

‘Kids these days’ busy, alone, stressed out_32105

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'Kids these days' busy, alone, stressed out

By Lance Wallace

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (ABP)-Sometimes the best way to minister to youth is by offering them less, said veteran youth minister Sam Hestorff of Bayshore Baptist Church in Tampa, Fla.

Cybercolumn by Jeanie Miley: Who do you say God is?_32105

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CYBERCOLUMN:

Who do you say God is?

By Jeanie Miley

Say the word “God” in any group, and the images that pop up in peoples’ minds will be as numerous as the people in the room.

Time was, before I’d thought about it, when I believed we were all on the same page in how we conceptualized God. It never occurred to me that a person’s God-image was shaped by his earliest experiences with caregivers. I hadn’t thought about the fact people form their images of God based on those pictures hanging in the Sunday school rooms. I just assumed that all of us had the same ideas about God.

Jeanie Miley

Shaped by the Christian story, I understood God as Good Shepherd or Great Physician, Savior and Teacher. I believed early, and I still believe, that Jesus is the best picture of God we have, but I now know not everyone with whom I live and work and share this planet shares that same belief.

The truth is that most people, I’ve learned, have not even brought their ideas about God into conscious thought. Most people have not taken the time to reflect deeply on how they think about God, and most are operating out of a childhood image of who God is, and then they wonder why their God is too small for their big challenges of life as an adult.

A person’s God-image is the most important concept he carries around in his head and heart. How a person perceives God determines how he perceives himself and how he understands his place in the world. If God is present and available, it is going to be easy for him to trust. If God is

absent and disinterested or uninvolved in the world, then he is likely to believe it's all up to him.

Seeing God as Judge and Jury keeps a person running from God, scared of committing the unpardonable sin. Seeing God as a Divine Butler or a Benevolent Santa Claus, both of which are common God-concepts, diminishes the power of the Holy One.

God created humankind in his own image, and, as some wise sage admitted, we humans have been returning the favor since time began, ascribing our tendencies and traits onto the Almighty and remaking God to fit our image. We humans cannot *not* be anthropomorphic, but I'm not sure that is such a good thing.

My childhood image of God was adequate for me when I was a child, and as a young adult, I had to expand it to allow room for all that I was learning in the world. Now that I am a mature adult, I need a God big enough for the largeness of my challenges, and that is why I need a full, biblical concept of the nature of God.

I don't need to form my image of God from an idea from some novel.

I don't need to define God by one of his human instruments, even if that human instrument acts all god-like and almighty.

I don't need to limit God by the ways that God worked in the past, for God is forever breaking out of old boxes and limited concepts and revealing still one more dimension of his sovereign nature.

What I do need, given the largeness of the challenges I face, is the full splendor of God, at work in my life day after day after day, and the very best place for me to go for a Big-Enough God is the Bible, where God revealed his full nature and character. And I need to read it all, from Genesis to Revelation, to get the full image of who God is.

Jeanie Miley is an author and columnist and a retreat and workshop leader. She is married to Martus Miley, pastor of River Oaks Baptist Church in Houston, and they have three adult daughters. Got feedback? Write her at Writer2530@aol.com.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.

LifeWay Family Bible Series for March 27: Jesus as high priest intercedes for all humanity_32105

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LifeWay Family Bible Series for March 27

Jesus as high priest intercedes for all humanity

Mark 16:1-7; Hebrews 7:1-9:14

By Mitch Randall

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for March 27: Celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ_32105

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LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for March 27

Celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ

John 20:19-29

By Dennis Tucker

Truett Seminary, Waco

BaptistWay Bible Series for March 27: It is important to follow God's timetable_32105

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BaptistWay Bible Series for March 27

It is important to follow God's timetable

Leviticus 23:1-38

By Wayne Smith

Texan had brush with law after distributing literature in Dubai_30705

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Texan had brush with law after distributing literature in Dubai

By Toby Druin

Editor Emeritus

WAXAHACHIE—Marie Bush has a heart for missions, and it's still beating strong— even after a brush with the law in Dubai, a coastal city on the Persian Gulf. In fact, her experience there and in India more than ever convinced her God is in control and will sustain his people.

Upbeat but exhausted, Bush returned to Waxahachie late March 3 after she and a companion, Vivian Gilmer of Myrtle Beach, S.C., were detained for 12 days in the United Arab Emirates—north of Saudi Arabia—for distributing Bibles and other materials in a marketplace.

Bush, 55, a member of First Baptist Church in Waxahachie, and Gilmer, 72, from First Baptist Church in Myrtle Beach were among 19 people who took a side trip to Dubai following a 10-day mission trip to India.

