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Florida governor pens thanks
for Southern Baptist efforts

By Barbara Denman

Baptist Press
9/28/92

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles has sent an open letter commending Southern Baptists for their efforts helping the victims of Hurricane Andrew.

In the open letter Chiles called Southern Baptist relief efforts "a great inspiration" and "abundant proof of the great compassion of Southern Baptists."

In an accompanying letter to the Florida Baptist Witness, Chiles noted "Southern Baptists from throughout the United States have been a valued source of help and inspiration to the victims of Hurricane Andrew."

During the past five weeks since Hurricane Andrew ripped through south Dade County, Southern Baptists provided 3 million meals to south Florida residents from 11 mass feeding locations, said Cecil Seagle, Florida Baptist Brotherhood director. The mass feeding units and the teams of volunteers came from Florida, Tennessee, South Carolina, Georgia, Missouri, Illinois, Ohio, North Carolina and Kentucky.

Teams from Georgia, North Carolina and Florida fed their first meals within 24 hours after the hurricane struck. In most of the locations, Southern Baptists were the first to respond with any relief. Currently seven feeding sites are being utilized.

At least 10,000 Southern Baptist volunteers from as far as North Dakota and Michigan toiled in 90-degree temperatures preparing meals, distributing water, canned foods, medicine and baby products and repairing homes and roofs.

The contents of Chiles' open letter are as follows:

"Dear Southern Baptists,

"The very early and continuing presence of the Southern Baptist relief effort in storm ravaged South Florida has been overwhelming. The selfless gift of time and material resources has been a blessing to Andrew's helpless victims and a great inspiration to those of us charged with caring for Florida's citizens.

"The millions of hot meals served, the medical assistance, hands willing to serve in any capacity and countless kind acts are abundant proof of the great compassion of Southern Baptists.

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"I want to extend my personal thanks, along with those of all Floridians, for your generous help. May God bless you as you continue your ministry in our state and across the world."

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Relief efforts turn corner
from rescue to recovery

By Barbara Denman

Baptist Press
9/28/92

MIAMI (BP)--One month after Hurricane Andrew cut a swath of destruction across south Florida, the area is slowly showing signs of healing.

Perhaps the most visible sign that rescue efforts have turned the corner toward recovery is seen in nature itself. Trees that four weeks ago stood barren of bark and life now sprout green buds of health.

Seeing that God can bring new life amid devastation has brought new hope to Southern Baptist relief workers. "The trees are amazing to me, said Debbie West of First Baptist Church in Eustis. "They have been tortured, yet there's life on the tree. It shows God is working through it all."

Other signs that life is returning to normal in south Dade County include:

- Potable water is available now throughout the area.
- Electricity has been restored except in 89,000 homes in an area hard hit by the storm.
- The military, which at its height numbered 28,313, has been cut by a third to 19,802.
- All but three Southern Baptist disaster relief mass feeding units have left the area after serving nearly four million meals.

Walking hand-in-hand, Florida Baptists, aided by fellow Baptists from throughout the country, are entering "phase two" of their relief efforts.

According to Cecil Seagle, director of the Brotherhood department of the Florida Baptist Convention, phase two of the recovery will become "proactive instead of reactive."

"In the past we've had to react to emergencies, providing vital necessities such as water, ice, hot food and groceries.

"Now we're looking at the long-term needs. In this phase, we will be able to identify and project needs by location and name. From the project list we can search for people across the Southern Baptist Convention who can meet specific needs."

He added that many of the volunteers north of Miami have been itching to begin rebuilding while south of the Dade County line "no one is ready yet to rebuild. First, they need power and phone lines."

Perhaps the most significant change in the long-term relief effort is that help will be shifted away from the feeding sites and to the local church.

Each of the 33 congregations significantly affected by the hurricane will be assisted by an assigned member of the Florida Baptist Convention. The 11 staff members serving in this role will visit daily their three assigned churches.

"We don't want our pastors standing in line to ask for help," Seagle said. "But we will walk hand-in-hand through this tragedy."

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The staff liaisons will have five responsibilities:

-- to assist the pastors in any way, especially in coordinating the flow of volunteers and construction projects.

-- to oversee distribution and acquisition of food available to the congregation and community.

-- to distribute financial assistance earmarked to provide subsidies for families, salary grants for staff and building grants and loans, as well as assisting in the acquisition of supplies, materials and equipment.

-- to assess evangelism needs as churches attempt to implement community surveys, conduct outreach and acquire Bibles.

-- to initiate church-to-church linkages with other Southern Baptist Convention congregations.

Other aspects of phase two include:

-- Miami Baptist Association has assumed responsibility for warehousing and distributing foods and commodities.

-- Three mass feeding units, Florida, Kentucky and Tennessee, will be stationed at three Florida Baptist churches, Cutler Ridge, Florida City and Glendale, preparing meals for the Red Cross to take out in the community.

