process is absolutely wrong in achieving that end."

For instance, Edwards said, he opposes government-instituted prayer in public schools because it cheapens genuine prayer rather than encouraging it. "I absolutely support voluntary school prayer but vehemently oppose government-sanctioned, organized school prayer," he explained.

But that's not always an easy nuance to portray to constituents. In his most recent campaign, Edwards said, his opponents sent out 500,000 mailers "saying I opposed children praying." Though he was re-elected, he said, "I have decided that protecting religious freedom is far more important to me than an election. If losing votes is the price of my protecting religious freedom, it is a small price to pay."

Edwards is a Methodist but is married to a Baptist minister's daughter, the former Lea Ann Wood. They and their two sons attend Calvary Baptist Church in Waco when at home, and Columbia Baptist Church in Falls Church, Va., when in Washington.

Edwards said he fell in love with the idea of public service and the

capacity of government to change people's lives for good during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Ironically, he didn't become passionate about church-state issues until a few years after he was elected to Congress as a result of a discussion with then-Baylor University president Herbert Reynolds. Baylor is located in Edwards' district.

"He sent me a copy of [legendary Dallas pastor and former Southern Baptist Convention president] George W. Truett's famous speech on religious liberty delivered on the Capitol steps in Washington in 1920," Edwards recalled. "I read it, and what came across so clearly is that free will is a divine gift of God and government has no right to infringe on that free will. It just hit me like a two-by-four in the face that God, who is omnipotent, could have made us puppets, but he gave us free will in our religious beliefs, and government shouldn't limit that free will."

"ABP bestows the Religious Freedom Award on Chet Edwards because of his tireless and courageous efforts on behalf of religious liberty and the separation of church and state," said ABP board chairman Marv Knox, editor of the Texas Baptist Standard. "He is a strong ally of the Baptist Joint Committee in the struggle to preserve and protect the First Amendment's religion clauses. He also is a compassionate friend and supporter of churches, helping them exercise their rights to express their faith without government hindrance."

Edwards is scheduled to accept the award at an April 10 banquet in Washington.

-30-

You are subscribed as Kathy@sbhla.org

If you want to unsubscribe from this mailing please click this link <http://www.abpnews.com/abpnews/unsubscribe.cfm?mail=3296>