Marie Bush
reunited
with her
husband,
Ronnie, in
Waxahachie
after her
arrest in
Dubai,
United
Arab
Emirates.

They and 40 others from across the United States held medical clinics and evangelistic services in tribal villages in three areas near the southeastern coast. Tom Cox World Ministries of Mountainburg, Ark., sponsored the trips to India and Dubai. It was the 24th annual trip for the Cox group, and members of the Waxahachie church have been involved with the Coxes in India for several years.

Bush served as a counselor and witnessed to women at the medical clinics and led the children's service at the church dedication. She is a veteran of nine mission trips, but this was her first to India and to Dubai.

"I took the trip to Dubai because information about the trip said we would be able to create relationships with the people there and be able to talk about Jesus," she said.

The Cox Ministry brochure on the trip describes activities in Dubai: "Shop, Drop Material and Prayerwalking."

Kay Cox, who directs the ministry with her husband, Tom, said she had advised the group going to Dubai that "there is always a chance there could

be a problem, but technically it is not illegal to pass out Bibles" there.

"I honestly didn't know anything I did was against the law," Bush said. "We had been told there were restrictions, but we thought what we were doing was OK. We knew we were not to give out tracts or witness verbally, but that it was OK to offer a gift."

The mission volunteers went to a vast international marketplace, Global Village, which features pavilions with products from many countries in Europe and Asia. They were assigned to various areas and given disposable cameras.

"We were told in the van on the way to Global Village that we were to focus on children, asking the parents if we could take their pictures and if we could have their names and addresses so we could send them the picture and a gift from America. The gift would be a Bible," Bush recalled.

After "getting our feet wet" with a brief visit to the Global Village the first day, the second day went very easily, she said. Although the Arab women were shrouded in black except for their eyes, they were easily approachable, and most spoke English.

"Women are just women," she observed, and they talked freely, carrying on normal conversations.

On the third night in Global Village, they passed out DVDs with several stories on them, including "Jesus the Carpenter," Bush said. On succeeding nights, they gave out the DVDs and Bibles, explaining to those who asked that it was not the Quran, but "our Holy Bible," and some gave them back.

She said she could not remember any particular instance that might have led to their arrests, but she recalled offering a Bible to an elderly man in a wheelchair surrounded by his family. She told the man's granddaughter the Bible was a gift from America, but when he asked if it was the Quran, she

told him it wasn't, and his son took it from him.

She also offered a Bible to a shopkeeper, she said, but he said he already knew a lot about the Bible and declined to accept it.

"It could have been one of those times, or maybe just the fact that I was being followed," Bush said. "But I have no idea who turned me in."

She said she and Gilmer were in the Czech pavilion, near the back door, when she heard a policeman say: "You! Come!" She looked and saw two policemen and three policewomen and she replied, "Me?"

The policeman said, "What do you not understand about the word 'come'?"

Bush said she responded: "Oh my. Mercy," and immediately thought, "'I am about to disappear.' That was the first thing that ran through my mind."

She responded by running a few feet around a corner in search of Gilmer.

"She was right there," Bush said. "It was a God thing. She could have been anywhere."

The police officers treated them well, she said, but asked "forceful" questions about what they were doing and where they had gotten the Bibles they were distributing, the name of their hotel and how many were in their group.

When Bush and Gilmer pleaded ignorance to many of their questions, they were taken to the Dubai police station, where they were asked the same questions. One police officer brought in and emptied onto a desk the 19 Bibles they still had with them when they were arrested and many, if not all, of those they had given away.

By that time, Bush said, they should have been meeting with the others of

the 19-member group at the lake in the Global Village. “We knew that when we didn’t show up, they would know we had been taken. They were already looking for us, but there was nothing they could do.”

That morning, while packing to leave the next day, Bush said, she had discarded all the phone numbers of the Coxes and other group members. Gilmer, however, remembered that she had a bulletin from the Emirates International Baptist Convention where they had gone for Bible study one night. It had Pastor Dan Marshall’s phone number on it.

“It was another God thing,” Bush said. “If I had called the others, it could have gotten them in trouble, too. Pastor Dan’s visa lists him as a pastor, so it didn’t get him into trouble.”

That morning, before going to the Global Village, she had prayed for divine intervention and “our intervention came when Pastor Dan walked into the station with two of his church members who spoke Arabic,” she said. “I felt God had sent us three angels. I felt it was what I had prayed for, because had it not been for them we would have seen jail.”

Although they were at the police station and never actually in jail, Bush said she was reconciled to going to jail, if it happened. She had survived 10 days in Third World conditions while in the villages in India, she reasoned, and Dubai was the richest nation in the world.

