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Wife of former Dallas pastor
files for divorce in Texas

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Former Dallas pastor Joel Gregory has been named in a petition for divorce, Associated Baptist Press learned Nov. 10.

Linda Gregory, his wife of 25 years, filed for divorce in Tarrant County District Court Oct. 26. The following day her husband, former pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, filed an additional court document indicating he will not contest the proceedings.

The Gregorlys asked their long-time friend Jimmy Draper, president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, to release their prepared statement about the divorce to the press.

Draper issued the statement Nov. 11 describing the dissolution of their marriage as "a mutual, joint decision" based on "a long-term difference in expectations compounded by the stress of public events in recent years."

According to the divorce petition, the Gregorlys have been separated since April.

Gregory, at one time one of the most heralded preachers in the Southern Baptist Convention, ascended to the pulpit of its largest church, the 29,000-member First Baptist Church of Dallas, in 1990. Less than two years later he resigned suddenly, reportedly because his predecessor, the legendary W. A. Criswell, would not relinquish control of the church after retiring from his pastorate of 47 years.

Since then Gregory has been rumored to be a candidate for other pulpits and denominational posts but continues to work in pre-need funeral counseling.

After leaving the Dallas church, he continued to chair a search committee for the SBC's Foreign Mission Board, eventually recommending the election of Jerry Rankin as board president last June.

Gregory, 45, is a past president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He has held pastorates in several Texas churches and taught preaching on the faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Draper urged "all Southern Baptists to pray for Joel and Linda and their sons," ages 19 and 16.

Women's enrichment ministry poses
no threat to WMU, leaders say

By Bob Allen

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- A women's enrichment ministry being developed by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board will work alongside, not against, Woman's Missionary Union organizations in local churches, planners say.

WMU leaders, however, say they are not sure they welcome the help.

A Nov. 4 news release through Baptist Press announced the beginning of a new ministry to involve women in Bible study, prayer and outreach. The ministry comes in response to a demand for materials from women's ministries groups in Southern Baptist churches, the release stated.

The ministry's intent is not to pull women from WMU programs, said Denise George, who was employed as the board's women's enrichment ministry specialist. George is a Birmingham, Ala., author and wife of a divinity school president.

"We are not going to be reaching out primarily to WMU women," George told Associated Baptist Press. "I see this as WMU and women's enrichment working side-by-side to reach people for Christ."

While reserving formal comment, WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien expressed some concern that the new ministry could be perceived as competing with WMU.

"Since we have not discussed this with the Sunday School Board nor seen any plans, we really would be premature to make any comment on it," O'Brien said.

However, she admitted, based on the ministry's description as enriching women through Bible study, prayer, worship, fellowship and evangelism, "there would be some overlap with what we are trying to do."

O'Brien questioned the desirability of encouraging women's enrichment ministries which could in some cases be construed as an alternative to WMU organizations. Such competition for the commitment of Baptist women could have a net effect of undermining missions education, she warned.

"There's only so much discretionary time women have today. I think we need to find out what our priorities are in determining what we offer," she said.

Sunday School Board President Jimmy Draper told ABP the new ministry will not compete with WMU. "We have no intention of having a competing organization with WMU," he said. "We view WMU as an ally and not as a competitor."

"The key," Draper said, is the women's enrichment ministry "is not going to be programmatic." Materials produced will be topical and geared to short-term studies as opposed to the on-going organizational approach of the WMU.

George, who wrote one of the ministry's first resources -- a book titled "God's Heart, God's Hand: Reaching Out to Wounded Women" -- said women need help in establishing mutual support through life's problems. "I meet women all the time that are coping with issues my mother and grandmother didn't have to deal with," she said.

In speaking engagements and other travels, "I don't meet many women who are not hurting in some way," George said. Women are crying out for support-group materials, she said, and the Sunday School Board is "the most natural place" for them to find them.

The WMU has also adopted a life-support model for many of its materials, O'Brien said, but has avoided "support groups for support groups' sake."

"Our focus has been while meeting personal and spiritual needs, we emphasize missions," she said. "We are hoping we can turn (women's) involvement and desire for Bible study to something that makes them more

ready and able to be on mission."

George, who is a member of the WMU at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham and a frequent writer and speaker for WMU, believes the Sunday School Board's ministry will bring similar results. Women reached and brought into churches through enrichment ministries will naturally want to share their faith with others. One likely outlet for that involvement, she said, is WMU.

