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## **House votes to override veto of abortion measure**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. House of Representatives voted 296-132 to override President Clinton's veto of a ban on a controversial late-term abortion procedure.

The July 23 vote was an attempt to ban the abortion procedure commonly referred to as "partial-birth abortion" despite Clinton's veto of a bill passed by Congress last year.

The ban would impose fines and up to two years in prison for doctors performing the procedure, which involves partially delivering a fetus through the birth canal before terminating it.

The ban would allow the procedure to be used in rare cases, when it is needed to save the life of the mother. Clinton vetoed the measure, however, after asking Congress to include a broader exception which would allow it to be used in cases where continuing a pregnancy could result in "serious harm" to a woman's health.

House members engaged in emotional debate before taking the override vote.

Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., said that "people of good will can be on both sides of this issue." But he said lessons learned during slavery and the Holocaust should be applied to the fight for the unborn.

Hyde said "dehumanizing people" was the lesson of slavery and the Holocaust. "History is nothing if it doesn't teach us something." He added that the partial-birth abortion procedure is "unworthy of a civilized society."

Hyde said that throughout its history, America has struggled to create a society of inclusion. "This great trajectory in our national history has been shattered by Roe vs. Wade and its progeny," he said. "By denying an entire class of human beings the welcome and the protection of our laws, we have betrayed what is best in our tradition," Hyde said.

He said the problem is health versus life. "If you put those on the scale, life weighs heavier," Hyde said.

Opponents of the ban disagreed strongly.

"It's time to stop playing politics with the lives and health of American women," said Rep. Nita Lowey, D-N.Y. "We must ensure that women have access to abortions if their lives and health are endangered."

Lowey said the ban is clearly unconstitutional.

"We have to trust the women of America, not the government, ... to make this very, very personal choice," she said.

Lowey said: "The GOP leadership, unfortunately, has been waging war on abortion rights since taking over this House in 1994. This is the 93rd vote on reproductive rights in less than four years. ... The goal is clear: ban every abortion procedure by procedure, month by month."

"We have a different vision," she said. "We want to reduce the number of abortions not by making them illegal but by empowering women to make healthy choices about their own reproductive health care."

Lowey said a recent vote in the House to ensure that health plans of federal employees cover prescription contraceptives would reduce the number of abortions. "It passed because the American people are tired of these polarizing debates," she said. "They want common-sense solutions to preventing unintended pregnancy and reducing the number of abortions. Increased access to contraceptive coverage is one such approach. The bill before us frankly, my colleagues, is not," she said.

A veto override also requires Senate approval. The Senate fell three votes shy of a two-thirds majority when it passed the ban last year.

The House approved the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act March 20, 1997, by a vote of 295-136. The Senate approved a slightly altered version of the bill May 20, 1997, on a 64-36 vote. After the House cleared those changes Oct. 8, 1997, Clinton vetoed the measure Oct. 10.

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## **50 Christian leaders affirm family statement**

DALLAS (ABP) -- More than 50 evangelical leaders have signed a statement affirming a statement on the family adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in June.

Dennis Rainey, founder of FamilyLife, a branch of Campus Crusade for Christ that focuses on marriage and family issues, collected signatures endorsing the statement, which includes a call for wives to "submit graciously" to their husbands, according to Religion News Service.

"I knew that the vast majority of Bible-believing Christians would not only agree with their statement but embrace it unashamedly as the timeless truth of Scripture," Rainey said at a July 15 press conference in Dallas during the CBA International Convention, a meeting of Christian retailers.

Rainey said he wrote Christian leaders, asking them to support "what is one of the most important issues of our time."

Among those signing the statement, which reads "I affirm the statement on the family issued by the 1998 Southern Baptist Convention," were Prison Fellowship founder Chuck Colson, Promise Keepers founder Bill McCartney, National Religious Broadcasters president Brandt Gustavson and Gov. Mike Huckabee of Arkansas.

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-- By ABP staff

## Clinton releases grants to faith-based groups

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President Bill Clinton announced July 22 more than \$2.5 million in grants for community-based programs, including some that are religiously affiliated, which work to curb youth violence, drug and gang involvement and other juvenile problems.

Clinton said the Justice Department will make the \$135,000 grants available in 16 cities "to help law enforcement, schools, business and faith communities together work to prevent truancy, mentor, teach values, and offer children positive alternatives to gangs and drugs."

He made the announcement at a White House ceremony with religious and community leaders. "What is working in America is a community-based, prevention-oriented, broad-based partnership to try to bring crime down and bring our kids back. And the faith community has an important role to play," Clinton said.