“I felt it wouldn’t be that bad,” she said. “But it didn’t happen. I never had a sense of fear, although I wanted to come home, to be at home. But I knew that when young girls in Dubai get pregnant and aren’t married, they are placed in jail. I thought that I could be a mother to them, and what would it hurt if I witnessed to them in jail?”

They were allowed to leave the police station at 1:30 a.m. and told they could get their passports at 7:30 that morning. When they got their wakeup call at 6 a.m., they were informed the hotel wanted them to check out. And

at 10:30, they were told their case had been bumped to a higher court.

“Our interpreter told us to use any connection we had in the States,” Bush said, “that this was not good.”

Although it was 4 a.m. in Waxahachie, she called her husband, Ronnie, and told him to call the church and her Sunday school teacher, Wayne Willmon, because she needed prayer warriors talking to God on her behalf. He also alerted their children—Matt in Iraq, his twin sister, Heather, who is a member of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., and their oldest son, Heath, a member of First Baptist Church of El Campo. They organized a worldwide prayer network.

After that, she felt every day that she and Gilmer would be allowed to leave that day. Her husband called every day, sometimes two or three times daily, to encourage her.

But each day when the courts closed at 2 p.m. and they hadn’t been given their passports, they knew the wait would go on at least another day. They received some assurances that they probably would be released, but the penalties for violating Dubai’s laws on promoting Christianity can be harsh, including prison sentences and heavy fines.

The day the news came they received their passports and were allowed to leave, Bush said, she had been reading the book of Job during her Bible study, and it occurred to her God was telling her to be patient.

“I thought: ‘Oh, God, you are so awesome. You reveal yourself in your word.’ I knew he had orchestrated our trip to India and then to Dubai, and he was still in control. He was just teaching me patience.”

Although the courts closed at 2 p.m., at 4:30, Bush and Gilmer were informed they would receive their passports if they could get confirmed airline tickets. That presented a dilemma, since it usually is impossible to

get a ticket without a passport, but with Pastor Marshall's help, they got a statement from the airlines that their seats had been confirmed, and their passports were released. They left the following morning.

Bush praised Marshall, a Texan who attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and whose work in Dubai is affiliated with the European Baptist Convention. After having to leave the hotel, Bush and Gilmer stayed with Marshall and his family. "They were very hospitable," she said.

She had kind words for the Dubai officials. "It could have been a lot worse," she said. "They were very gracious to us."

She's already thinking about her next mission trip, she said, although she doesn't know where it will be.

"I would love to go back to India," she said. "I have loved every mission trip, but on this one you could truly feel the presence of God."

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Texas, Virginia conventions to be recommended for BWA

membership_30705

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Texas, Virginia conventions to be recommended for BWA membership

FALLS CHURCH, Va—The Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Baptist General Association of Virginia will be recommended for full membership in the Baptist World Alliance, the group's membership committee reported March 9.

British Baptist Alistair Brown, who sits on the committee, said it is "the committee's unanimous view that both be recommended" to the BWA General Council to become full member bodies of the worldwide umbrella group for Baptists. Brown's report came during the BWA's semi-annual Executive Committee meeting March 9 at BWA's suburban Washington headquarters.

The BGCT and BGAV already are major financial contributors to the Baptist World Alliance, and both already have joined the North American Baptist Fellowship, one of BWA's six regional groups. But the recommendation, if approved by the BWA's General Council during its meeting in July, would mean the two state conventions would become members on the same level as the 200-plus national or regional Baptist groups that make up BWA's membership. They would be the first U.S. state conventions to join.

"I'm delighted that the Baptists of the world were open to our application for membership," said Charles Wade, executive director of the BGCT.

"We know that the Baptist people around the world serve Christ with great

courage and faithfulness,” Wade said. “They will be an inspiration to Texas Baptists. And I believe that we can be an encouragement to them, as together we share the gospel and serve the people of the world.”

The moves by the two conventions come after the Southern Baptist Convention voted last year to leave the global fellowship.

“Both bodies express sadness at the withdrawal from membership from the BWA of the Southern Baptist Convention,” Brown told the assembled BWA leaders. “And they said that the withdrawal from the BWA had removed from them a means of fellowship with Baptists from around the world.”

BWA rules require that member bodies not be an integral part of any other Baptist denomination in their countries. Brown said the committee felt both BGAV and BGCT meet that requirement, noting, “Both grant freedom to churches to apportion giving to a variety of causes for missions work overseas.”

In other news, BWA leaders heard a positive financial report. Despite large reductions in the group’s budget over recent years—including a \$425,000 annual loss as a result of the SBC withdrawal—the group’s revenue in 2004 was more than \$500,000 greater than in 2003. And BWA came in more than \$561,000 over budget for 2004.