Seagle said the philosophy Florida Baptists have held in ministering to the community remains unchanged. "We don't care if they are Baptist or Buddhist, if we can help in Jesus' name, we will."

-- Daily briefings involving state convention staff and Miami Baptist Association staff will provide an outlet for surfacing needs and securing resources.

Already, many needs have been met. During one meeting, the staff field liaisons discovered that rice and beans needed in the Hispanic community were in short supply. The next day 40,000 pounds of rice were trucked in and delivered to the Hispanic churches for distribution.

Requests for Bibles, folding chairs and hymnals have also been received and met daily.

According to Jim Goodson, director of the convention's missions division whose staff is serving in the liaison roles, "We are taking the field command center to the people.

"For the past four weeks, many churches have been recipients of volunteers and ministries sent to them from our state convention's field center, yet the congregations and staff have been unsure of where they came from," he said. "Now our staff members have daily conversational ties with our churches and can meet needs right on the spot. This will help them to know that Florida Baptists are standing behind them in their time of crisis."

Charles Koch, pastor at First Baptist Church of Cutler Ridge, said he has discovered firsthand how the state convention is meeting needs of the churches. "Our leaders have not operated from a distant place," he noted. "They have been at these feeding lines. They have been in my office and they have said, 'How can I help you?' They have given us tangible means of money and food and have assured us of their prayers."

Bush, Clinton reps differ
on church-state issues

By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--Bill Clinton and the Democratic Party oppose aid to religious schools, while George Bush and the Republican Party favor educational vouchers parents can use in such schools and say are constitutional.

This was one of the disagreements on church-state issues expressed by representatives from both presidential campaigns during a session of the recent national conference of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The Clinton campaign was represented by Robert Drinan, a Catholic priest and law professor at Georgetown University, while the president was represented by Herb Ellingwood, national co-chairman of the Bush/Quayle evangelical coalition who works full-time as a volunteer in the campaign.

The Democrats maintain the church-state positions they have held since the 1940s, Drinan said. The Democratic ticket of Clinton and Al Gore opposes aid to church-related elementary and secondary schools, favors the Supreme Court's decisions on prayer in schools and supports the free exercise of religion.

The Republican ticket of Bush and Dan Quayle supports vouchers for low- and middle-income families to use in religious and other private schools and endorses a voluntary prayer amendment, Ellingwood said. He did not address free exercise of religion.

(Bush has not taken a public position on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, a bill designed to restore to its previous standard the free exercise of religion restricted by the Supreme Court in its 1990 Employment Division v. Smith opinion. Clinton recently endorsed a legislative remedy to the Smith decision but did not specifically endorse RFRA.)

President Bush "believes that there should be choice in education, so that there's competition," Ellingwood said. "George Bush believes that monies given to parents rather than to the schools, wherever the parents choose, is certainly not a violation of the separation of church and state."

The Bush administration's school-choice initiative, known as the G.I. Bill for Children, "would not be available to rich parents," Ellingwood said.

Drinan seemed to surprise the Americans United audience when he expressed sympathy for parents who pay for a religious education for their children and suggested there could be government assistance for secular aspects of church-related schools.

Although he rejected the concept of vouchers, Drinan said, "The people who want church-related education say, 'I am not going to allow my universe, or my children, to be segregated into secular and sectarian. I want them together. I think God is the center of life.' And it seems to me we can be very sympathetic to the millions of American parents who say, 'I want something different.'

"But I think it's a problem of, frankly, religious freedom. A man the other day said, 'I have checks here for \$4,000 that I shelled out for my children's tuition for this year.' And there has to be a solution or this is improper in this great democracy," Drinan said.

Silence met his statement. In nearly every other case, the AU audience applauded Drinan's positions.

Drinan, a former representative from Massachusetts, raised the abortion issue during his opening statement. The Republicans "want to recriminalize abortion," he said.

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During the question-and-answer session, a member of the audience asked why Drinan injected the abortion issue into a church-state debate and if he believed the pro-life position is a breach of church-state separation.

"No, I raise it simply because I think it's relevant when we judge the church-state positions of the Democratic ticket, and the Democratic ticket does say that they prefer the pro-choice position," Drinan said.

So abortion is not a church-state issue, the questioner asked, unless someone makes a direct connection?

"Well, no, I think it's a matter of personal conscience, sir," Drinan said.

The bulk of questions from the audience were directed to Ellingwood and concerned school choice and prayer in the schools.

The focus of voluntary prayer is "God is to be honored," Ellingwood said. "The (Bush) position is that there should be a formalized statement that there would be voluntary prayer in the schools. We're not arguing for a teacher to make up a prayer of their own... ."

About the Lee v. Weisman case prayer, which the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional in June, Ellingwood said, "I can't imagine anyone being greatly offended by sitting under that prayer, unless of course they were an atheist... ."

Some members of the audience laughed and several briefly spoke back to him from their seats.

Drinan criticized President Bush's declaration in August the Democratic Party had excluded from its platform "three simple letters: G-O-D. My party's platform is different."