The president's "Value-based Violence Prevention" initiative is modeled on a program in Boston, where there has been a dramatic reduction in youth violence.

"No partner is more critical to this strategy than the faith community," said Boston Police Commissioner Paul Evans.

He said that police, principals, pastors and other community leaders joined together to take responsibility to stop gangs, guns and drugs.

Evans told Associated Baptist Press that Boston officials were careful not to violate the separation of church and state through granting tax dollars to religious organizations. "We don't give money to churches to push their doctrine. ... Religion really doesn't play a role that much," he said. Evans said the faith-based groups bring credibility and are willing to work with other religious and community groups to help young people.

A White House press official told ABP the Clinton administration, working with Justice Department officials, put in place two safeguards for church-state concerns.

The official said grants cannot be used to advance religious activities. Also, she said there can be no direct aid to "pervasively sectarian institution, like churches."

Several congressional proposals designed to boost funds for community-based programs do not contain such safeguards and would allow funds to go directly to churches and nonprofit groups that are affiliated with a church.

But Rob Boston, associate communications director at Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said his group still has concerns about Clinton's proposal and would like more information.

Boston said the proposal leaves many unanswered questions: "Who polices the funding to make sure the money isn't used for religious programs? Who polices whether a group is pervasively sectarian or not?" Whenever the government begins funding religious groups, he said, "it opens a Pandora's Box."

At the unveiling of his program, Clinton said, "There is a critical, fundamental role for the faith community in teaching our children a sense of right and wrong and self-discipline and respect."

"Boston's pastors and faith communities took the lead," he continued. "Often, they are the most stable institution left in unstable neighborhoods. I think it is important that these mentors saw in each child a cause and not just a case file; a future, not just a present full of problems."

Clinton said Harvard researchers recently found that urban neighborhoods with a strong sense of community and shared values had lower crime rates than those without. Clinton said those findings were not a "big surprise," but he said such talk is not usually heard when politicians talk about crime.

"You get more emotion on the meter readers if you give some rough, tough speech about jails and punishment," Clinton said. "Well, we have to have jails, and people who do the wrong things have to be punished. But we will never jail our way of America's problems, and you know that."

Clinton quoted poet Carl Sandburg's observation that "a baby is God's opinion that the world should go on."

"Well, when we lose our children, we are thwarting the opinion of God," Clinton added.

The president called on Congress to provide more funds for the approach, saying that there needs to be more than just 16 cities participating. "If something can happen somewhere, it is our duty to make sure it happens everywhere," he said.

Cities selected for the grants are Los Angeles, Washington, Miami, Chicago, Indianapolis, Baltimore, Detroit, Kansas City, Portland, Philadelphia, San Antonio and Seattle, along with Hempstead, N.Y.; Charleston, S.C.; Richmond, Va., and Salinas, Calif.

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## **Advertising campaign proclaims that homosexuals can change**

By Bob Allen and Marie Biggs

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Prompted by criticism of football player Reggie White and Sen. Trent Lott for making statements deemed anti-gay, the Christian Coalition and 13 other conservative groups recently purchased full-page ads in national newspapers proclaiming that homosexuals can change.

The ads, called the "Truth in Love Campaign," appeared in mid-July in the New York Times, USA Today and Washington Post.

An ad in the July 14 Washington Post read: "We're standing for the truth that homosexuals can change. ... The critical difference in this debate is that some recognize their sin and repent, and others don't." The ad also said, "Calling homosexual behavior sin is not anti-gay, it's pro-life."

Another ad featured a photo of Anne Paulk with a caption reading, "wife, mother, former lesbian." The headline proclaimed, "I'm living proof that Truth can set you free."

Ad sponsors include Americans for Truth About Homosexuality, the Christian Coalition, Concerned Women for America, Coral Ridge Ministries and Family Research Council.

"Many people have been seduced into a destructive homosexual lifestyle that has rendered nothing but pain and sadness," said the Family Research Council's Robert Knight in a press release. "How long will the pro-homosexual lobby attempt to muzzle people like Reggie White and Trent Lott who speak this life-saving truth?"

White, a Baptist preacher and a star for the National Football League's Green Bay Packers, was criticized after recently saying that homosexuality is a choice. Lott, a Republican from Mississippi and the Senate's Majority Leader, also was criticized after comparing homosexuals to alcoholics and persons who steal.

"There is hope for homosexuals, but it entails that they make some changes," Knight said. "No condom or clean needle or legislation will bring them what they really need: healing."

