

Year in review: News makers in 2010

December 22, 2010

(ABP) — The year 2010 began badly with a deadly Jan. 13 earthquake in Haiti that killed an estimated 230,000 people and affected 3 million. The 7.0 magnitude quake left what was already one of the world's poorest countries in shambles, but it prompted unprecedented compassion in the United States.



The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is part of a cooperative effort to rebuild homes in Haiti. Using rubble from a family's previous home, permanent housing for earthquake victims can be built for about \$3,000

News of Baptist groups reaching out to earthquake victims dominated Associated Baptist Press in the months that followed. In all, ABP published 37 stories on relief efforts between Jan. 13 and Nov. 12. Subjects ranged from immediate [response](#), [fund raising](#) and [cooperation](#) between Baptist organizations, projects like fitting victims who lost limbs with [prosthetic](#) devices and [rebuilding](#) permanent homes from earthquake rubble to recent medical [response](#) to a cholera outbreak.

Other newsmakers from 2010 included:

— "**Bloated bureaucracies.**" The term first used in a chapel address by a seminary president advocating a "Great Commission Resurgence" in the Southern Baptist Convention stuck as shorthand for work of a task force studying ways to improve efficiency of the second largest faith group in the

United States.

Recommendations [approved](#) at the SBC annual meeting in June included a major [revamping](#) of how Baptist associations, state conventions and the North American Mission Board will cooperate in church planting.

The sea change coincided with several high-profile leadership changes. Kevin Ezell, a pastor known for working outside official mission-funding channels like the Cooperative Program unified budget and Annie Armstrong Easter offering for home missions, proved a controversial [choice](#) as new president of the North American Mission Board. After taking office in mid-September, Ezell immediately offered a retirement-incentive package to senior employees with a goal of reducing staff by 25 percent. By year end he surpassed the goal, [downsizing](#) the 250-member staff by 99 jobs.

Two key posts were vacated — presidencies of the Executive Committee and International Mission Board. The Executive Committee [chose](#) former SBC president Frank Page to succeed Morris Chapman, who retired at the end of September. IMB trustees haven't announced a successor to retired President Jerry Rankin.

Similar conversations got underway this year at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. After several years of stalled funding, a group of CBF leaders went on a [retreat](#) in April to discuss the organization's future. It led to [formation](#) of a two-year study by a [task force](#) expected to report in 2012. Listening sessions are [underway](#).

— **Ken Starr.** The [choice](#) of former Whitewater prosecutor Ken Starr as president of Baylor University in February took nearly everyone by surprise. Baylor is one of the world's most famous Baptist universities. Starr's religious [background](#) is Church of Christ, but he pledged to join a Baptist church after moving to Waco.

— **Ergun Caner.** After years of earning a reputation among Southern Baptists and other evangelical groups as an expert on Islam, the president of Liberty Theological Seminary became [controversial](#) after videos of him exaggerating his testimony from a Muslim to a Christian surfaced on the Internet. Claiming to have grown up overseas and trained as a terrorist, documents showed that Caner actually spent most of his childhood in Ohio. After an [investigation](#), Liberty trustees voted in June to [remove](#) Caner as president.

— **The "Idaho 10."** What began as a mission of mercy for two Southern Baptist churches in Idaho turned into a cautionary tale of good intentions gone awry when 10 volunteer missionaries were [arrested](#) in Haiti while trying to remove 33 children from the country illegally. Officials said they suspected human trafficking, while the Baptists insisted they were just trying to find the earthquake victims temporary shelter in the neighboring Dominican Republic. Eight of the 10 were [released](#) after spending three weeks in a Haitian jail. A ninth was freed March 8. The last to be [released](#), team leader and organizer Laura Silsby, remained jailed until May 17, when a judge found her guilty of reduced charges and sentenced her to time already served.

— **Arson.** A [rash](#) of 10 church fires in January and February set off a wave of fear in East Texas. Residents breathed a sigh of relief Feb. 21 with the arrest of two [suspects](#). Jason Bourque, 19, and Daniel McAllister, 21, who had attended youth group together at a Southern Baptist church before drifting away a few years ago, [pleaded](#) guilty Dec. 15 to setting five fires. They await sentencing Jan. 10.

— **Belmont University.** After being out of the news since settling a lawsuit that severed ties with the Tennessee Baptist Convention, Belmont University in Nashville, Tenn., became an unlikely symbol in debate over gay rights in recent weeks. Lisa Howe, women's soccer coach at Belmont for six years, [left](#) her job suddenly Dec. 2 after telling her team she is a

lesbian. Student and community protests accused Belmont's administration of firing her because of her sexual orientation. Belmont President Robert Fisher said the university does not discriminate against gays. Belmont's faculty senate [voted](#) Dec. 17 to recommend adding "sexual orientation" to existing nondiscrimination policies in faculty, staff and student handbooks.

— **20th anniversary of Associated Baptist Press.** OK, so it probably isn't on anybody else's top-story list, but 2010 marked the 20th anniversary of the founding of Associated Baptist Press. Charles Overby, ABP's first board chair, [accepted](#) an award in October on behalf of board members and Baptist state paper editors who founded the news service. July 17 [marked](#) the actual anniversary of the firing of two top editors of Baptist Press in 1990 that led to formation of an alternative news source not subject to censorship by denominational leaders.

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