
A S S O C I A T E D B A P T I S T P R E S S

Phone: (904) 396-0396 Fax: (904) 396-4441 CServe: 70420,73

July 30, 1992

IN THIS ISSUE:

- * Ministry to blended families must meet unique needs, pastor says
- * 'Blending' families takes faith, Texas family says
- * House subcommittee explores impact of abortion-pill ban
- * Company to release RU-486 to brain-tumor patient
- * 'Good neighbor' opens home to backyard Bible club

Ministry to blended families must meet unique needs, pastor says

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
 LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
 Historical Commission, SBC
 Nashville, Tennessee

SWEETWATER, Texas (ABP) -- Churches that want to minister to "blended" families must adapt church programs to the unique needs of those families, says one pastor whose church has done just that.

A year ago, First Baptist Church of Sweetwater, Texas, started a support group for blended families -- those that result from the marriage of two persons when at least one of them has custody of a child or children from a previous relationship.

Charles McLaughlin, pastor of the church, said he never fully understood blended families until he served as facilitator of the support group.

"Until I listened to the couples and their children, I didn't comprehend how different, complex and difficult their lives can be," he said. "As a result of this experience, I discovered more ways a church could respond to meet their needs."

Although not immune to the blended-family phenomenon, many churches are unaware of the statistical growth of such families, said McLaughlin, who did a doctor of ministry degree in the area of blended-family ministry.

One study projected that 1,300 to 1,800 new stepfamilies are being formed each day in the United States, and that there are as many as 35 million stepparents.

While in 1970 one of every eight children under 18 was a stepchild, that figure rose to one in five by 1983. By the end of the 1990s, demographers predict, the blended family will be more common than the traditional nuclear family.

High rates of divorce and remarriage have produced a dramatic increase in the number of stepfamilies in the last decade, McLaughlin said. Nearly one in every two recent marriages ends in divorce, and half of these divorces involve children. Within three years after divorce, 80 percent of divorced persons remarry.

"This means that the growth of the number of blended families is too great for the local church to ignore," McLaughlin said.

Ministry to blended families cannot be approached in the same way churches have done family ministry in the past, McLaughlin said. While the two groups share some characteristics, he said, "blended families have additional dilemmas and issues which set them apart."

McLaughlin cited three ways in which blended families differ:

-- Complex family structure. "Stepfamilies have a more complex family structure because of a larger number of relationships with significant others," he said.

Such circumstances produce reactions such as these: "What do I call my father's new wife?" "No matter how hard I try, I will never make it with my husband's daughter." "How can you love two fathers at the same time?" "Why can't you be like my real mother?"

-- Focus on children. Often the focus of a remarriage shifts unexpectedly from the couple to the children, McLaughlin said. The most frequently identified problems experienced by blended families are issues involving the children, he noted.

"Many remarried couples have the unrealistic expectation that they and the children will adjust and adapt to harmonious relationships within six months," the pastor said. "However, research indicates that it takes approximately two-and-one-half years for the blended family to make positive adjustments that begin to produce cohesiveness and family bonding. This is particularly true for the children."

-- Pace of change. The amount of change experienced by children in a blended family creates additional problems of adjustment, McLaughlin said. "Children may be adjusting to their parents' divorce, death of a parent, living in two family systems, and searching for security among new stepsiblings."

First Baptist of Sweetwater started its blended-family support group in August 1991. An eight-part curriculum addressed issues such as stepfamily characteristics and myths; couple communication; new role and step relationships; parenting in the blended family; finances; legal affairs; visitation rights; custody battles; children's loyalty conflicts; and dealing with loss through death or divorce.

Talking about such issues with people facing the same struggles helped participants build a network of support, McLaughlin said. One stepmother who missed one session reported her feelings to McLaughlin: "'I felt kind of lonesome, like I missed my best friends."

Of primary concern to stepfamilies, McLaughlin said, is the "desire to be accepted by church members and not be judged by them." Some stepfamilies report feeling left out or like second-class citizens because of their status, he reported.

"The church must continue to teach against divorce as taught in Scripture," the pastor said. "However, a redemptive attitude of acceptance and help for the divorced is equally biblical.