The ads sparked a debate over whether homosexuals can change. Groups like Exodus International, a Christian referral and resource network founded in 1976, proclaim that freedom from homosexuality is possible through faith in Jesus Christ and counseling. On the other hand, research seems to indicate that some people are genetically predisposed to homosexuality and that few gays are able to maintain a heterosexual lifestyle.

Several religious leaders at a July 15 press conference accused the ads of twisting Scripture to advance a political agenda.

"The real agenda behind this Religious Right campaign is not about saving souls but about amassing votes," said Welton Gaddy, executive director of the Interfaith Alliance, a liberal group.

In a press release issued by Equal Partners in Faith, a coalition of faith-based activists, Ken Brooker Langston, a minister at Washington's National City Christian Church, said the organizations listed in the ads have been at the forefront of efforts to restrict the constitutional rights of gays.

"It is clear from the list of supporters of this expensive media campaign that the message is targeted at members of Congress who are now considering vital issues affecting gay and lesbian Americans," Langston said.

Philip Wogaman, president of The Interfaith Alliance and pastor at Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, said the Religious Right would have others believe that their position is shared by all people of faith, which, he said, it is not.

"Gays and lesbians should be treated with dignity," said Wogaman, whose parishioners include First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. "There are members of the congregation who hold different viewpoints on the issue. These differences, however, exist in a culture of respect and caring that is marked by civility."

Gaddy, a former Baptist pastor, said categorizing homosexuals as sinners is not helpful.

"I think that it makes no contribution biblically, psychologically, socially to simply make the statement that homosexuality is a sin," Gaddy said, "I think it is far better to deal with individuals with compassion and to try to enable those individuals to live out their lives and enjoy all kinds of rights that the rest of us do."

In response to the Interfaith Alliance press conference, Christian Coalition spokeswoman Molly Clatworthy said the ads are intended to be a message of hope and love for those homosexuals who are living in despair and looking for a way out.

"We are expressing our convictions and beliefs, which have resulted in name-calling, and we find it intolerant," Clatworthy said.

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## **Clinton vetoes expansion of education savings accounts**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President Bill Clinton vetoed an education-reform package July 21 which included tax breaks for parents who send children to private and religious secondary schools.

Currently, money saved in special education-savings accounts can only be used for college.

Sen. Paul Coverdell, R-Ga., sponsored a plan to allow parents to use the funds for kindergarten through higher education and to increase the amount parents could place in the accounts. Parents could also have used the tax-favored accounts to pay for tuition at private and parochial schools.

In a veto message to the House of Representatives, however, Clinton said the proposed changes to the education IRAs would be "bad education policy and bad tax policy."

He said the bill "would divert limited federal resources away from public schools by spending more than \$3 billion in tax benefits that would do virtually nothing for average families and would disproportionately benefit the most affluent families."

Republican congressional leaders were quick to criticize the veto.

House Majority Leader Richard Armey, R-Texas, said Clinton vetoed the bill to appease teachers' unions.

Christian Coalition Executive Director Randy Tate said that in vetoing the bill, "Clinton sided with the education bureaucracy and against children."

Groups which support the separation of church and state are divided over whether the bill would have been constitutional.

Brent Walker, general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee, said the Coverdell proposal "may be flawed for policy reasons but is not clearly unconstitutional."

An official from Americans United for Separation of Church and State recently said the organization is opposed to the legislation.

"We see it as a foot in the door to broader tax aid for private and religious schools," said Joe Conn, AU communications director.

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## **Students of different faiths urged to seek common goal**

By Marie Biggs

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The future will not belong to those who sit on the sidelines, a United States senator told a group of nearly 60 Protestant, Catholic and Jewish students from across the nation.

The future "is not going to belong to people who are content with the way it is," said Sen. Paul Wellstone, D-Minn. "The future is not going to belong to those who sit on the sidelines. The future is going to belong to those who have passion and those who are willing to make our country better."

The high school graduates were participating in a three-week program called "E Pluribus Unum Project," sponsored by The Washington Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values. The program, also sponsored by National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry, is designed to allow the participants to explore the relationship between their faith, advocacy and social change.

Wellstone thanked the group for their interest in public affairs and their commitment to justice.

He said that the students need to take their enthusiasm and ideas toward social issues and organize them in a way that will allow them to work.

"If you have ideas and you have the policy, but you do not have the grassroots to organize from around the country, it will never happen," Wellstone said.

He encouraged the students to work together and to use their talents to achieve a common goal.

