

Police Call on Pastors to Keep the Peace

In Indianapolis police have recruited a growing number of ministers to help calm individuals involved in volatile crime scenes.



Pastors are often known as peaceseekers. In Indianapolis, a growing group of them are being enlisted at homicide scenes for that very reason reports the *Indianapolis Star*.

Police from that city have recruited more than a dozen ministers so far to help calm individuals involved in volatile crime scenes.

According to Deputy Chief Patricia Holman, pastors will serve as liaisons between police and the community at the scenes of homicides, police-action shootings or any other potential crisis situation the newspaper said.

"They have a connection to the neighborhood," said Holman, who also serves as an assistant pastor at Mount Carmel Baptist Church in Indianapolis. "They are the very people that people are looking to for answers." Police hope to eventually have a pastor on call in every district.

Only Two Ministries Meet Grassley Deadline

Only Joyce Meyer Ministries and Kenneth Copeland Ministries complied with the Dec. 6 deadline to submit financial records

to the U.S. Senate.



Only two of the six charismatic ministries asked to submit financial data to the ranking Republican member of the Senate Finance Committee complied with their Dec. 6 deadline.

Last month, Sen. Charles Grassley sent letters requesting detailed information about perks, salaries, compensations and board-meeting minutes to Randy and Paula White, Benny Hinn, David and Joyce Meyer, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Eddie Long, and Creflo and Taffi Dollar. Grassley said his interest was in determining whether or not the nonprofits were operating in compliance with their tax-exempt status and gave the televangelists 30 days to respond.

Because the letter was sent from Grassley's office and not from the Senate Finance Committee, the law does not require compliance. Nonetheless, Joyce Meyer Ministries and Kenneth Copeland Ministries mailed in their documents by the deadline. "Our timely response to the senator's efforts to ensure the financial accountability of all nonprofits is a decisive demonstration of the high standard of fiscal responsibility that we hold ourselves to," said a spokesman from Joyce Meyer ministries.

Benny Hinn Ministries asked for an extension until Jan. 30. Grassley said representatives for Randy and Paula White spoke with his office, but there had been no further response.

Long's ministry did not release the requested information because Grassley's letter was "not a subpoena or a formal inquiry by the Senate Finance Committee," his attorneys said in a statement. The ministry sent Grassley a letter instead, saying the church will fully comply with all laws applicable to churches but that Grassley's request disregards the ministry's privacy protections.

Creflo Dollar, who has been vocal in the media in saying that the inquiry was an invasion of privacy, also sent a letter stating that it would not voluntarily turn over documents,

Grassley's office said. In a letter written by Dollar's attorney, the ministry stated that the "religious doctrine and practices of a church should not be held out for the world to evaluate as a result of responding to Congressional inquiries," the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* reported.

Grassley has said issuing a subpoena is an option open to the finance committee, but that he would rather not have to pursue it. The senator noted that the only time he has had to pursue a subpoena was when he was gathering information from charities connected to Jack Abramoff, the political lobbyist now in prison for fraud, conspiracy and tax evasion.

"It's good that some of the ministries are cooperating," Grassley said in a statement released shortly after the 5 p.m. deadline. "I hope all of them will cooperate in the end. For the focus of this inquiry, ministries are the same as any other nonprofit organization. It's a question of abiding by tax laws just like any tax-exempt group."

Church Planting in US Hits Record High

New research shows that church planting in the U.S. is at a record high. Thousands of evangelical churches are planted yearly and 68 percent of those are still functioning four years later.



New research shows that although denominations have seen decline, church planting is showing signs of new life.

LifeWay Research's "State of Church Planting USA" found that approximately 4,000 churches are being planted in the United States each year—an all-time high. The study also discovered

that the churches being planted are more diverse than in the past.

Many new missional, seeker-sensitive, “purpose-driven” and ethnic churches are springing up. Dave Travis, managing director at Leadership Network, which assisted in the study, sees a new generation driving the trend.

“There is this bulge of young adults that come up and begin to create new forms of institutional faith,” Travis said. “There will always be a need for new churches and new church plants to serve those needs.”

The study also debunked the common perception that new churches usually fail: 68 percent of the 4,000 churches planted each year are still functioning four years later.

Huckabee Surges Ahead in Iowa

Christians lack consensus on who they will support for president, but this week's results in the Iowa polls is showing that many are rallying around Mike Huckabee.