"The church should follow God's pattern of extending grace and forgiveness. Many have fallen short of the biblical ideal of marriage. Failure to live up to the ideal creates a need for forgiveness, but is not a ground for condemnation or discrimination. If God is merciful and forgiving, shouldn't the church be likewise?"

That attitude should be demonstrated through intentional actions of support, care and encouragement, he said.

McLaughlin noted several ways in which blended-family life impinges on church participation.

Children of divorced parents often spend alternate weekends with their non-custodial parent. Those stepchildren often feel unnecessary

embarrassment when they are penalized or singled out because they cannot attend Sunday school every week, keep up with choir practice or participate in special youth activities, McLaughlin said.

Many blended families report that Sunday night is not a favorable worship time for their families, since many courts set visitation rights for non-custodial parents from 6 p.m. on Friday evening until 6 p.m. on Sunday evening.

"When the children return to the custodial home, some are extremely emotional," McLaughlin said. "The range of emotions varies, but a child generally requires some transitional time between families."

Churches also can be involved in preparing divorced and widowed people for remarriage and blended-family life, McLaughlin said. He suggested support groups for divorced persons, single parents, and teens with divorced parents. To help remarriages work, he said, churches can consider sponsoring a "Couples Night Out" on a regular basis. "The number one problem for some couples is having time to be alone with each other," he explained.

As with the characters in the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan, McLaughlin said, Christians offer a variety of responses to the phenomenon of blended families.

"They can choose to ignore the wounded, especially the divorced. They can walk by, deciding the issues are too complex, the families are too shattered to mend.... Or Christians can choose to make observations from a distance, as though they were sitting in ivory towers conducting theoretical debates to resolve the theological issues of divorce and remarriage.

"What is needed are Christians, like the Good Samaritan, who will choose to create a local church ministry that meets the needs of blended families with a personal touch."

-30-

-- Adapted from the Baptist Standard of Texas

'Blending' families takes
faith, Texas family says

By Toby Druin

DeSOTO, Texas (ABP) -- "Blended" is a valid term for what must occur when two families -- a father and his children and a mother and her children -- are brought together by marriage into a new relationship, said Charles and Diane Kendall.

"It is an excellent term," said Kendall, pastor of Southwest Baptist Church in DeSoto. "That really is the challenge, the faith challenge, to blend families into one."

But both admit it is difficult -- "no piece of cake," said Diane -- and may never be 100 percent complete.

"We've been together eight years, and we have done a lot," said Charles, "but we are not completed yet."

The Kendalls -- Charles and his two sons, Andrew and David, and Diane and her four children -- Chris, Amber, Janelle and Jon -- certainly are not your average blended family, and the way they got together is unique.

Diane's husband, a corporate pilot and Baptist deacon named Jack

Emery, was killed in an airplane crash in 1978. Charles' wife, Virginia, died of leukemia in 1982.

Though left in the same circumstances -- Diane with children ages 4, 7, 8 and 9 and Charles with sons 4 and 9 -- they faced their futures very differently.

Diane said she rarely thought about another relationship. "Trying to meet the needs of four young children and keep up with their activities kept me from having the long, relentless bouts with loneliness that some 'single women' experience," she said.

She ached over the loss of her husband. But the day came some four years after his death, she said, when she was able to commit it to the Lord. "Jesus Christ took a heart that felt as though it had been ripped in two and patiently and gently healed it. He replaced a heart that was so filled with sorrow that it felt like a load of stones with a heart filled with his love and joy."

Charles was pastor of Lake View Church in Grand Prairie, Texas, when his wife died. He was 43 and a recent graduate of Southwestern Seminary. He said he asked in his prayers, "Now what, Lord?"

Unlike the Apostle Paul, Charles said, he needed to be married. But at his age he didn't want to start over with a previously unmarried woman. To marry a divorced woman would limit or end his ministry, he speculated.

That left widows. He was always hearing about women who had been widowed with children that needed a father, and he had two boys who needed a mother.

"It seemed like a reasonable approach," he said, "so I said, 'OK, Lord, but I don't know any widows.'"

He was reminded that he did know one widow.

In 1979, while doing a two-week summer training stint with the Army, Charles had been at Fort Chaffee in Fort Smith, Ark. On Wednesday evening, being a Baptist preacher and fresh out of seminary, he had sought out a church in order to attend prayer meeting. He found East Side Baptist Church and after the service was shown about the church by Pastor Trueman Moore.