"You need to figure out how you locate yourself personally, who you are, what you are good at, what you love to do," Wellstone said.

The students participated in volunteer work which exposed them to community needs and social issues of human rights, poverty and the environment.

"Our community service has all of the people of all the different faiths working to the same goal at the same place," said Matt Lahut, an American Baptist youth from Nassau, N.Y.

Sara Mary Lamberson, an American Baptist youth from Lincoln, Neb., learned that people of different faiths can work together.

"I have learned that although all of us are different within our own faiths, they really overlap and we are really all going to the same goal," she said. "If we could just buckle down and do something about it and look at where the problem comes from instead of starting at the top. Sometimes you need to get at the root of the problem, too."

The program also exposed youth to the types of religious persecution suffered by various faiths.

"We visited the Holocaust Museum because we need to increase awareness," said Christian Kirby, a United Methodist and adult sponsor.

E Pluribus Unum is Latin for "Out of the Many, One" and is the national motto for the project.

"Oneness is not sameness. We can still be one and have the same goals as society, but not all believe the same things," Lahut said.

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## **Parenting should be tailored for various ages, expert says**

By Marv Knox

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (ABP) -- Parenting must be tailored to meet the needs of children at various stages of their development, Lydia Padilla explained in a workshop on helping families "stand firm in a troubled world."

Padilla, a veteran consultant and conference leader in Woman's Missionary Union and Sunday school work and a member of Iglesia El Calvario Bautista in Dallas, spoke to participants in the Celebrating the Hispanic Woman conference.

"Values are caught, not taught," Padilla insisted, noting parents' behavior toward their children and everyday actions contribute significantly toward shaping their children's own values.

Regular family meetings, involving every member of the family, can reinforce values for all children, she said, outlining five key concepts for the meetings.

First is the meeting schedule. "Pick your time, but find a time that's good for all your family," she said.

Next is discussion about other events involving any or all members of the family, she added. This is a key for helping family members understand each other and their activities, as well as a way to clear the calendar so members can support each other's activities, such as school concerts, ball games, etc.

Third is discussion of family problems, such as sibling disagreements, unfinished chores and other situations that might cause conflict or difficulty.

This should be followed up by assignments from the parents, such as tasks the children can undertake to correct problems, improve their behavior and the like, she said.

Finally, the meetings should conclude with affirmation, building family members up and encouraging them, she advised.

Padilla also pointed out parenting techniques to help children at various ages:

-- 0-5. Children at this age learn about God through songs and activities, as well as picture books, she said. They also learn through repetition, such as preparing their offering envelopes on Saturday night so they will be ready on Sunday.

Play is very important at this age, she added. "Fathers, get over your 'macho thing' and get on the floor and play with your children," she urged.

"Above all, we want children to stay in the word of the Lord," constantly hearing scripture to direct their young lives, she said.

-- 6-11. "This is the age where they're memorizing everything -- bad and good," she said.

Help them memorize Bible verses, she said, adding that teachings in Scripture can be applied to everyday situations.

"'I can't' is a no-no phrase," she illustrated. "Teach them the Bible tells them, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'"

Parental behavior strongly reinforces verbal messages, she added. "If you want your children to grow up in the Lord, you've got to grow up in the Lord. You've got to be loving and forgiving. Let your children see your dedication, your devotion to the Lord and the church."

Teach children to ask the catch-phrase "What would Jesus do?" to help them guide their decision-making, she said.

-- 12-18. "You cannot tell them anything; they know everything," Padilla quipped.

"So use God's word" to communicate to them, she added, noting she taped small pieces of paper with Bible verses in places where her teens would find them.

Parents of children this age still lead their children, but they also must learn to let go, she said, acknowledging, "It's hard to step back and say, 'I have taught you well; fly on God's wings.'"

## Southern gospel takes on new, younger listeners

By Stacey Hamby

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Southern gospel music isn't what it used to be. It's even better. In recent years, the Southern gospel music industry has exploded with new artists, new sounds and a renewed interest in the "old-fashioned" gospel songs.

"Gospel music is stronger than it's ever been," said Ben Speer of The Speers. "The quality of music is higher, and it's taken on the face of ministry, so that it's more than just entertainment."

Speer, who has been around gospel music for decades, said one of the biggest changes in gospel music has been moving from a "piano-only" style to using bands and soundtracks. He and Vestal Goodman of the Happy Goodmans have both seen many changes in the industry over their years of singing.

Speer, Goodman and other artists shared their thoughts on gospel music recently while backstage during a Gaither Homecoming concert in Kansas City, Mo.

