

Baptist Briefing

Week of April 30, 2008

NEWS

Baptist Leaders Urge Senate to Pass Strong Bill on Climate Change

More than 140 Baptist leaders from 25 states and the District of Columbia endorsed a Baptist Center for Ethics letter sent today calling on the U.S. Senate to pass climate-change legislation

Delivered Monday to Senate offices by e-mail, the letter from BCE Executive Director Robert Parham urges the Senate to "pass the strongest possible climate legislation that recognizes the needs and burdens of low-income and working families in the United States and around the world."

"We are Baptist leaders who recognize the moral imperative to love our neighbors—neighbors today and those across time," the letter says. "We love our neighbors through acts of justice, stewardship of God's creation and advocacy for legislation related to climate change."

All of BCE's board members signed on in support of the letter, along with clergy from Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. Other signatories include denominational leaders from American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, North American Baptist Fellowship and Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.

"If we had had the time, I believe we could have enlisted the signatures of a thousand more goodwill Baptist pastors and leaders who are obedient to the biblical call to guard the earth and to protect the poor," Parham said. "We need Baptist clergy to offer a moral framework for the interconnectedness of the environment, poverty, race and security. We need Baptist leaders to provide a muscular commitment to reformation through individual lifestyles, church practices, public policy priorities and cultural values."

The letter applauds Senators John Warner, R-Va., and Joseph Lieberman, ID-Conn., for introducing bi-partisan legislation and the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works "for beginning to address this important moral issue."

The Baptist leaders called for legislation that "shields vulnerable populations from the disproportionate dangers

resulting from planet warming, spreads the economic costs of changing our energy habits fairly and sustainably and limits the financial burdens that will be placed on low-income and working families."

"We have a moral duty to speak up for the vulnerable in our society," the Baptist leaders say. "Those who have contributed least to the problem of climate change stand to suffer the most. Those who are poor will likely bear the greatest burden economically from any large-scale program to reduce global warming pollution, if the legislation is not constructed correctly."

"We also have a moral duty to speak up for the global poor. Global warming's impact already falls and will continue to fall most heavily on the marginalized in developing countries. To rectify this injustice, legislation must include mechanisms that provide adaptation assistance to vulnerable communities."

"We recognize that significant reductions in global warming emissions require that we change our lifestyles and our energy consumption," the letter from Baptist leaders says. "Legislation must encourage energy conservation throughout our economy." (4/28)

NEWS

SBC Reports Membership Decline

Total membership in the Southern Baptist Convention dropped nearly 40,000 last year, prompting one official to declare America's second-largest faith group officially a "denomination in decline."

New statistics released by LifeWay Christian Resources listed total SBC membership in 2007 as 16,266,920, a 0.24 percent decrease from the 16,306,246 reported in 2006. Baptisms, long used as a marker of Baptist vitality, dropped more than 5 percent to their lowest level since 1987.

LifeWay President Thom Rainer called the report "truly disheartening."

Ed Stetzer, director of LifeWay Research, said membership growth has been moving toward a plateau for some time.

"Many have predicted that membership (an inflated statistic anyway) would soon began to decline, but the statement, 'Southern Baptists are a declining denomination' was not 'officially' accurate," Stetzer wrote in a LifeWay blog. "Until today." (4/24)

NEWS

Mission Board Sponsors Exhibit for Messianic Jews

The Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship, a ministry formed in 1990 to preach the gospel to Jews, will for the first time have a booth this year in the exhibit hall at the Southern Baptist Convention.

Baptist Press reports the messianic fellowship is "now recognized as an official ethnic and language ministry of the North American Mission Board."

The Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship Web site says the group has sought space on the exhibit floor for three years.

"We are praying that we will be recommended by NAMB to have a booth on the exhibit floor in the SBC Convention Center this year," says a prayer request on the Web site. "We would like to let our SBC brothers and sisters know who we are and how we can help them in this race we run together. So many SBC brothers and sisters don't even know that a Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship exists. We need exposure in our convention. With this exposure we could partnership with many local SBC churches to bring the Good News of Yeshua to many more Jewish people."