"We are very much in support of WMU, but we will be separate," she said.

Draper said WMU leaders should not automatically assume that any similarity or overlap with their programs poses a threat.

"I think WMU would like to feel they are sort of the exclusive women's organization in the church," Draper said. "I have no problem with that as long as we are not denied the right to pursue our assignment to produce materials for the whole church family."

"I hope people would not see anything we're doing as a threat to them or anything they're doing as a threat to us," he added. "I just thank God anybody is trying to minister."

Asked about a statement he made to Baptist journalists two years ago, when he denied any truth to a rumor that the Sunday School Board was considering an alternative women's organization to WMU, Draper said his remarks then were "totally unrelated" to the current ministry.

"I was responding to a rumor that I had come here with the express purpose of starting a women's ministry with my wife as director," he said. While that rumor was false, the board has maintained "an ongoing interest in discipleship training and meeting needs," Draper said.

One women's enrichment ministry resource will be "Journey: A Woman's Guide to Intimacy with God," a monthly devotional guide scheduled to be released in April 1994.

George is married to Timothy George, dean of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School. A native of Chattanooga, Tenn., she has written 10 books and more than 800 articles for various denominations. She will continue to reside in Birmingham.

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Virginia won't exclude
non-supporting churches

By Greg Warner

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Virginia Baptists decided not to require churches to contribute money to their statewide organization in order to participate in it.

Messengers to the Baptist General Association of Virginia narrowly defeated a motion Nov. 10 that would have amended their constitution to exclude those churches that fund Southern Baptist work, as required, but not on the state level.

Some conservative Virginia Baptist churches that disapprove of the moderate-controlled BGAV have been bypassing the state association in recent years and sending all their denominational contributions to the national Southern Baptist Convention.

Although that practice has not prevented those churches from participating in the BGAV, it has hurt the finances of the state association, critics say.

Virginia Baptists have failed to meet their state budget for at least three years. During the annual BGAV meeting Nov. 9-10, Virginia Baptists adopted a significantly smaller budget for 1994 that is more in line with the

recent reduced giving. The new \$15.5 million budget is a 5 percent reduction from 1993.

In other action, the 4,000 messengers elected a slate of moderate officers and formalized relationships between Virginia Baptists and the Baptist Joint Committee and Associated Baptist Press.

They also toughened their stand against homosexuality but declined several times during the two-day meeting to deal with the issue of abortion.

The constitutional question about how churches qualify for membership in the BGAV produced the most debate and one of the closest votes during the generally peaceful annual meeting.

Bob McKinley of Tappahannock introduced the motion, which would have based membership in the BGAV on contributions "to the Virginia portion" of the Cooperative Program, the SBC-wide budget that funds denominational work. Each state convention keeps a portion of Cooperative Program contributions -- unless instructed otherwise by the contributing churches -- and sends the rest to national SBC coffers.

"This is a matter of simple fairness," McKinley said. "If you wish to participate, you should help pay the bill."

But opponents said the change would be divisive and exclusionary. "We're already divided enough. We don't need another wedge," said Tim Piland of Suffolk.

Charles Fuller of Roanoke said he supports the concept that participating churches should contribute, but he added, "We don't need to create ... the perception of exclusiveness."

Mark Olson of South Boston, who supported the amendment, argued that churches opposed to specific BGAV causes can withhold their funds from those causes. "We're not asking you to give against your conscience but to give generously," he said.

Although 60.5 percent of messengers approved the motion, the measure fell slightly short of the two-thirds majority needed for constitutional changes. The vote was 1,959 to 1,279.

A related measure also failed, one that would have initiated a study of the term "cooperation" as used in the constitution to define membership.

But messengers did authorize a dialogue with the Southern Baptist Conservatives in Virginia, an alternative organization set up earlier this year by conservatives opposed to some BGAV actions.

Another dialogue was authorized between Virginia Baptists and three other Baptist bodies that operate in the state -- the American Baptist Churches, a predominantly white denomination that is strongest in the North, and two predominantly black denominations, the Progressive National Baptist Convention and the Baptist General Convention of Virginia.

The dialogue is intended to boost "voluntary cooperation" and "mutual understanding" among the groups. The motion was approved by a margin of 50 votes -- 1,297 to 1,257. A similar motion narrowly failed last year.