"It was particularly offensive," Drinan said. "Somehow they're saying that God is on our side and that other side is godless.

"Why are the Republicans using that? They're just trying to demonize or vilify the Democrats, saying they are less religious. And I think it's just very inappropriate."

Ellingwood said, "Nobody has said that God is on either side. What Bush and the others have said is, 'We honor God by talking about him in the platform.' Nobody has said that he is pro-Republican or pro-Democrat. One doesn't become a demon by not mentioning God. We have said that we have honored God by having him in the platform."

Drinan said he signed two documents in response to Bush's statement. One was a letter to Bush from People for the American Way, and the other was a statement signed by 59 persons, including several Southern Baptists, calling on the presidential candidates to refrain "from further attacks based on religion."

Southern Baptists signing the statement included Jimmy Allen, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention and former president of the Radio and Television Commission; Grady Cothen, retired president of the Sunday School Board; Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, former executive director of the Woman's Missionary Union; James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs; Darold Morgan, former president of the Annuity Board; and Foy Valentine, retired executive director of the Christian Life Commission.

The National Council of Churches also sent a letter to Bush signed by 23 church leaders.

About 230 people registered for Americans United's 45th national conference Sept. 19-22. Valentine, who is president of AU's board of trustees, moderated the session with Drinan and Ellingwood.

AIDS spread can be stopped,
say Ankerberg and guests

By Keith Hinson

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (BP)--The AIDS epidemic can be stopped by testing all Americans for the HIV virus.

That's according to the host and several guests on a recent five-part series of "The John Ankerberg Show," a nationally syndicated Christian TV and radio broadcast. Ankerberg and his family attend Brainerd Baptist Church in Chattanooga.

Concerning the idea that everyone should be tested for the virus, Shepherd Smith, president of Americans for a Sound AIDS/HIV Policy (ASAP), told Ankerberg "the way that we end (the epidemic) is through knowledge. We intervene the chain of transmission by identifying people who are HIV positive. And that's done by routinely testing in hospital settings, premarital testing, STD (sexually transmitted disease) clinic testing. It becomes a normal part of medical practice."

"The business of life ought to include HIV testing," said William L. Roper, director of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta.

"I believe everybody needs to know whether or not they're infected with the AIDS virus. We think we need to incorporate HIV testing into the routine of getting insurance, going to your doctor for whatever else (or) going to the hospital," Roper said.

Baptist Press asked the CDC's office of public affairs why universal testing is not being practiced since the CDC's director said he favors such a policy. The CDC issued a written statement that did not comment on the question but responded to several other issues raised by Ankerberg's guests.

Anita Moreland Smith, ASAP's vice president and wife of Shepherd Smith, said no legislation is pending in Congress for universal testing for the HIV virus. "I don't really expect to see anything until the new Congress," she said.

Lorraine Day, former chief of orthopedic surgery at San Francisco General Hospital and former faculty member of the University of California-San Francisco, told Ankerberg she agrees with the idea of universal testing.

"About 75 percent of the entire population will go to some doctor or medical clinic within a one- to two-year period," said Day, who now researches, writes and lectures on the AIDS epidemic. Much of her work is published through Rockford Press of Palm Desert, Calif., which Day owns, according to Sue Drury, who answered the phone in Day's office.

"We could test three-fourths of the population if we just tested when they came into a medical situation," Day said. "The only way we have to control this disease right now is to make sure that the people who don't have it don't get it from people who do. If we cannot identify the people who have this disease, how can we keep them from giving it to someone who doesn't have it?"

Ankerberg and his guests acknowledged that objections have been raised to routine HIV testing, such as possible breach of confidentiality.

"Doctors, by their profession, are not going to tell intimate details about a patient's personal history or disease," said Stanley Monteith, an orthopedic surgeon who lives in Santa Cruz, Calif. "By law, we have to report people who have the terminal stages of HIV disease, which is AIDS, and there have been over 200,000 instances of reporting to public health offices in confidence that somebody is infected.

"I've made this statement repeatedly across the nation and never once been challenged: There is no instance in all ... 200,000 cases ... that has ever led to public disclosure and discrimination," Monteith said.

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Some of Ankerberg's guests said the AIDS epidemic is not subject to normal public health procedures for stopping an epidemic.

"This is the only virus that has its own civil rights," Day said. "In every other epidemic, we were allowed to test the patient for the disease without any special signed consent. ... This is the only disease that a person can keep secret from their doctor and their nurse. And yet this is the only disease that has a 100 percent fatality rate. We are operating under ridiculous restrictions for this disease."

Donald S. Burke, an Army colonel who is director of retrovirology at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Rockville, Md., said "what doctors have really allowed to happen is they've allowed the legal system, the politicians, to actually legislate laws that prohibit them from practicing their profession properly. This is not just ludicrous. This is negligent.

"Every time one makes a late diagnosis of HIV infection, it's a failure of the medical system. Every time one of us physicians diagnose HIV infection and another member of the family is already infected, it's a failure," said Burke who is a member of ASAP's advisory board.