This year the prayer was answered. The North American Mission Board notified us that they are sponsoring the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship to have a booth on the exhibit floor of the SBC Annual Meeting in Indianapolis, Ind., a recent posting proclaims. "*Baruch Ha'Shem Yeshua*." That is Hebrew for "Blessed be the name of Jesus." (4/29)

NEWS

Christian TV Reports Growing Audience in Iran

Iran's mix of political instability and harsh enforcement of Sharia law are combining to produce an unexpected result--increased interest in the gospel message--reports a broadcasting ministry operated by and for Christian in the Middle East.

Persian-language broadcasting by SAT-7, an international Christian

satellite network has grown tremendously since being launched five years ago, SAT-7's Debbie Brink told Mission News Network.

"We're hearing fantastic stories of people coming to Christ in those Farsi speaking countries," Brink said.

On the air since 1996, SAT-7 began broadcasting in Farsi, a Persian language used by 40 million people mostly in Iran and Afghanistan, in 2002. In 2006 it launched SAT-7 PARS as a second channel available 24 hours a day in areas where Farsi is widely spoken. The channel takes its name, "Pars," from the Farsi word that embodies the Persian culture.

SAT-7's David Harder said Iran's "public security plan," intended to enforce Islamic dress code and other provisions of Sharia law in Iran's capital, may be having an opposite effect on the nation's young people.

"There's a great amount of disillusionment with what people see around them," Harder said. "They're dissatisfied with the economy, with the government, with the religious system." (4/30)

NEWS

Baptist Minister/Judge Says Incarceration a Moral Issue

Baptists should condemn the idea that incarceration cures crime, advocate just alternatives to prison and work to reclaim and restore persons leaving the penal system, says an appellate judge and ordained Baptist minister.

"If I told you that I could cure cancer or AIDS, you would pay attention," Wendell Griffen, the third-most senior member of the Arkansas Court of Appeals, said in an e-mail interview with EthicsDaily.com. "If I then said that my cure consists of building more cemeteries and hiring more morticians, you would certainly reject my suggested cure."

But Griffen said that is the very reasoning behind America's approach to curing the problem of crime. "Building more jails and prisons and hiring more jailers and prison guards is to solving crime as building cemeteries and hiring morticians is to curing cancer or AIDS," he said.

"That does not mean that we don't need cemeteries and morticians, prisons and

jails and jailers and guards," he said.

"However, we should never believe that we are stopping crime or eliminating life-threatening diseases by those approaches."

(4/28)

This Week at EthicsDaily.com:

COLUMN: LEEDing By Example
By Jeffrey Rogers

COLUMN: Gospel Tears Down Idols and Shrines of Politics and Race
By Larry Greenfield

COLUMN: Environmental Racism: Another Inconvenient Truth
By Miguel De La Torre

COLUMN: The Kingdom of God is a Kingdom of Love
By Drew Smith

COLUMN: It Ain't Easy Being Green
By Michael Ruffin

COLUMN: Faith and Values in Summer Superhero Films
By Greg Garrett

COLUMN: Struggling in Silence
By Jim Evans

COLUMN: Should Christians Be Concerned About Our Carbon Footprint?

By Michael Helms



New from the Baptist Center for Ethics

"Good Will for the Common Good: Nurturing Baptists' Relationships with Jews"

"Good Will for the Common Good: Nurturing Baptists' Relationships with Jews," documents past anti-Semitism and proposes a way forward for constructive partnerships between Baptists and Jews.

The 31-minute DVD sells for \$40 to individuals and churches, and \$150 to libraries and academic institutions. The purchase price comes with a license for public viewings. To order, go to

<http://www.ethicsdaily.com/static.cfm?mode=goodwilldvd>.

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