At the start of the primary season conservative Christians are united in their anxiety over the possibility of Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton becoming president. But their harmony ends there.

No presidential candidate has managed to rally the complete support of the evangelical voting bloc, which in 2004 comprised 40 percent of the vote for President Bush. And although polls show that most Americans believe it is important for a president to have strong religious beliefs, the two front-runners—Clinton and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani—are seen as the least religious candidates from

their respective parties.

Yet an increasing number of evangelicals are rallying behind former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who has long been considered a dark horse for the Republican nomination. This week, Huckabee attracted heavy media attention when he overtook Gov. Mitt Romney in Iowa, placing first in a Des Moines Register poll. He hit double digits in a CNN national poll last month.

Adding to the Huckabee momentum, actor Chuck Norris, *Life Today* host James Robison and American Family Association founder Don Wildmon have all endorsed the one-time Baptist pastor while Saddleback Church pastor Rick Warren, who has known Huckabee for nearly 30 years, said he is “definitely presidential material.”

But more than 20 percent of evangelicals said they did not have a favorite presidential candidate. The recent Associated Press/Ipsos poll also found that 24 percent would vote for former Sen. Fred Thompson, and 20 percent supported Giuliani despite his failed marriages and support of abortion and gay rights.

The lack of consensus has been most evident among ministry leaders known for their political activism. In November Christian Broadcasting Network founder Pat Robertson announced his support for Giuliani, saying he was the best candidate to defend the nation against terrorism.

Meanwhile, the National Right to Life Committee, the nation’s largest pro-life group, endorsed Thompson, while Moral Majority co-founder Paul Weyrich, Bob Jones University Chancellor Bob Jones III and pro-life leader John Willke threw their support behind Romney, despite his Mormon faith. And former GOP candidate Sam Brownback endorsed Sen. John McCain, who once called right-wing Christian leaders “agents of intolerance.”

Among conservative Hispanic Christians, Huckabee and McCain stand out, said Samuel Rodriguez, a Pentecostal minister and president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference.

The immigration debate will sway Hispanics away from the Republicans, he noted, but Huckabee's positions on immigration, social justice, life and marriage make him "not your typical white conservative" but one "in the vein of Ronald Reagan."

He added that McCain also has appeal because he "has spent more political capital on immigration than any other."

On the Democratic side, Clinton has yet to attract any prominent evangelical support, but her main contender, Sen. Barack Obama, has made inroads into Christian circles. Obama garnered an endorsement from popular pastor and singer Donnie McClurkin and the Rev. Stephen Thurston, president of the National Baptist Convention of America. He also was invited to Warren's annual summit on AIDS, as were Clinton, Huckabee, Romney and Giuliani.

However, despite Obama's emphasis on faith, some socially conservative black Christians perceive him as too liberal because of his support for abortion and gay rights, said Harry Jackson, an African-American pastor and the chairman of the High Impact Leadership Coalition, a group promoting faith-based leadership among blacks and Hispanics.

Last fall Christian leaders, including James Dobson of Focus on the Family and Gary Bauer, a Christian activist and 2000 presidential candidate, organized a meeting in which they agreed that if neither major party nominated a candidate "who pledges himself or herself to the sanctity of human life," as Dobson later wrote in a New York Times op-ed, they would vote for a minor party candidate.

"Voting according to the possibility of winning or losing can

lead directly to the compromise of one's principles," Dobson wrote. "Winning the presidential election is vitally important, but not at the expense of what we hold most dear."

The group even considered creating a third party, but reached no consensus.

Bauer said differences among Christians are understandable given the unprecedented way the candidates are reaching out to evangelicals. "The one thing I'm worried about is that as Christians we will be angry with each other because we've picked different candidates and that'll make it harder for everybody to join together once there's a final nominee," he said.

Jackson said despite the apathy among many conservative Christians, evangelical voters may still decide the election. "At the very least we're going to be a spoiler vote," he said. "For example, if Hillary Clinton was the person we all said 'we're not voting for Hillary no matter what,' it would be hard ... for her to win." —AMY GREEN

Government Gives Pentecostal Ministry \$3.5 Million in Food

Convoy of Hope was recently given an unexpected \$3.5 million of Meals Ready to Eat from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).