During the course of the tour, the pastor pointed out to him a woman he said needed Charles' prayers. Her husband had been killed in an airplane crash, Moore said, leaving her with four small children.

Now, four years later, that incident popped back into his mind as he asked the Lord for guidance.

At first he "kind of swept it away," Kendall said, but he continued to pray about it. He dated a few women, but none was right. He began to pray in earnest. "I said, 'Lord, I just don't understand. How do I go about this?'"

And the Lord responded, Charles said, with "I told you there is a widow in Fort Smith."

Charles said he knew the only way to put that thought to rest was to call the church in Fort Smith. After four years he expected the widow to have remarried.

He found out Moore was still the pastor. Moore told him the widow was still there, unmarried and still active in the church. He also remembered Charles' visit four years previously.

Moore suggested he write a letter to Diane and send it to him. He would ask her if she would be interested before giving it to her.

Diane said when Moore told her of Charles' call it hit her "like a ton of bricks." Only a few months before she had come to a peace about her situation. With the letter, she said, "I felt like God had up-ended my teeter-totter."

They began writing to each other, letters so bland, Diane said, that she refers to them as "Sunday School reports." They never talked on the telephone until the fall of 1983 when Charles decided after eight months to arrange a date. In November, while on a trip to Amarillo, Texas, he drove the additional 500 miles to Fort Smith.

They found they had many similarities, among them that both their grandparents had come to the United States from the same area of Sweden. Charles and Diane drove the same kinds of automobiles, their mothers-in-law had the same names, and they each had an Uncle Floyd and Aunt Etta. Diane was the accompanist at her church. Charles was pastor at Lake View.

After only a little more than a month, they became engaged at Christmas and were married the next June. Moore performed the ceremony and added a time when the children could acknowledge Diane and Charles as Mom and Dad, as God's provision for their need. Diane's children have retained the Emery name. "There was no need for them to change it," said Charles.

The children took quickly to the new relationship. In fact, the boys, after all had shared a room together for awhile, paired off, David with Chris and Andrew with Jon.

Any problem with moving into the Kendalls' home was soon alleviated by adding onto it. A trust fund has provided automobiles and college money for the Emery children.

Chris, the oldest, recently was married. Charles performed the ceremony. Amber, Andrew and Janelle are attending college. Jon just graduated from high school and is interested in college. David is a high school student.

Diane said the transition into a new town and church was eased by the warm welcome of some of the deacons' wives at Southwest Baptist -- all close friends of Charles' first wife.

The Kendalls had their struggles, however, and still do from time to time, they admitted. One incident proved instructive for the long haul, Charles said. It came on their first family vacation to Disney World in the second year of their marriage, when he realized he was dealing with six individuals and quit trying to be the "tour guide" and make command decisions.

"I learned that you cannot control kids' lives," he said. "You can't make decisions for them. As they get older you have to give them control of their lives and their space..."

"We have learned which hills to die on and which ones not to die on," Charles said. "Our house is not always perfect. Our cars are not always perfectly shiny. And we may not always have our Bibles and Sunday school books when we go to Sunday school or show up at the same time. But we are all in church, seeking a personal walk with the Lord, and that is more important than having everything in its place."

They said they learned that in crisis situations, the biological parent, supported by the other, should be the one to apply the discipline.

Their experience has made them aware of not only the challenge of ministering to blended families but some other opportunities too. One is ministering to people who aren't part of a "couple" or a traditional family.

Southwest Church recently has started a women's department, Charles said, to remedy the problem of many single women feeling like they are not a part.

The Kendalls said their experience had underscored the need for churches to have leaders that are sensitive and open to the unique struggles of both broken and blended families.

They urged couples to realize that making a second marriage work requires even more commitment than the first. "They must approach it with the commitment that separation and divorce are not the answer -- are never the answer -- to problems," they said. "Because if you go into the marriage with the option to get out, you will."

Janelle, one of Diane's daughter's, had advice for children in blended families: "Smile.... Have an open mind."

-30-

House subcommittee explores impact of abortion-pill ban

WASHINGTON (ABP)-- Anti-abortion politics are holding advances in medical science hostage, witnesses told members of a House subcommittee July 28.