"Medicine's going to lose credibility on this one, big-time," said Robert R. Redfield Jr., an Army colonel who is director of retroviral research at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research and chairman of ASAP's advisory board.

"The fact is, the major mode of transmission for a majority of Americans, the major risk for the majority of Americans is going to be if they happen to be those Americans that have an infected health-care worker that's going to do recurrent, invasive procedures on them," Redfield said.

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Can AIDS be transmitted
more easily than we think?

By Keith Hinson

Baptist Press
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CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (BP)--The HIV virus may be transmitted more easily than is widely believed.

That was a key theme sounded by the host and several guests on a recent five-part series of "The John Ankerberg Show," a nationally syndicated Christian TV and radio broadcast. Ankerberg and his family attend Brainerd Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tenn.

Open-mouth kissing may pose a risk for transmitting the HIV virus, said some of Ankerberg's guests, including William L. Roper, director of the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta.

"When we say, 'You won't get AIDS from a kiss,'" Roper said, "we are referring to closed-mouth or social kissing, which is a form of casual contact. There's a theoretical risk of HIV transmission through sexual or open-mouthed or French kissing because of the potential for the exchange of blood and both persons have sores or cuts on the lips or the tongue or in the mouth."

Stanley Monteith of Santa Cruz, Calif., an orthopedic surgeon, cited an Italian study "that showed when they took saliva specimens after deep and passionate kissing, 91 percent of the cases had red cells -- and red cells carry the virus."

Roper said "although there is some virus in saliva, it's not at high concentration. So the point I'm making is ... open-mouthed kissing is a hazard and may lead to the transmission of the virus. The reason I say 'may lead' is we've not found cases of individuals who said that 'Listen, I have never had genital, sexual contact with anybody and I have HIV, so I must have gotten it through French kissing.'"

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Monteith criticized the Surgeon General's Report on AIDS that said the virus cannot be transmitted by kissing. He said the study only examined "600 people who lived in homes with somebody who was infected -- mothers living with children or grandchildren -- and they kissed one another on the cheek or maybe even kissed them on the lips -- dry kissing."

Roper told Ankerberg, "If you're asking what the Public Health Service's advice is on the issue of French kissing, deep kissing, open-mouth kissing, we say it's a risk for transmitting HIV and we recommend against it."

Since some of Ankerberg's guests expressed opinions that contradict widely disseminated information about AIDS -- much of which originates from the CDC -- Baptist Press asked the CDC to respond. CDC issued a written statement by fax transmission from Anne Sims of the agency's office of public affairs.

Following is a summary of other views put forth by some of Ankerberg's guests and the CDC's response.

-- Restaurant patrons may be at risk if restaurant workers are HIV infected.

"They keep telling us that it's safe to go to restaurants," said Lorraine Day, former chief of orthopedic surgery at San Francisco General Hospital and former faculty member of the University of California-San Francisco. "We know that restaurant workers get cut five to six times a month while they're preparing food. And they can bleed into the food."

Day said a friend of hers who is a doctor "has taken care of six restaurant workers ... who had severe bleeding injuries in the restaurant while they were working, while they were preparing food (and they) bled into the food. And several of them admitted they were HIV positive.

"We know that the virus can go through mucous membranes in our mouth," Day said. "We know that babies have gotten AIDS from drinking infected mother's milk long after they were born. They didn't get it from birth. And yet we keep saying restaurant workers don't need to get tested." Day now researches, writes and lectures on the AIDS epidemic. Much of her work is published through Rockford Press of Palm Desert, Calif., which she owns, according to Sue Drury, who answered the phone in Day's office.

The CDC statement responded "there is no known risk of HIV transmission ... from contact in industries such as food service establishments. Food service workers known to be infected with HIV need not be restricted from work unless they have evidence of other infections or illnesses for which any ... worker, regardless of HIV infection status, should be restricted.

"Should ... an injury occur, any food contaminated with blood should be discarded as a matter of good hygiene practice rather than out of concern for transmission of HIV infection," the statement said.

-- Scientists should investigate whether the HIV virus may be transmitted through the air.

Day cited the case of David Acer, a Florida dentist who continued his medical practice while sick with AIDS. One of Acer's patients, Kimberly Bergalis, received national attention after she apparently contracted the disease from Acer.

Acer had "seven Kaposi's Sarcoma lesions on the inside of his mouth. When he was caring for Kimberly, one had recently been biopsied and was draining into his mouth," said Day, who said she was an expert witness in Bergalis' lawsuit against Acer and a consultant for the CDC in the same case.

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"I have said to the (CDC), you must at least investigate the possibility of respiratory transmission of this being transmitted by coughing, sneezing or talking. I'm not saying that it is. I'm saying investigate it. This may be your first case where you can prove this and you refuse to investigate it," Day said.