Convoy of Hope, a humanitarian ministry that has responded to global catastrophes such as Hurricane Katrina and the floods in Bangladesh and Chile, was recently given an unexpected \$3.5 million of Meals Ready to Eat from the Federal Emergency

Management Agency (FEMA), reported the Assemblies of God (AG) News Service.

“It’s a marvelous resource to help us better serve people in need following a disaster,” Randy Rich, operations director for Convoy of Hope, told AG News. “We are thankful for the good working relationship that we have with FEMA, and for being considered one of the most efficient and effective first responders.

The AG-affiliated organization said that much of the food, which has already filled 35 semitrailers, will be stored in their warehouse to be used for future international and domestic relief response; 350,000 pounds will be given to other nonprofits.

Global Vigil Held for AIDS Orphans

This past Friday concluded the first-ever Global Vigil for AIDS Orphans, which sought raise awareness of the 6,000 children left without a parent every day due to the AIDS.



This past Friday concluded the first-ever Global Vigil for AIDS Orphans, which sought to honor and raise awareness of the mostly forgotten 6,000 children worldwide left without a parent every day due to the AIDS pandemic ravaging entire nations.

Sponsored by the Christian humanitarian organization World Vision, the vigils, which began in Toronto on Nov. 29, were held in 17 different cities around the globe before finally concluding in New York 24 hours later.

AIDS activists, musicians, students and other leaders joined

to speak out about the children affected by the deadly disease.

“This disease is killing millions—and destroying the lives of millions more,” said World Vision employee and AIDS activist Bwalya Melu, who lost three of his brothers and their wives to the virus in his native Zambia. “But each of those millions is a real life. My brothers and their wives had real children who feel the tragedy of their loss every day. We must safeguard their futures as well.”

In addition to speakers giving their testimonies, musicians like the Brooklyn Youth Chorus and Shane and Shane ministered at events while volunteers helped assemble AIDS caregiver kits to give AIDS workers.

During the vigils, participants read the names of children who had lost a parent because of AIDS; by the last vigil 6,000 names had been read, representing the amount of children that had lost a parent that day.

“This event is like nothing we’ve ever done before,” said Richard E. Stearns, president of World Vision. “But then this crisis is like nothing we’ve ever addressed before. A crisis like AIDS demands a response of enormous scale, both in our programs for those affected by the virus, and in our call to affect change.”

Photo Credit: ©2006 Paul Bettings/World Vision

Country:Uganda

Evangelicals OK With Divorce

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An article in *USA Today* noted that when charismatic televangelists Randy and Paula White recently separated, “the most remarkable part of the reaction was that there wasn’t much reaction at all.”

The same seemed to be true for the split between Thomas W. Weeks and televangelist wife Juanita Bynum. A recent poll from the Pew Research Center for People and the Press found the divorce records of GOP presidential candidates Rudy Giuliani, Fred Thompson and John McCain have not hindered their popularity among white evangelical voters.

After writing a recent *Christianity Today* cover story, David Instone-Brewer is being criticized for concluding that adultery, physical and emotional neglect, abuse and abandonment are all biblically justified reasons for divorce reports *USA Today*.

Mark Galli, managing editor of the magazine, said, “I think conservative Christians are becoming more liberalized in ... making more room for the acceptance of divorce and remarriage. You’ll see a lot of churches that plunge right in and have divorce ministries. ... Marriage is a really difficult thing in our culture right now.”

Catholic Church Leaders

Combat Declining Membership

Catholic Church leaders say the Church must undergo a “self-critical pastoral examination of conscience” to confront the “exponential” rise of Pentecostalism.



The Vatican is worried. There's an exodus of Catholics around the world to Pentecostal churches, and they want to stem the tide reports the Associated Press (AP).

At a meeting of the world's cardinals, Walter Kasper, who heads up the Vatican's office for relations with other Christians, said the Church must undergo a “self-critical pastoral examination of conscience” to confront the “exponential” rise of Pentecostalism.

According to the AP the losses of the Catholic Church have been especially pronounced in developing countries.

In Brazil, Roman Catholics used to comprise 90 percent of the population; by 2005, it was down to 67 percent.

Kasper added that the activity of “aggressive” evangelical movements has complicated the Catholic Churches dedication to ecumenism, which he nevertheless called “not an option but an obligation.”

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