Ellen Teague, BWA’s finance director, attributed much of that increase to generous giving by local churches. Last year, BWA began allowing local churches to become “associate members,” and more than 300 local churches—including SBC congregations— have sent contributions directly to BWA.

Compiled from reports by Rob Marus of Associated Baptist Press and Ferrell Foster of Texas Baptist Communications.

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BWA membership will reflect Texas Baptist's heart, pastor says_30705

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BWA membership will reflect Texas Baptist's heart, pastor says

By Ferrell Foster

Texas Baptist Communications

Texas Baptists have “a heart as big as God’s world,” said a San Antonio pastor, and they’re on track now to become an official part of the largest

worldwide Baptist body— the Baptist World Alliance.

The BWA's membership committee voted March 7 to recommend the Baptist General Convention of Texas for membership in the alliance. The final vote will come this summer at the BWA Centenary Congress in Birmingham, England.

Seeking membership in the BWA is "an extremely appropriate and necessary step to execute the vision that our Lord has given us," said Charles Johnson, senior pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio.

People throughout the world are "more interrelated and closely connected than ever before," the pastor said. "Therefore, an organization like the Baptist World Alliance will help us to advance the cause of Christ among every nation.

"We Texas Baptists are becoming world Baptists," he added.

BGCT President Albert Reyes said he is "very encouraged" and "optimistic" by the move toward BWA membership. "I can't imagine a more strategic move or alliance."

Membership in the BWA would indicate a "strong possibility" that Texas Baptists will be "at the center of God's activity in the world for the next 50 years or longer," Reyes said. "By taking the hands of our Baptist brethren around the world, we begin to become part of the family that God intends us to be."

Reyes, who also is president of the Baptist University of the Americas in San Antonio, said both the BWA membership and the BGCT's reorganization are bringing about possibilities of greater cultural diversity in Texas Baptist life.

"We have cultural blind spots that keep us from seeing the world as it

really is,” Reyes said. “As we increase cultural diversity, we reduce the number of cultural blind spots.”

Ken Hall, immediate past president of the BGCT and president of Buckner Baptist Benevolences, also expressed excitement about the possibility of BWA membership. “I’m thrilled for the BWA and extremely excited for our state convention.”

“I think BWA will be good for Texas Baptists” by providing opportunities for “our perspectives to enlarge and grow as we interact with fellow Baptists around the world.”

Hall has been involved with the BWA through Buckner’s relationship with the world body. For Charles Johnson, it came about through two retired missionaries, Jerry and Francis Smyth, who introduced him to Tony Cupit, BWA’s evangelism director.

Johnson attended his first BWA meeting five years ago—the 2000 Congress in Melbourne, Australia.

“It was an indescribably powerful experience of Christian community,” Johnson said. “It was an incarnation of Christ’s great hope for us that we would in fact go into all the world. And we have done that.”

Johnson will attend the Centenary Congress in England this year, as many other Texas Baptists are expected to do.

The Baptist Standard and Texas Baptist Historical Collection are organizing tours of historic Baptist sites in England. Those tours will be prior to the Congress, which will be held July 24-31.

For more information about the tours, contact Wilcox Travel via telephone at 800-438-5828 or e-mail at bwatours@wilcoxtravel.com.

For details about the Congress, visit the web sites at

www.bwacongress2005.org.uk or at www.bgct.org/bwa. Or call Coleen Brooks at (214) 828-5228 with the BGCT for a registration packet.

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Tsunami relief in a ‘relay’ from immediate to long-term help_30705

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Volunteers start framing (left) on more permanent structures for tsunami refugees in Sri Lanka. The finished house (right) is ready for a family to move in.

Tsunami relief in a 'relay' from immediate to long-term help

By Craig Bird & John Hall

Baptist Child & Family Services & Texas Baptist Communications

SRI LANKA (ABP)—Tsunami disaster relief is not a race between the tortoise and the hare. It's more like a relay effort by the two.

Baptist groups that remain deeply involved in helping victims of the catastrophe insist the sprint to keep people alive by providing them emergency food and shelter has given way to the marathon of restoring the communities and hope wiped away by the wall of water Dec. 26.

"This looks like it will be a long term project, possibly lasting several years," said Gary Smith, disaster relief off-site coordinator for Texas Baptist Men, which has had teams in Sri Lanka since early January.



Emergency food aid is giving way to more long-term help in Sri Lanka.

“Our first crews concentrated on feeding and water purification. But now we are shifting to home construction and even building schools and other permanent structures. I think we will be rotating volunteers in and out of Sri Lanka into 2006, if not beyond.”