"The virus ... can be aerosolized," she said. "What that means is the virus can be thrown into the air in small, tiny fragments that remain airborne indefinitely like the dust in a sunbeam or like hair spray fragments. These you can breathe in. They can go through a surgical mask. A surgical mask will only filter out fragments that are 5 microns or larger. The virus is .1. It can easily go through a surgical mask and into your lungs. The AIDS virus goes right through a surgical mask like BBs through a tennis net."

The CDC statement said, "Many theories have been proposed regarding additional ways in which HIV can be transmitted, including transmission through air. ... However, no evidence to support these theories has been found. ... If HIV were being transmitted through these routes, the pattern of reported AIDS cases would be much different from what has been observed, and cases would be occurring dramatically in persons who have no identified risk for exposure.

"All reported cases suggesting new or potentially unknown routes of transmission are promptly and thoroughly investigated by state and local health departments with the assistance and guidance of CDC," the statement said. "Thus far, no additional routes of transmission have been determined."

Day acknowledged some people believed Bergalis became HIV infected in some other way than by her dentist.

"If (Bergalis) hadn't been a medically confirmed virgin, they would have chalked it up to some other lifestyle factor," Day said. "But then when they had documented evidence that she was, they had to start testing."

Day said 730 of Acer's patients were tested and five were found to be HIV infected. "They were able by DNA sequencing, a specialized test, to find out that these five people had essentially the same virus that the dentist had," Day said. "That's one out of every 150 people who went to that dentist."

The CDC statement did not specifically address issues related to the Bergalis case but said, "When health care workers adhere to recommended infection control procedures, the risk for transmitting HIV from an infected health care worker to patients is small. ... These small risks should not deter patients from seeking necessary surgical or dental care."

-- The HIV virus does not die easily.

"The AIDS virus is very hardy," Day said. "It does not die on contact with the air. It stays alive outside the body in body fluids for seven days dried and for 14 days wet.

"The virus survives freezing. In fact it survives freezing at below zero in liquid nitrogen That's the way laboratories keep it for the experiments the next day," Day said.

The CDC statement took issue with the idea that the HIV virus is hardy: "Medical authorities agree that HIV is fragile and does not survive well in the environment. ... Large concentrations of HIV have been kept alive under certain controlled and limited laboratory conditions, (but) CDC laboratory studies have shown that drying of even these large concentrations of HIV reduces the infectiousness of the virus by 90-99 percent within several hours. This drying reduces the risk of transmission to an incalculably small rate, a rate which becomes even smaller when human-obtained virus is tested."

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The CDC said "no one has been infected with HIV due to contact with an environmental surface. Additionally, since HIV is unable to reproduce outside the human body ... it cannot spread or maintain infectiousness outside its host."

-- Intact skin may not be a barrier to the virus.

"The word out there is that you cannot get AIDS through intact skin -- that intact skin is a barrier," Day said. "Well, first of all, that's not true. Number one: How do you know you have intact skin? You can have small cuts and abrasions on your hands and not even know it. Secondly, you have hair follicles, you have sweat glands, you have oil glands in your skin.

"And thirdly, lots of things go through intact skin. If you are seasick and go on a boat, you wear a Dramamine patch on intact skin. How does that get through? Because there are cells that can bring it through," Day said.

The CDC statement said, "Human skin is an effective barrier that protects us against many kinds of germs, but it is not a perfect barrier. Health care workers should wear gloves when contact with blood is anticipated."

-- The probability of HIV transmission increases when a human carrier has had the virus a long time.

"There seems to be a critical amount of viral load necessary for transmission to occur," said Shepherd Smith, director of Americans for a Sound AIDS/HIV Policy (ASAP). "If you think about somebody with the flu and you're around them when they have just gotten it or they're getting over it, you probably aren't going to get it. But if you're around them when they're turning blue and feeling awful, you have a much higher probability of acquiring influenza from them. And that's because they have so much virus present.

"What we're seeing in respect to HIV transmissions is that in early-stage disease, people who have intimate sexual activity even don't often infect their partner," Smith said. "But in later-stage disease, the probability increases dramatically. So it seems that you need a lot of virus present in one exposure for transmission to occur. In other words, we may actually be able to suppress naturally small quantities of this virus."

The CDC statement said, "While there may be differences in the risk of sexual transmission from a HIV-infected person to a sex partner, it is not known whether these differences are related to 'viral load,' route of entry of the virus or the underlying health of infected or uninfected partners."

The CDC statement invited readers to request more information by calling its National AIDS Hotline at 1-800-342-2437 (open 24 hours a day) or writing to the CDC National AIDS Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 6003, Rockville, MD 20850.

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Baptists in New York City
mark association's 30th year By Karen Willoughby Santiago

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NEW YORK (BP)--Church starter Chris Caldwell invited more than 50 people to his birthday party. Almost everyone showed.

"Throwing a party is a very New York thing to do," Caldwell said. "When I arrived here, I just simply decided to go about developing relationships with people and a couple of months later used my birthday as an event to bring them all together."