The dialogue task was assigned to the BGAV's denominational relations committee, which in recent years has produced several major changes in the way the BGAV functions. One such change is the concept of "shared ministries," by which the state association provides direct financial support to organizations outside the SBC structure.

At this year's meeting, messengers overwhelmingly approved formal "shared ministry" relationships with the Baptist Joint Committee, a Washington-based religious-liberty agency recently defunded by the SBC, and Associated Baptist Press, an autonomous national news service set up after SBC conservatives fired the editors of the denomination's official news service in 1990.

Under the agreements, negotiated by the denominational relations committee, Virginia Baptists will provide funding and appoint some trustees

for the two organizations.

A similar relationship was established last year with the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, a new moderate seminary.

The committee also issued a statement of support for Woman's Missionary Union, the SBC's mission-support auxiliary for women, and deplored recent attacks on "the integrity and commitment" of WMU.

The committee asked that its work be extended to 1996 through appointment of another nine-member committee. The denominational relations committee was begun in a different form in 1988 in response to the SBC controversy.

At this year's convention, messengers adopted a resolution which described homosexual behavior as "sinful and unacceptable for Christians" and which discouraged "elevating those who practice it to positions of leadership."

The same resolution was adopted prior to last year's annual meeting by the BGAV's General Board in what some said was an attempt to keep the issue from surfacing at last year's annual meeting. Last year messengers did decline to adopt the board's statement as their own, instead endorsing a resolution that stopped short of calling homosexual behavior sinful.

As a result, the BGAV endured a year of criticism from those who said the association was soft on homosexuality. To stem that criticism, the General Board recommended that the anti-homosexual statement be adopted by the full association this year.

Opponents said the resolution singled out one sin over others. "To elevate the sin of homosexuality sort of leaves my sins out," said David Melnick of McLean.

"We are not singling out one sin," countered John Boquist of Yorktown. "The world is singling it out for us and to us. We are being forced to accept it."

After a move to postpone action indefinitely failed, the statement easily won the 75 percent approval required for resolutions.

But messengers were more reluctant to act on another controversial issue -- abortion. They defeated at least three attempts by conservatives to deal with the issue, including one motion that requested the BGAV's Christian Life Committee to study abortion from "a biblical perspective" and recommend "an appropriate course of action."

Also defeated were motions requesting the Christian Life Committee to define "sanctity of human life" and requiring the committee to prepare and distribute materials on abortion.

The BGAV's resolutions committee likewise declined to act on a proposed anti-abortion resolution. In fact, the committee avoided action on several controversial topics, including secular politics, religious freedom, "basic doctrine," and crime and violence.

Passed was a resolution of appreciation for organizers of the annual meeting and one calling for prayer and fasting for spiritual renewal.

The new smaller budget is "much more realistic" than recent budgets that had not been met, Nat Kellum, BGAV treasurer, told messengers.

The association is \$1 million under the 1993 budget of \$16.3 million after only 10 months and is operating on 88 percent of budgeted income, messengers were told. "This has been a very difficult year for us," Kellum said.

Conservatives blame the budget shortfall on the BGAV's new funding procedure, which allows churches to choose one of three methods for distributing their mission gifts outside Virginia.

Sixteen percent of churches have chosen the plan that funds only SBC causes; 6 percent have chosen the plan that funds only the causes of the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship; and 63 percent have chosen the plan

that combines the two approaches. Fourteen percent have drafted their own distribution plan.

Moderates say the downturn is the result of conservatives bypassing all the BGAV's funding options and sending their missions contributions directly to the SBC.

Moderate-backed presidential candidate Ron Crawford was elected in a runoff. Crawford, pastor of Lakeside Baptist Church in Richmond, won 49.9 percent of the vote on the first ballot, while conservative-backed Vander Warner of Richmond received 27 percent and centrist Cecil Chambers of Richmond won 23 percent.

Warner then withdrew from the race and endorsed Chambers. But Crawford won the runoff anyway with 58 percent of the vote.

Two other moderate candidates were elected -- Mark Olson of South Boston as first vice president and Mary Wilson of Falls Church as second vice president.

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Court broadens protections
against sexual harassment

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- How should men and women treat each other in the workplace? While many Baptists seek a biblical model, the nation's highest court pursues a legal solution.

The U.S. Supreme Court handed down a unanimous decision Nov. 9 that broadens protections for victims of sexual harassment and is expected to make it easier for them to bring claims.