Karolyn Southerland of Alice, Texas, recently went to Sri Lanka as a volunteer to feed tsunami victims. She ended up cleaning wells contaminated by sea water. Nonetheless, she is eager to go back.

“I want to see if I can do more than I did the first time,” she said. “I don’t think a feeding unit will go, but maybe I can help build a house. Maybe I can help feed children. I’d go back in a minute.”

Every person who serves in Sri Lanka makes a difference, said Southerland, who went as a part of a Texas Baptist Men group.

“Those children won’t forget we were there,” she said. “The parents of the children won’t forget we were there.”

“There’s so much work that still needs to be done there,” she said. “Where the tsunami hit, the homes were shattered. We’re needed there to share, to

care. It doesn't matter if it's a few months later."

Some Sri Lankan families still rely on emergency food provided by Baptist aid workers, said Paul Montacute, director of the Baptist World Aid, the hunger and relief arm of the Baptist World Alliance.

Returning recently from the island nation off the southern coast of India, Montacute confirmed the need for more permanent housing for tsunami victims. The emergency tents provided for so many are proving to be too hot for the climate, he said, and people need to move into wood or block accommodations.

Sri Lankan Baptists plan to build temporary houses for about \$300 each. Montacute pledged \$60,000 to build 200. Hungarian Baptist Aid also is rebuilding homes, with the help of a \$40,000 grant from BWA.

A tsunami-aid summit of relief groups and indigenous Baptists is scheduled for Bangkok in May, Montacute said, organized by Baptist World Aid and the Asian Baptist Fellowship, the BWA-related organization of 4.7 million indigenous Baptists in 55 Baptist bodies in Asia. "By working together, Baptists are able to achieve so much more", said Montacute. "We are all trying to support the work of our indigenous Baptist groups in the affected areas."

The challenge for many aid groups—Baptist and otherwise—is to make the appropriate use of personnel while practicing the best stewardship of an unprecedented outpouring of contributions.

The International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention reports tsunami-relief donations have passed \$10 million. The Baptist World Alliance has received \$1.5 million and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship \$1 million. Some individual state Baptist conventions also have their tsunami-relief programs. The Baptist General Convention of Texas has received in excess of \$1.19 million.

The task is overwhelming. The scope of the devastation stretches from Indonesia to the east African coast, with dead and missing numbering almost 300,000. Most of the money contributed to Baptist relief groups has yet to be disbursed, but eventually the funds will play out—likely before all the needs have been met, leaders say.

The money is both “a blessing and a responsibility to ensure that it is well used,” said Montacute. He said he hopes Baptists will resist “letting the media set our agenda” and won’t forget the tsunami victims when they fall out of the headlines.

“We need to get Baptists to see that needs exist throughout the years—seven days a week, 24 hours a day—and not just when something appears on television.”

So far, Baptist generosity has been unprecedented. The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, which has sent at least 12 teams to work with the SBC, CBF, BWA and other Christian aid groups, surveyed its church members and found 69 percent of poll participants had made financial contributions to tsunami relief.

But relief workers will need patience to match the generosity. While some Christian groups have grabbed headlines with over-aggressive evangelism techniques, most Christian groups agree now is a time to build relationships, not churches.

In many Asian countries, including Sri Lanka, Christians live and work in a cultural mix that includes centuries-old expressions of all other major world religions. There is widespread suspicion among those majority religions that Christian groups are only using tsunami aid as cover to “steal” needy individuals from their traditional faiths in exchange for houses, jobs and food.

“It is hard because many of us didn’t have experience in countries that

aren't open to the normal ways of sharing our faith," said Kevin Dinnin, president of Baptist Child & Family Services.

"When our assessment team was in Sri Lanka in January, I did what I always do and asked if I could pray for every (refugee) camp we went into. But one of the camps was Muslim and I didn't know that. When I bowed my head, the leader of the camp got very upset and chased all the children away from us. It took awhile but I finally convinced him that I was not trying to steal the children but sincerely wanted to ask God's grace and care for them."

In such a situation, Dinnin said, the Apostle Paul's advice that "we be 'all things to all men that some might be saved' takes on new meaning. And we find out sometimes it's harder to 'testify' to our faith in a living Lord by being kind and loving and forgiving when you can smell death all around you, when you are sleep deprived, and when it seems like all the mosquitoes in the world are feasting on you, than it is to pull out a New Testament and share scriptures."

It's a good thing he feels that way because Baptist Child & Family Services has accepted what may be the longest of the long-term projects involving Baptists—partnering with the Sri Lankan government to organize and administer the country's first foster-care program.