Five people who attended the birthday party went on to attend a home Bible study Caldwell led that since has grown into Harmony Baptist Church, a multi-cultural mission that meets in Queens.

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Harmony is one of 192 units of work in the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary in October.

This year also marks the 35th anniversary of the start of Southern Baptist work in New York City, which was the first Southern Baptist work on the northeastern seaboard.

James Aaron is credited with opening the work in the Northeast. He was from Illinois, a graduate student at New York University who met other Southern Baptists at a 1957 Billy Graham crusade in Madison Square Garden.

A few weeks later, Aaron and 35 other people met in midtown Manhattan for Southern Baptist worship at a YMCA. That small group determined they wanted to become a church. They called as their pastor Paul James, a man who was pastor of a 3,000-member Atlanta church. James accepted the call and by the time Manhattan Baptist Church constituted in January 1958, there were 99 charter members.

The New York Times said it was the first new church to be organized in New York City in 40 years.

Today, the Baptist Convention of New York (state) includes about 25,000 members, 18,000 of whom are in the churches, missions and preaching points of Metropolitan New York Baptist Association. The association sprawls across parts of Connecticut, northern New Jersey and New York. It extends from New York City to 100 miles north and west, 60 miles south and is home to about 18 million people.

About 80 percent of the congregations in the association are ethnic or language churches. In the five burroughs of New York City, only five churches are not specifically ethnic/language.

The ethnic and economic diversity of New York City is a challenge to ministry, said longtime associational director of church extension DeLane Ryals.

"Manhattan is the most densely populated county in the United States," Ryals said. "The congressional district with the highest per capita income in the nation is here, and just across the river is the lowest. They can probably see each other. That's not all. Four out of the top five of the most racially diverse counties in America are right here in New York City. And the highest and the lowest home ownership ratios are right here too.

"All of these extremes are in this association," Ryals continued. "How do we minister to them all? Just every which way we can."

Ministry strategies include an annual midwinter youth festival that attracts about 400 city and suburban teens; a sweat-equity (with the help of volunteers) home building program for Bronx homebuyers -- led by Southern Baptist pastor Sam Simpson in cooperation with people in other denominations; plus a myriad of ministry activities that typify the involvement of Southern Baptist churches in their communities such as help for the homeless, care for AIDS victims and their families and classes in English as a second language.

"This association ministers to more people than do most state conventions, with the exceptions of New York itself, Texas and California," associational executive director David R. Dean said in an interview in his office in the Baptist Building near Manhattan's famed Central Park. "I think the greatest challenge here is the continuing changing separate groups of people.

"This is not a melting pot," Dean said. "A neighborhood's racial ethnicity can change within two years."

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Providing spiritual enrichment to newly arriving ethnic groups is one challenge that faces the association, Dean said. Another is to provide opportunities for training, encouragement and fellowship for people already in the association.

"People in the South have no earthly concept of what it's like up here," said Fairy Harpe, longtime campus minister at West Point Military Academy. West Point is about 55 miles north of New York City. "We're so scattered and we're hungry for more fellowship, but it takes a major event to bring us together because of the distance, the traffic and the people."

The association will celebrate its 30th anniversary at its annual meeting in October with little more than a recitation of its history, Dean said. But other plans are in the formative stage.

"We hope to have a rally next spring to celebrate our diversity," Dean said. "That will say a lot about who we are."

The concept of a county fair-type gathering to include people and activities from the 15 main people groups ministered to in the association came out of listening sessions Dean conducted with ethnic pastors in the aftermath of the Los Angeles rioting early this summer.

"In New York, we have the opportunity to demonstrate to Southern Baptists and to the world that people can dwell together in unity," Dean said. "We've got to deal with the fact that we're not an Anglo body, not at all. We're 22 percent white, English-speaking."

Virtually from its inception, Southern Baptist work in the greater New York City area included non-whites. The first pastor, Paul James, brought in Leobardo Estrada from Los Angeles. Estrada passed out evangelistic tracts in the subways and, from that, gathered five Hispanics for the first Southern Baptist language Bible study in the Northeast.

"We maybe touch 15 languages out of the maybe 50 spoken on the sidewalks of New York," Ryals said. "We are multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic in makeup, and we are uniquely positioned to be engaged in global missions because home and foreign missions meet here at the United Nations."

The international agency attracts government leaders and entouragees from all over the world.

"What happens here matters globally and eternally," Ryals said. "People in our churches here have connections all over the globe."

Many churches in the association both support the SBC Cooperative Program and help provide financially for churches and ministries in their homelands. The churches' strength comes from what they give away, and it starts at the neighborhood level, Ryals said.

"A church that ignores its neighborhood is ignored by its neighborhood," Ryals said. "What works? Caring for people, listening, staying with them, responding to their needs ... Multiple approaches to ministry. They won't all work but by having multiple approaches, something should."

Church starter Caldwell found that talking at bus stops worked.