The Small Business Subcommittee on Regulation, Business Opportunities and Energy held a hearing to explore the impact of the federal ban of RU-486 on medical research, drug development and pharmaceutical manufacturers.

RU-486 is a French drug that may be used to induce non-surgical abortions. The so-called "abortion pill" regained national attention in early July when Californian Leona Benten tried to import RU-486 into the United States so that she could have a non-surgical abortion. Federal authorities confiscated her dosage, and her request to have the drug returned was turned back by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The House subcommittee has been examining for the past three years the Food and Drug Administration's ban, which the FDA calls an "import alert." Subcommittee chairman Ron Wyden, D-Ore., introduced a bill (H.R. 875) in February 1991 that would lift the ban. The subcommittee has held three hearings in two years on the impact of the ban, but the bill itself has not had a hearing and is under the purview of another subcommittee.

At the latest hearing, nine of the 10 witnesses spoke in favor of lifting the ban, because they said far more than abortion politics is at stake. They said the drug also shows promise in the treatment of life-threatening diseases, such as breast cancer, brain tumors, glaucoma, endometriosis, ovarian cancer, prostate cancer and depression.

A representative of the National Right to Life Committee offered another view. Richard Glasow, NRLC education director, said "the pro-RU-486 campaign is a classic case of disinformation and misrepresentation by abortion advocates who want the public's eye off of abortion."

"Abortion supporters are clearly not being honest about their real objective . . .," Glasow continued. "There is no scientific evidence showing that RU-486 has any proven use except abortion. Supporters have exaggerated very small and very preliminary research results into impressive-sounding gains in areas of intense public interest, such as breast cancer and endometriosis."

He refuted some critics' arguments that the FDA ban is based on politics and not sound medicine. Glasow said the evidence is clear that RU-486 is dangerous.

Medical and scientific experts disagreed.

Robert Dickson, associate professor of anatomy, cell biology and pharmacology at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., spoke on behalf of

The Endocrine Society, founded in 1918 and composed of 7,200 members.

RU-486 is an effective antagonist to certain hormones, making it an important research tool for treatment of a variety of diseases, he said.

Initial studies indicate that the drug may help reduce the high number of Caesarian-section deliveries and hysterectomies in the United States, Dickson said, adding that in France the drug has been used as a safe, effective method of early abortion.

"Import alerts are typically placed on products that are found to be either useless or harmful for medical treatments," Dickson said. "RU-486 has been found to be neither useless nor harmful.

"Because of the current import alert, the federal government is implicitly allowing the censorship of meritorious research."

Arthur Caplan, biomedical ethicist at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, said, "The poison of abortion politics is the sole reason why biomedical research involving RU-486 is being stifled."

Caplan noted that this is not the first time abortion politics have held up medical research, pointing to the administration's ban on fetal-tissue research and research on in vitro fertilization.

Cybill Shepherd, actress and single mother of three children, told the subcommittee that American women were being victimized in this war and that "politics has no place in medicine."

When Shepherd was growing up in Memphis, she learned that the United States "led the world in the humanitarian application of medical discoveries," she said. But her pride in America has changed, she remarked.

"Instead, I have to tell them (her children) that America has become the leader of the industrialized world in unintended pregnancies, in teen pregnancies, in infant mortality and in its inability to provide safe, medical choices for women who terminate pregnancy," Shepherd said.

Wyden said the ban has had "a serious, chilling effect" on research and that "this debate shouldn't even be happening."

Rep. Pat Schroeder, D-Colo., agreed with her colleague, saying the FDA was placing "political correctness" on a higher plain than public welfare.

"At a time when our country is striving to remain economically competitive, we cannot afford to have one of our strong cards -- developing new drugs, medical technology and scientific research -- weakened because of a disturbing trend of medical McCarthyism," Schroeder said.

Schroeder introduced a resolution in the House July 21 that complements Wyden's bill. The resolution would express the "sense" of Congress that the U.S. Customs Service return the dosage of RU-486 confiscated from Benten.

-30-

-- By Pam Parry

Company to release RU-486
to brain-tumor patient

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- One day after a brain-tumor patient told a House subcommittee that politics and red tape were threatening his life, he was told that he may receive a controversial drug for treatment.