"We have been asked by national and regional government leaders to set up a pilot program, initially involving approximately 50 children, as well as train Sri Lankan government staff in how to do child-care and even fund a government employee who will be the liaison between our work and the government," said David Beckett, Sri Lanka director of BCFS's overseas arm. "The government leaders see the need but have such limited resources. I admire their wisdom and their courage in asking us to help them in this area."

Baptist Child and Family Services has employed a Sri Lankan native who has a graduate degree in counseling to help draft the procedures for the program, which is expected to get underway next month.

“The initial estimates of 10,000 orphans proved to be extremely overstated,” Beckett said. “And some non-Christian aid groups are resisting our program because they say all the orphans have been placed in homes. But you often have a grandparent or a single mom already living near the poverty level trying to find the energy and resources to care for children they suddenly are responsible for. And there is no system to support them or to protect the children-in place. The government wants to do the right thing and we want to help.”

That sentiment is found among Baptist volunteers all across the tsunami area, whether they are doing medical exams, cleaning out wells, or helping fishermen acquire new boats.

The tortoises and the hares are working together.

House passes bill to let religious charities discriminate in hiring_30705

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House passes bill to let religious charities discriminate in hiring

By Robert Marus

ABP Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON (ABP)—The House of Representatives has passed another bill giving religious charities the right to discriminate in hiring, even when they receive federal funds.

On a largely party-line vote of 224 to 200, the chamber passed the Job Training Improvement Act. The legislation is a reauthorization and extension of a federal job-training program that has been around since 1982. It funds local organizations that help provide unemployed people with marketable job skills.

The program's original authorizing legislation barred organizations receiving grants under it from discriminating on the basis of religion, race, gender and other categories. The new bill deletes those protections only for religious providers, and only on the basis of religion.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act already allows churches and synagogues to

discriminate in hiring for most positions on the basis of religious principles. However, the courts have not definitively settled the issue of whether religious groups retain that right when hiring for a position wholly or partly funded by tax dollars.

“The bill turns back the clock on decades of civil rights protections in our job training programs. This is simply wrong,” said Rep. Dale Kildee (D-Mich.), debating the measure on the House floor.

But the bill’s supporters said churches and other religious job-training agencies would be unable to maintain fidelity to their mission if not given the right to hire workers on a religious basis—even when using tax dollars.

“Our nation’s faith-based institutions have a proven track record in meeting the training and counseling needs of our citizens,” said Rep. John Boehner (R-Ohio). “Why would we want to deny them the opportunity to help in federal job-training efforts?”

Rep. Bobby Scott (D-Va.) offered an amendment that would have restored the bill’s original 1982 language barring grant recipients from discriminating on the basis of religion. It failed on a 239-186 vote. Fourteen of his fellow Democrats crossed the aisle to vote against Scott’s amendment, while only three Republicans supported it.

The vote came just a day after President Bush spoke strongly of such provisions as essential to his plan to fund more social services through churches and other religious organizations.

“I want this issue resolved,” Mr. Bush said, in a speech to about 250 religious leaders invited to a White House conference on the faith-based plan. “Congress needs to send me the same language protecting religious hiring (rights) that President Clinton signed on four other occasions. And they need to do it this year. And if we can’t get it done this year, I’ll consider measures that can be taken through executive action.”

Bush was referring to several other federal social-service programs containing similar religious-hiring provisions that Congress passed and Clinton signed into law between 1996 and 2000. However, Clinton's administration made it their policy not to give grants directly to churches and other pervasively religious providers, thus rendering the hiring provisions moot.

Bush, however, has aggressively pushed a comprehensive plan to fund social services through houses of worship. Although the effort as a whole failed in Congress, Bush has slowly implemented parts of the plan via executive orders and other administrative actions.

Bush's allies in the House have also attempted piecemeal implementation of the plan in various bills, such as the Job Training Improvement Act, authorizing individual grant programs. The House passed a similar version of the bill in 2003, but could not agree with the Senate on it.

The bill is H.R. 27. It now goes to the Senate, where it will likely face stiff opposition.

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Woman's love for Mexican villagers led to role as liaison for handmade quilts_30705

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Woman's love for Mexican villagers led to role as liaison for handmade quilts

By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

More than 20 years ago, Mickey Burleson and her husband, Bob, began helping women in an isolated Mexican village improve their quality of life by marketing their handmade quilts to buyers in Texas.

La Caldera quilts became sought-after treasures by Woman's Missionary Union leaders who browsed the bookstore at the annual Texas Leadership Conference in Waco, and they began to fetch top dollars at an annual pre-Christmas craft show in Salado.

In the last two decades, Mrs. Burleson estimates the women of La Caldera have made and sold close to 5,000 quilts.