"One of the biggest barriers to reaching people here with the gospel is the dehumanization of the people," Caldwell said. "People don't treat others as real people. It's a protective device and it's hard to break through that barrier. But there is a commonality about waiting together at a bus stop that breaks down barriers."

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"Another way is by sitting on your front step," Caldwell said. "That's another real New York thing to do in the summer, maybe because not a lot of people have central air conditioning. You sit on your front step and the people in your apartment house get to know you."

By getting out of their churches and mingling in their neighborhoods, Southern Baptists are becoming known in New York City. Sam Simpson (Jamaican-born pastor at Bronx Baptist Church and Wake Eden Community Baptist Church) served a term as president of the Council of Churches for the City of New York. Tae Jin Cheung, pastor at the Korean Baptist Church of New York, currently is president of the Korean Council of Churches for New York. Samuel Fook Wong leads his congregation, Chinese Promise Baptist Church, in active participation in Brooklyn's annual Chinese street fair.

And over the past 35 years about \$35 million in property has been acquired by Southern Baptist churches in the association.

"I think the future of this association is to strengthen the churches we've got so they can plant other churches," Dean said. "People call this the Big Apple. I say we ought to call it the Big Orchard and our goal should be to produce new churches and have whole groups of different kinds of apple trees."

The growth in the association will come through ethnic/language churches, Dean said. Five years ago there was one Filipino church. Now there are 15. The number of Korean churches has more than doubled in the last five years. And the largest church in the association is a French-speaking Haitian church.

"To go to church is not the cultural norm for this society, so we're swimming upstream," Ryals said. "We help people to be home here, to find kinship ties in church and some anchor. We're here to help people find meaning in their lives in what can otherwise be an anonymous and uncaring society."

"We should be here because people need the Lord," Ryals said. "And he's got a lot of people here."

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Santiago is a free-lance writer in New York City and former Home Mission Board Missions Service Corps regional reporter in 15 western states.

Churches encouraged to open
facilities to the handicapped

By Dave Parker

Baptist Press
9/28/92

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--She drives into the church parking lot, looking for a parking space. The handicapped parking space is not really large enough for her wheelchair lift, but if she parks the van right she will be able to make it.

She looks at the curb to find the curb cut. It is just wide enough for her wheelchair, but the cut is about an inch higher than the parking lot. If she gets enough momentum going, though, she can get onto the sidewalk.

But the sidewalk is awfully narrow. Maybe enough room for the wheelchair. There is a ramp going into the building, but it is so steep Arnold Schwarzenegger would have trouble going up it. And the heavy doors have handles too high for her to use.

She imagines narrow hallways inside, bathroom stalls not wide enough for a wheelchair and water fountains that deny accessibility.

She had seen the church services on TV. The pastor seemed so warm and caring, and when he told her about Jesus, she knew she wanted to know more. So she came. But as she looks at the obstacles facing her, it is as if the warm, inviting church is behind a huge drawbridge that only opens to a select few.

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She sighs as she backs the van out of the parking space and drives away. Maybe she can learn about Jesus somewhere else.

More than 43 million Americans have some sort of disability, which led Congress in 1990 to pass the Americans With Disabilities Act. The act, which gradually is being phased in, forbids discrimination against people with disabilities and requires accessibility in all public places.

Churches are exempt from the requirements -- unless they use their facilities for such things as private schools, day-care centers, mother's day out programs or as polling places.

Vernon Day, a member of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma's disability act study committee, said he is pleased with the act's passage.

Two years after Day, a Baptist associational worker, and his wife, Nona, were married, she was stricken with a virus of the spinal cord. For the past 34 years she has been confined to a wheelchair.

"We hope (the act) will have an impact on the churches," Day said. "The AWDA, as it was enacted, exempts churches but we hope they will comply with the law anyway. I'd like to see them recognize the ministry potential in being able to provide buildings that disabled people can access."

Just in Oklahoma, for example, there are 517,000 people who are considered disabled. "They're not all in a wheelchair -- some are hearing or visual impaired or are in walkers," Day said. "If we have buildings that are not accessible, we are missing a ministry potential."

Day and his wife, in visiting churches over the years, have noticed several common problems with accessibility.

"Any step or group of steps is a barrier to a wheelchair user and a real inconvenience to a walker user," he said. "Restroom doors inside church buildings are normally too narrow for a wheelchair to make an entry."

Even when wider stalls are used, he said they often do not have enough clearance to shut the stall door once inside.

Other common problems are designated parking spaces too far from the building entrance as well as doors and parking spaces that are too narrow.

"My personal attitude is I want to change people's awareness about what handicapped people face," Day said. "When I present these problems to pastors, the typical response is, 'I never thought about it.' And you don't, until your wife is in a wheelchair or you're in one."

At Oklahoma State University, handicapped awareness increased dramatically after the school's president toured the campus in a wheelchair. Day said he challenges pastors and staff members to try using a wheelchair for one day.