Overtaking a lower-court ruling, the Supreme Court said that a woman who claimed sexual harassment did not have to prove she had suffered psychological injury to collect damages from her employer.

The court held that any sexual harassment creates an "abusive work environment," and that it need not "seriously affect (an employee's) psychological well-being" or lead to "injury" in order for a victim to sue.

Writing the opinion of the court, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor said a work place "permeated with 'discriminatory intimidation, ridicule, and insult' that is 'sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the victim's employment and create an abusive working environment,'" violates the employee's civil rights.

When a work environment becomes so hostile as to be "abusive" is not "a mathematically precise test," she wrote. "We need not answer today all the potential questions it raises But we can say that whether an environment is 'hostile' or 'abusive' can be determined only by looking at all the circumstances."

Those circumstances may include: frequency and severity of conduct; whether it is physically threatening or humiliating, rather than merely offensive; and whether it unreasonably interferes with work performance.

"While psychological harm, like any other relevant factor, may be taken into account, no single factor is required," the opinion said.

The ruling came in the case of Harris vs. Forklift Systems Inc. An employee, Teresa Harris, complained that Charles Hardy, the president of the equipment rental company, often made her the target of unwanted sexual innuendos.

A federal district court in Tennessee denied her petition, holding that Hardy's conduct was offensive but not abusive because it was not "so severe as to be expected to seriously affect (her) psychological well-being."

Supreme Court justices Antonin Scalia and Ruth Bader Ginsburg filed concurring opinions overruling the lower court.

The term "abusive" is not a clear standard, Scalia wrote. "Be that as it may, I know of no alternative to the course the Court today has taken. One of the factors mentioned in the Court's non-exhaustive list -- whether the conduct unreasonably interferes with an employee's work performance -- would, if it were made an absolute test, provide greater guidance to juries and employers."

Ginsburg, the newest member on the bench, said, "The critical issue is whether members of one sex are exposed to disadvantageous terms or conditions of employment to which members of the other sex are not exposed."

The ruling drew widespread approval from women and employers.

Baptist college professor Carolyn Blevins said the ruling "is an affirmation to women that unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature is not to be permitted."

Blevins, who teaches church history at Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn., and has written on sexual abuse, said Christians likewise will welcome the decision.

"Sexual harassment has not been appropriate for those with a biblical perspective, and the Supreme Court is simply recognizing that it is not legal either," said Blevins, an associate of the Baptist Center for Ethics.

The Christian's opposition to sexual harassment is based on respect for God's creation, she said. "Since each of us is created by him, we are to respect his creation. ... Harassment is not respect."

A lot of "vagaries" remain in laws governing harassment, Blevins conceded. "It is still ill-defined, but at least it is better defined." Some people are predicting the court's ruling will actually make employers more reluctant to hire women and could spawn frivolous harassment lawsuits.

But Blevins suggested the ruling's net effect will be less sexual harassment. She agreed with other observers that the ruling can help employers by giving them some guidelines about appropriate behavior. But it poses no threat to most, she said.

"The individual whose business is built on respect of the individual has nothing to fear. ... For the employer who is not sexual harassing, it is of no consequence."

Sexual harassment emerged as an issue on Capitol Hill when Oklahoma law professor Anita Hill accused Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment during his confirmation hearings as a Supreme Court justice. Two years later, the issue continues to plague Washington, with several women claiming sexual misconduct by Sen. Bob Packwood, R-Ore.

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Success of updated "Messiah"
gives producers reason to sing

By Mark Wingfield

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Roll over, Handel. The pop version of your "Messiah" is a hit, giving its producers plenty of reason to sing "Hallelujah!"

A touring version of "The Young Messiah," based on a contemporary adaptation of Handel's masterpiece, has been among the top-drawing concerts in America the last three years.

That's not just a ranking among Christian concerts, but among all major concert tours in the United States.

For example, "The Young Messiah" last year drew a bigger crowd in

Charlotte, N.C., and St. Louis, Mo., than Bruce Springsteen. It outdrew Michael Bolton in Houston and Clint Black in Nashville.

Last year, "The Young Messiah" featured the seventh-highest grossing concerts in America. That means the tour's 12 concerts during November and December 1992 drew average ticket sales in each location greater than most of the biggest acts in pop, country and rock music.

"The Young Messiah" ranked fourth last year in average number of tickets sold per concert -- right behind country superstar Garth Brooks.