"There's been a lot of style change," Goodman remarked. "The original essence -- four-part, trios -- is the same, but the music quality has improved greatly.

"We've gotten wiser in the music field. A bigger percentage read music, know music. We're concerned about how the church feels about our music; we want to bless the church."

That blessing extends beyond church walls. Thousands have packed auditoriums to hear gospel artists sing together during a Gaither Homecoming concert.

"What I'm seeing at Gaither Homecoming recordings is a time of revival for groups and ministries," said Brian Lester of the St. Louis group, The Lesters. "The Gaither recordings have helped bring a lot of people to the realization of the roots of gospel music.

"It's been able to sustain all these years. Maybe it hasn't been as popular as contemporary music, but it's still a vital part of it. We just needed a good ol' revival in what we do."

Bill and Gloria Gaither released the first Homecoming video about eight years ago. Bill Gaither's assessment of the success of the series: "It shows that the music is as good as we always thought it was."

Mark Lowry has sung with the Gaither Vocal Band for 10 years. "Our coming together like this is about him [Jesus]," Lowry said. "I think that's why he's blessing it." Lowry also is known for his comedy acts and spoof songs on the contemporary Christian music market.

Lowry noted that while contemporary Christian music appeals to mostly a younger audience, gospel music draws "everybody from the cradle to the grave."

Candy Hemphill-Christmas agreed. She said the stereotype that gospel music is for an older audience is disappearing, and a younger generation is listening to gospel music.

"People used to think country music was only a barroom sort of music, primarily listened to by an older audience," Christmas said. "But Garth Brooks and others started bringing a younger audience. And I think God is trying to break the stereotype of Southern gospel music, too."

The Southern gospel and contemporary Christian genres are not in competition for listeners. "We'd like to think they complement each other," Christmas explained. "We're all trying to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus. It's a different sound, but we're saying the same thing."

Gaps are being bridged, too, between traditional white and black gospel music. "To a degree, I see a merging of audiences," Goodman said.

Although the music styles are different, the people singing them are not -- at least in God's eyes. "God doesn't see color," Goodman said.

And more and more, gospel music artists are taking their message in music to other nations. The Lesters, along with their pastor, Danny O'Guin of Tower Grove Baptist Church in St. Louis, are planning a mission trip to India in January.

The group will sing and O'Guin will preach during five evening services. During the day, they will minister in villages.

"Groups and individual ministries are starting to take on something like this because they realize it's vital for each ministry," Brian Lester said. "It helps open doors to areas where we can minister to other folks -- not just in the United States, but worldwide."

Gospel music radio personalities have also noticed changes in their listening audiences. Doug Atteberry of KEXS in Excelsior Springs, Mo., cited a recent listener survey showing an increase in listeners ages 25 to 45.

"Our (listener) demographics have traditionally been about 55 and up," Atteberry said. "But one of the last surveys I did showed as many reporting persons in the 25 to 45 age group as in the 55 and up."

Atteberry said KEXS tries to cater to both audiences by playing a mix of the more traditional style and the newer style music. "Right now Southern gospel is the No. 1 Christian music format in the U.S. and the No. 12 format overall," he said. "It's as contemporary as any style of music. And it ministers to everybody."

"There's substance in the music; it's not a lot of smoke and lights. I can pinpoint times when God has used certain songs to minister to me, convict me and comfort me."

Max Rhoades of KTTK in Lebanon, Mo., noted that although the industry is drawing a younger market, it's not alienating the older listeners in the process.

"I attribute the growth to the fact that you can understand the words," Rhoades said. "The music doesn't overcome the message, and the older people get, the more they want to understand what they're listening to."

Dick Morris of KWFC in Springfield, Mo., said Southern gospel music has shed its "country cousin" image.

"Southern gospel is technologically keeping up," he said. "Artists have had to realize they have to spend the money and do it right. Listeners are more discriminating, especially younger listeners."

"They want to hear something as clear sounding as what they hear in rock or contemporary Christian," Morris continued. "When contemporary Christian artists started producing and sounding as good as adult contemporary or Top 40, that did a lot to make Southern gospel and other musical genres wake up."

Morris, who has been in gospel radio for 25 years, said a mainstream country sound is creeping into gospel music's sound, but it's not taking over.

"It's different from Christian country, which is a separate format, like 'The Night Jack Daniels meets John 3:16,'" Morris said. "Christian country is positive country ... but you don't get so much of a Christian message. There is a country sound coming into gospel sound, but lyrically, it's still very solid."