"This is not a grave expense," Day noted. "You may need to build a ramp or widen a door. We were at a revival and Nona couldn't get into the church. So, the men got together Monday morning and widened the door."

"It just shows that you want all people of all types. If expenses are prohibitive, study alternative plans, such as deciding who's going to meet the disabled people in the parking lot and help them into the building."

"If you can't do it all at once, do a little at a time and keep at it until you're done."

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Day said a lot of churches across Oklahoma were built right after World War II and have a similar design: 10-12 steps to the building entrance, then an "aggravated" slope down to the altar and a two-story education building.

"The people who were on the building committees then are now in their 80s or 90s and can't get into the buildings they designed," Day said. "I am thankful that as a convention that we are interested in these people and will do all we can to make our buildings accessible."

Day's committee presented four recommendations to the BGC0 board of directors Sept. 15:

-- That Oklahoma Baptist churches take a survey to determine the openness and accessibility of their facilities.

-- That a survey be taken among individual church membership to determine the ministry potential among the handicapped in the community.

-- That churches be encouraged to observe Disability Awareness Sunday on Jan. 31, 1993.

-- That the state convention be asked to produce materials to assist in the observance of Disability Awareness Sunday.

All four recommendations were passed unanimously.

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Missionaries targeted
in money-bilking scheme

By Sarah Zimmerman

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ATLANTA (BP)--Home and foreign missionaries are apparently the latest target of a money-bilking scheme by prisoners, said Bill Donovan, director of institutional chaplaincy for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Donovan said letters from inmates at the Mississippi Department of Corrections institution in Parchman, Miss., have been sent to home missionaries and retired foreign missionaries.

The letters include a request for money orders, with the use of the money varying from personal items for the prisoner to money for his family. Some letters give instructions about how to send the money orders so they can be credited to the prisoner's account.

"It's dangerous to respond to any unsolicited mail from prison," said Donovan, a former prison chaplain. "Sometimes the needs are legitimate, but if the letter comes from prison it has the potential of being manipulation. You need a good, healthy skepticism."

Manipulative writers typically will use the first letter to gain sympathy, Donovan said. They also will appeal to the person's caring emotions and try to make recipients feel guilty if they do not respond.

People who decide to respond to a letter should first check with the institution's chaplain or administrator to verify claims in the prisoner's letter, Donovan said.

"If you respond, in your very first letter make your boundaries very clear and state your reasons for responding," Donovan said. Such boundaries include subjects that will be addressed in the letters and the intention to not send money or goods.

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New Churches of Christ may not
reflect mainline denomination

By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (BP)--The newest Church of Christ congregation in major cities may not be part of the mainline denomination with the same name, warns a Southern Baptist interfaith specialist.

The Boston Church of Christ is a "splinter of a splinter" of the traditional Church of Christ, said Tal Davis, associate director of the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department.

The sect began in Boston in 1979 as an offshoot of the Crossroads Church of Christ movement, Davis said. The group is known as the Boston Church of Christ because of its beginning but new congregations use the name of the city where they are located.

That has caused public confusion between traditional Churches of Christ and the Boston group. Churches of Christ in St. Louis purchased a full-page newspaper advertisement to identify themselves as different from the splinter group.

"We refer to the Boston Church of Christ as an authoritarian sect because of the way it controls people," Davis explained. "They have a strong structure based on a shepherding model where members must submit to their Bible study leader.

"They regulate peoples' lives to an extreme," Davis said. "Members are not even allowed to make mundane decisions for themselves."

The strategy is evidently appealing to many people, however. In 13 years, the group has grown from one community of 30 members to 103 congregations worldwide. Their total Sunday attendance reaches 50,000, according to Time magazine.

One reason for the growth is the demand for a high degree of commitment from members, Davis said.

"The Boston Church of Christ preys on people who were not challenged to a strong commitment to Christ," Davis said. "Their members typically say they didn't feel like they were being fed" in the church they attended before joining the sect.

People also are attracted to the congregations, which rent facilities rather than buy buildings, because of a typically warm fellowship and exciting worship services, Davis said.

The group has a strong emphasis on evangelism and discipleship, but the evangelistic thrust may come from proselytizing people from other denominations, Davis said. The group rejects all other churches, including mainline Churches of Christ, and categorizes them as inferior and unscriptural, Davis added.

Consequently, leaving the Boston Church of Christ is stressful, said Davis who has counseled several people involved in the churches. "They are made to feel like they are not just leaving this group, but in essence that they're leaving God."

The Boston Church of Christ equates baptism and discipleship, Davis said. A key to Southern Baptists' approach to members of the Boston Church of Christ is to understand the "biblical teaching that baptism is a symbol for salvation that is already complete, not an essential element for salvation," Davis said.

It is also important for "Baptists to affirm the individual's competency and responsibility to understand and follow biblical teachings for themselves under the leadership of the Holy Spirit," Davis said.

For more information on the Boston Church of Christ or other faith groups, contact the HMB interfaith witness department at (404) 898-7404 or 1350 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30367-5601.