An updated "Young Messiah" tour hits the road Nov. 26 with a 12-city itinerary. Performances are slated for Memphis, Indianapolis, Atlanta, St. Louis, Dallas, Tulsa, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Chicago, Denver, Anaheim and Kansas City.

More than 200,000 people are expected to attend this year's concerts.

So what makes "The Young Messiah" so popular?

There are at least three factors, according to Norman Miller, a Southern Baptist who arranged the contemporary musical setting and produces the annual tour. Miller recently moved to Nashville, Tenn., from Norfolk, Va., where he was a member of First Baptist Church.

First, doing the tour during the Christmas season is a natural draw, he said. The period between Thanksgiving and Christmas is traditionally a "dead" time for major arenas, yet "Messiah" has its greatest appeal during the holiday season, he said.

Second, Americans' familiarity with and love of "Messiah" makes for an easy sell, he added.

Third, the tour offers more popular artists in one event than most concert-goers can imagine, he said. For example, this year's cast includes 11 of the hottest acts in contemporary Christian music.

Co-hosts of the program are Sandi Patti and Carman. Other participants include Steven Curtis Chapman, BeBe and CeCe Winans, Michael English, Twila Paris, Larnelle Harris, 4HIM, Wayne Watson, Steve Green and First Call.

The cast also includes a 200-voice choir directed by legendary composer Ralph Carmichael.

A new recording of "The Young Messiah" also has been released this year by Sparrow Records.

Further, the tour's Chicago performance Dec. 9 will be broadcast live nationwide on a cable pay-per-view system and then rebroadcast throughout December.

The tour draws a diverse crowd, Miller said in a telephone interview. "A lot of people come along with their kids, and people come with their parents. It's very much a family thing."

And despite tampering with one of Christianity's best-loved musical classics, the project has drawn far more praise than criticism, Miller said.

"Everybody was skeptical about it at first," he said. "They felt the purists would be up in arms."

"After the first recording, I got maybe a half-dozen critical letters. A lot of purists have come to me and said, 'I'll never listen to the original again.'"

Finding such strong converts to the contemporary "Messiah" sounds odd even to Miller, who said he still listens to the original version repeatedly. "This was not meant to replace the original 'Messiah' in any way."

Actually, Handel's original version drew more than a few raised eyebrows in his day, noted Rick Hoganson, a tour promoter. "Messiah" was written in 1742.

"The composer's early performances, which featured such controversial innovations as syncopated rhythms and improvising soloists, incurred the

official censure of church and political leaders alike," Hoganson said.

The "Young Messiah" tour is a three-hour concert, of which only the latter half is the contemporary rendition of "Messiah." The first half features traditional Christmas hymns and carols performed by the cast and choir.

This year's tour also is affiliated with World Vision to promote sponsorship of underprivileged children around the world.

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Regular churchgoers see America
more positively than others

GLENDALE, Calif. (ABP) -- Americans who attend church regularly are far more optimistic about the nation's condition than those who attend church seldom or never, a new Barna poll has found.

For example, less than 10 percent of all Americans believe citizens have improved their moral values in the last 10 years, and more than 20 percent believe moral values have declined. The majority (65 percent) believe moral values have not changed either for the better or the worse.

However, people whose beliefs classify them as "born-again" Christians are significantly less likely (14 percent compared to 20 percent nationwide) to say moral values have declined.

Similar trends were found in measuring attitudes about spiritual commitment, honesty and integrity, and personal selfishness.

Weekly churchgoers (27 percent) are far more likely than people who never attend church (11 percent) to see improvement in Americans' spiritual commitment.

Weekly churchgoers (26 percent) also are less likely to see decline in honesty than people who attend worship sporadically (47 percent).

Weekly churchgoers (27 percent) also are less likely to believe dishonesty has gotten worse than are irregular churchgoers (47 percent).

"It is ironic that churched Americans see less moral decline and more spiritual improvement over the past 10 years than do Americans living outside the boundaries of church life," said pollster George Barna.

"It makes one wonder whether people who are active in churches are far more insulated from the wider society than are those who are only sporadically involved. Many churched Americans may simply be unable to see beyond the sanctuary door to what is going on in the rest of the country."

Churchgoers may be suggesting that others are experiencing the progress they see in their own lives, Barna said. "And they may not be right to do so."

Data for this study were drawn from a national random sample of American adults in July and August 1993.

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