Times and circumstances have changed, and she wants to hand off the

ongoing responsibility of marketing the quilts to someone else.

“We feel led to do other things at this point, but I still have a heart for these women,” she explained. “Love for the people is in our blood now. But I can’t carry the responsibility any more.”

Working with the women of La Caldera always has presented challenges, but whoever takes over the reins from Mrs. Burleson will confront different problems than those she and other volunteers first encountered in the early 1980s.

At that time, the people of La Caldera lived in a dusty village in the northern Chihuahua desert, eight hours by car from the nearest town. Men made a meager living by harvesting the wax from candelilla plants, while their wives tended small gardens and made piecework bedspreads from scraps.

Mrs. Burleson and other volunteers from First Baptist Church in Troy noticed the primitive beauty of those simple homespun bedcovers, and that prompted them to create a cottage industry that soon thrived.

Church volunteers provided the women with a quilting frame and other supplies, and then Mrs. Burleson marketed the villagers’ first seven quilts at craft fairs in Central Texas. The quilts were so well-received, the women of La Caldera began to expand their operation.

Initially, WMU groups throughout Texas donated scraps for the women to use, and members of First Baptist Church of Troy supplied them with additional frames and hooks. Later, Texas volunteers advanced the women the supplies they needed, with the understanding that the cost of those raw materials—purchased at wholesale prices from bedding manufacturers and mills—would be deducted from their proceeds once the quilts sold.

“We wanted them to become independent,” Mrs. Burleson explained.

Over the last 10 years, the women of La Caldera averaged sales of 300 quilts a year.

Along the way, volunteers from First Baptist Church in Troy—joined by members of churches in Moffatt, Bellmead, Temple, Lorena, Morgan's Point, San Antonio and Abilene—made regular mission trips to La Caldera three times a year. Working through the Baptist General Convention of Texas' River Ministry, the Texas Baptists provided medical, dental and optometry clinics, built a church and school for the village and conducted Vacation Bible Schools.

"As we had the opportunity to get to know them, and they came to know the Lord, the women came to feel loved by him and by us. They just blossomed," Mrs Burleson said.

But in recent years, the people of La Caldera have scattered. The market for candelilla wax dried up, and goat herds failed. Then the Mexican government sold the public land on which the families had been living to a private company, and the villagers were forced to move.

Many former residents of La Caldera relocated to colonias surrounding Ciudad Acuna and Muzquiz. Husbands and older sons work long hours in assembly plants for about \$60 a week.

"They're making more money than when they were in the outback, and they have electricity and running water—even if it comes to them in a hose," Mrs. Burleson said. "But the families also have expenses they didn't have when they lived in the village, and they don't have the same support systems."

Although the former residents of La Caldera live up to four hours away from some of their former neighbors and distant relatives, they have managed to stay in contact, start a church in one of the colonias and continue their cooperative quilting venture.

"The women have taken such pride in their work, and they enjoy doing it," Mrs. Burleson said. "They want to continue to be able to work in their homes."

Lack of a centralized location for the quilters will be one challenge faced by anyone who agrees to take on the challenge of coordinating the program, she noted. But the women desperately need someone in the United States with business experience to help them.

"The problem with just dropping the program because we feel called to retire is that the quilters themselves would have a very difficult time selling their quilts in Mexico for what they are worth," she said.

"They would also have a difficult time getting raw materials, as good quality fabrics are hard to come by in the areas where they live, and even those of lesser quality are more expensive than they are here.

"It would be sad to see them unable to profit from the wonderful skills many of them have developed and the talent they have demonstrated. Furthermore, we have come to deeply love and admire these women, and we would hurt with them and for them if we left them with no opportunity to make decent earnings from their work."

Mrs. Burleson can be contacted at 5101 Berger Rd., Temple 75501 or by e-mail at micnbob@vvm.com.

"We will be more than happy to work with any group during the transition period. If they want to do things the same way we have, that's fine, and we'll be glad to teach them," she said. "But we are quite aware that there are probably better ways to carry out the ministry, and we would say, 'More power to you,' if they wanted to try something new."

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Carolyn Ratcliffe's journey to Wayland religion faculty filled with challenges_30705

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Carolyn Ratcliffe's journey to Wayland religion faculty filled with challenges

By Jonathan Petty

Wayland Baptist University

PLAINVIEW—If someone had asked Carolyn Ratcliffe 40 years ago what she intended to be doing at this stage in her life, she would have gladly replied, “making quilts and baking cookies.”

Somewhere along the line, however, her life took what she considers a divinely inspired detour, leading to her current position as assistant professor of religion at Wayland Baptist University.