David Grow of Atlanta testified July 28 during a hearing on RU-486, a controversial French drug that may be used to induce non-surgical

abortions. The hearing held by the Small Business Subcommittee on Regulation, Business Opportunities and Energy, focused on the impact of the federal directive banning importation of RU-486.

Grow, who has inoperable meningioma, told the subcommittee that he has about a 75 percent chance of prolonging his life using RU-486. He said he applied for compassionate, personal use of a non-approved drug and was unable to cut through the government red tape.

This treatment "offers a possible future for me and my family, which includes five children, one of whom is 15 and whom I hope to have the opportunity to put through college. I believe the FDA's import ban on RU-486 jeopardizes my chances to have this opportunity.

"Moreover, it denies me and others in similar life-threatening positions the personal freedom to obtain a drug that may save our lives."

His testimony prompted an administration official to contact him even before he left the hearing room.

Gary Fendler, a spokesman for the Food and Drug Administration, said that the agency received word that the French manufacturer has decided to release the drug to Grow's doctor immediately.

Fendler said the FDA never tried to impede Grow from obtaining the drug, and despite some witnesses' testimony to the contrary, the FDA has never banned RU-486 for legitimate research purposes. "We have never interfered with important, legitimate research," he said.

Hearing witnesses testified that the FDA's prohibition, which the agency calls an "import alert," was stifling important research on various diseases, such as breast cancer and glaucoma.

Fendler said the FDA has not banned RU-486, since that would mean the drug would never be allowed to enter the country. However, the drug has not been approved for importation into the country, he said. An import alert, he said, notifies border inspectors of unapproved drugs that travelers may try to smuggle into the country.

The RU-486 controversy regained national attention earlier this month when Californian Leona Benten tried to import the drug to induce a non-surgical abortion. Federal authorities confiscated the drug, and she has been unsuccessful through the court system in retrieving it.

Fendler said the Grow and Benten cases are different issues. Grow's treatment will be part of a clinical trial conducted under a doctor's supervision, Fendler said, while Benten did not want the drug for research-related use.

Fendler said Grow will be the sixth individual to obtain RU-486 for clinical trial for his particular disease and that other research is being conducted as well.

-30-

-- By Pam Parry

'Good neighbor' opens home
to backyard Bible club

YAZOO CITY, Miss. (ABP) -- Eighty-five-year-old Pearl Simmons watched every day as neighborhood children, enjoying the summer, walked past her Mississippi home. She thought to herself that it was a shame they had no vacation Bible school to attend.

Simmons' home is adjacent to her church, Southside Baptist, a mostly

white congregation near a predominantly black neighborhood in Yazoo City, Miss.

She decided to host a weeklong Bible school for neighborhood children in her back yard.

"I wanted to do something here in my house that I could do," said Simmons, who describes herself as "almost a shut-in." After knee-replacement surgery and a broken hip, she said, she has a "hard time getting out."

She talked to her pastor, James Everett, who gave the okay for Southside Baptist Church to provide a tent, materials, tables, chairs and volunteers. Simmons' back gate opens to the back lot of the church, so it was convenient for church members to help.

Simmons' daughter, Gwen Allen of Traverse City, Mich., drove down with her 13-year-old grandson, Garth Allen, to visit and help. Allen also brought a load of red New Testaments to distribute to the children.

A sign, accented with colorful balloons, was placed near the street in front of Simmons' home advertising the July 6-10 Bible school. Flyers were given to children and adults who passed on their way to the nearby grocery store.

Word got around. By the week's end, the average attendance was 14 a day.

Many rode their bicycles to Bible school. They memorized Bible verses and sang songs. And they took the Bible study to heart, reported Janet Everett, the pastor's wife. "They were reflecting on it because they would come back the next day with a rap song...written about the previous day's lesson."

By the end of the week, the Everetts said, 10 children had made professions of faith.

Baptist churches in the neighborhood will follow up on the contact made with the children. One of those churches will be a new black Southern Baptist congregation, for which groundwork is now being laid. The congregation held its first meeting July 15 in a library.

Simmons said she hopes to host another Bible school next summer. The children already are talking enthusiastically about coming back to Simmons' backyard Bible club next year, the Everetts said.

"She is indeed a neighbor to them," Janet Everett said.

-30-

-- By Shannon Simpson

***** END *****