Joyce Martin McCullough of The Martins said the future couldn't look better for gospel music.

"God's music has been a vehicle he has used through the ages, and he'll continue to do that. It's going to be a future that's full of people singing gospel music."

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## **Arkansas trio brings new sound to gospel music**

By Stacey Hamby

HAMBURG, Ark. - (ABP) - They call it "Martin music." It's traditional Southern gospel mixed with a little bit of country and contemporary sound. And few can sing a cappella like this trio of two sisters and a brother. The Martins' original style has brought a new sound to Southern gospel music.

"Martin music is basically a background of Southern gospel, which was the kind of music we were exposed to when we first started singing," Joyce Martin McCullough said.

"Southern gospel was really the only kind of gospel music we knew of besides church music, and it wasn't until we got older and started enjoying other styles of music that those influences began to be part of what we did."

The Martins, who also include brother Jonathan and sister Judy Martin Hess, have come a long way since their days of singing together under the training of their mother in a rural cabin near Hamburg, Ark.

"We were taught as children that if you had a song in your heart, you could sing it," Joyce said. "What a lovely thing to learn."

Now the Martins are four-time Dove Award winners. They've had songs at the top of the charts. They've even been nominated for a Grammy award.

"When they were small, I did not have any foresight of them being what they are today, but I prayed for each of them to find out what God wanted them to do and pursue that to the best of their ability," said the trio's mother, Wylma Martin. She still lives near Hamburg with her husband, J.W., and manages her children's office.

"My proudest thing is the fact that I really believe that each of them personally knows the Lord as their Savior, each personally knows their calling, and each is answering that call to the best of their ability.

"And that's all a parent can ask from the Lord for their children."

The Martins, who had recorded an independent album and performed in churches and concert halls in the South and Midwest, got their big break in 1992. It happened when they sang to a one-woman audience in a ladies' rest room in Indiana.

Mark Lowry and Michael English of the Gaither Vocal Band had invited the Martins to tag along for a Gaither video recording. At the right moment, they crammed Joyce, Jonathan and Judy into the bathroom to sing to Gloria Gaither. She was so impressed by their a cappella version of "He Leadeth Me" that she told her husband, Bill, to have them sing on the video. Bill heard the Martins sing for the first time while they were taping.

"I've never been so scared in my life," Joyce recalled. Judy recalled she almost passed out when she sang a line wrong.

"But we were used to singing together impromptu like that because our mom and dad used to make us sing in the oddest places, like restaurants," Joyce said. "Somebody would come up to talk, and Dad would say, 'Kids, sing something.' When you're put on the spot, you just perform."

The Gaithers signed The Martins to their record label, and even today, The Martins make regular appearances at Gaither Homecoming concerts across the nation. They said the Homecoming videos are probably a big part of why The Martins' music is popular in such non-traditional Southern gospel markets as Chicago and Cleveland.

"Radio also has a lot to do with it," Judy said. "For us, that's an extension of our ministry -- every artist's ministry. We're just blessed to be one of those artists."

Joyce, 30, confessed she's the "mother hen" of the siblings. "I know I'm bad," she said. "Jon's the pesterer -- pick, pick, pick. He can stir up stuff and leave, and he never gets upset. Judy, as the baby of the family, gets her feelings hurt easily."

Sibling rivalry was squelched by their parents years ago, Joyce said. Growing up in the country without a lot of other children around, they often were each other's only company -- especially when their parents began home-schooling them.

"We honestly get along better than any other brothers and sisters I know, but our parents really told us to get along. They wouldn't let us pick and fuss."

Today, they still spend a lot of time together -- about 200 days a year in a bus on the road. "Looking back, we know home schooling was what was best for us, because it helped prepare us for today to be around each other so much."

Joyce added, "Gospel music, in reality, is what has kept us together. We might be on opposite sides of the world if we hadn't started singing together."

Jonathan, 28, said growing up in a rural home helped prepare them for their present careers. "It took the emphasis off material stuff and put it on relationships -- loving each other."

The Martins and their families still make their homes in the area where they grew up. Joyce and her husband, Harrie, have been married eight years. Harrie travels with the group to handle the sound equipment.

Jonathan and his wife, Milinda, have been married seven years. They have a daughter, Halea, 3, and twin sons, Michael and Taylor, 2. Milinda stays home to care for the children.

Judy, 27, and Jake Hess Jr. have been married nearly two years and have an 8-month-old son, Jake "Trip" Hess III, who travels with his mom.

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**END**