“This is not exactly what I intended to do with the rest of my life,” she explained, sitting behind a large desk in a small office stacked wall-to-wall with books.

Carolyn Ratcliffe

In fact, when she first attended Texas Tech University straight out of high school, Ratcliffe had only one thing in mind—get married. She met her future husband, Ted, during her first year at Tech. The two were married, and she left school to raise a family.

“I accomplished at school what I intended to accomplish, and that was get married,” she said. “I never intended to go back.”

Four years later, Ratcliffe was on her way to visit her mother. As she topped a hill near Dickens, she felt a clear sense of direction, clear as a voice telling her to go back to school and complete her degree.

“When I arrived in the Lubbock, the first thing I said to mother was, ‘I’m going back to college,’” she said.

She completed her degree in education in 1966 but never entered the classroom as a teacher. Ratcliffe spent the next 20 years rearing her children. It wasn’t until her daughter, the youngest of four children,

politely asked her not to join the PTA board during her high school years that Ratcliffe started feeling “rather useless.”

“I remember praying and asking God what I should do with the rest of my life. The kids didn’t need me anymore,” Ratcliffe said.

A few weeks later, as she and her husband were attending a worship service at Highland Baptist Church in Lubbock, she again sensed that guiding voice.

“It was just so clear,” she said. “‘Go back to school and teach my word in college.’ When I walked into church that morning, that was the farthest thing from my mind.”

As Ratcliffe attended the evening service, she listened to a guest speaker preach about Jonah running from his Nineveh. The preacher that night was Gary Manning, religion professor at Wayland.

“That sort of sealed it for me,” she said.

At age 45, Ratcliffe decided to return to college, entering the master’s program at Wayland. After finishing her master’s work in 1989, Ratcliffe applied to the Ph.D. program at Baylor University.

Although she was eventually accepted by Baylor, Ratcliffe was beginning to see some underlying resistance to her calling from Christians who believed women should not teach men in a religious setting.

Taking seminary courses between her time at Wayland and Baylor, Ratcliffe said she was always the only woman in the class.

“Everyone was trying overly hard to be nice to me,” she said. “But the professors were all very accepting, with the exception of one.”

Ratcliffe said she took one course under a prominent professor that she

enjoyed very much. On the last day of class, she walked up to him to tell him how much she enjoyed the class.

“He looked at me seriously and said, ‘We have enjoyed having our one token female student in the class,’” she said. “I had never even said enough in class for him to even know my heart.”

Ratcliffe said she found the statement “interesting,” especially from someone in his position. But she didn’t let that deter her. It wasn’t the first time she had heard something negative about her intended career choice.

“Everyone told her, given the situation, that she shouldn’t be doing this because there will never be a job for her,” explained Fred Meeks, chairman of the religion division at Wayland. “Jobs in religion are by far the toughest to get. But she was going through with her calling.”

Meeks, who taught Ratcliffe as she worked on her master’s degree, watched her progress through the Ph.D. program at Baylor. By the time she completed everything but her dissertation, Meeks had been promoted to division chair and was looking for an adjunct faculty member to teach courses at Wayland’s Lubbock campus. Meeks asked Ratcliffe if she would be interested in teaching some courses, and she jumped at the opportunity.

Ratcliffe was awarded her doctorate in 1995 and continued to teach as an adjunct professor at Wayland, a position she held seven years.

“She was teaching regularly four to five courses a semester,” Meeks said. “Finally, I went to the administration and said it was not ethical for us to be using someone to teach full time and not give them faculty status.”

Meeks explained that was at a time when there was a lot of controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention, and every move was viewed under a microscope.

“Wayland was taking a big risk,” Meeks said. “Not only to employ a woman teaching in the religion department ... that was risky enough. The seminaries had used women to teach church history and things like that, but not Bible courses.”

Meeks said Wayland’s administration didn’t hesitate, offering Ratcliffe full-time faculty status in 1999. Meeks said, to his knowledge, there has been no resistance to Ratcliffe. In fact, she has been asked to teach at various associational meetings, as well as the Pastors’ and Laymen’s Conference that Wayland hosts every February, and she was just named 2004-05 recipient of the favorite professor award as voted on by Wayland students of all academic backgrounds.

Ratcliffe said she has always felt accepted at Wayland and hopes she can now be a role model for young women who feel called to the ministry.

“I tell them to toughen up and understand that their call is from God and not from human beings, and that they have to follow what God has told them to do,” Ratcliffe said. “Church history is full of individuals who followed God and paid a price for it. I tell them they are going to find some resistance in some areas. Although, I think by the time my generation dies off ... there will be a day where there will be no resistance, but we have to get rid of us old dead-heads first.”

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