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Most Southwestern profs sign statement, but at least two opting to leave seminary

By Toby Druin

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- While a majority of the 90-plus faculty members at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary have reportedly affirmed the "Baptist Faith and Message" as revised by the Southern Baptist Convention in June, at least two professors have said they will leave the seminary rather than endorse the change.

Earlier, Ken Hemphill, president of the seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, announced professors would be required to sign a statement saying they subscribe to a new family amendment added this summer or to any future revisions to the faith statement originally adopted in 1963.

Afterward, two professors, Dan Kent and Alan Brehm, indicated they will leave the seminary -- Kent by retiring and Brehm resigning.

Kent, professor of Old Testament who has been on the faculty since 1980, announced he will retire rather than sign. However, he said the faith-statement decree was only part of what prompted the decision.

"There is no one factor that determines when a person will retire," he said, "This situation has more to do with the timing than anything else." Other reasons, he said, include health problems "and my wife is retired and enjoying it."

Brehm, assistant professor of New Testament, said he will resign. He called the "Baptist Faith and Message" amendment, with its controversial interpretation of Ephesians 5, a "clarifying event," but he already had been

experiencing a "crisis of conscience over the direction of the Southern Baptist Convention and over recent events at Southwestern."

The seminary's bylaws have for decades required that professors at Southwestern sign a pledge to teach in accordance with the "Baptist Faith and Message" statement.

This summer, however, for the first time since 1963, the statement was amended. A new article on the family was added. It notes, among other things, that a wife is to submit "graciously" to the husband's servant leadership and respect him and serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.

Critics of the amendment have objected to what they see as an emphasis on the wife's submission and the omission of the statement in Ephesians 5:21 that husbands and wives should be subject to one another.

Hemphill said the seminary's legal counsel advised the administration to respond to the revised statement. The change was not initiated by the trustees, although trustee approval of bylaws during a meeting Oct. 19-21 made it officially necessary for faculty to re-sign the statement, he added.

Scotty Gray, vice president for academic administration, said all faculty members would be asked to indicate their compliance with the teaching requirements.

But they will be given the option of signing either the revised Baptist Faith and Message statement or another "covenantal" statement that says: "In covenant with the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and its community of faith and learning, I hereby subscribe to the institution's Statement of Faith known as the 'Baptist Faith and Message,' which may be revised from time to time by the Southern Baptist Convention to address specific needs in light of our living faith."

No deadline for obtaining the signatures has been set, but it should be done in the "next month or so," Gray said.

Kent said the major problem with signing among some faculty members is "it's open-ended."

"We are endorsing any statement the SBC may make, and that is awfully broad," he said.

Requiring him to re-sign the statement would change the basis on which he was hired, granted tenure and promoted to full professor, Kent complained. When he was hired, the seminary charter specifically mentioned the 1963 statement.

Tommy Brisco, chair of the faculty council, said he felt the matter was being handled "in a baptistic way" in a dialogue with the administration, which he described as "not adversarial."

The faculty, Brisco said, had concerns about the legality of the required signings and were concerned about moving from confessionalism to creedalism. He emphasized that in no way should the dialogue or questions be raised about the amendment be construed to be "anti-family."

"We are dialoguing about freedom of expression. We strongly defend the biblical concept of the family," he said. "The family is God's foundational unit of human society."

Kent and Brehm are not the only faculty members leaving the seminary. Jimmie Nelson, associate dean and professor of preaching, is retiring; Calvin Miller, professor of communications and ministry studies, is moving to the Beeson Divinity School at Samford University; and Keith Putt, associate professor of philosophy of religion, reportedly is leaving but could not be reached for comment.

Former SBC administrator dies from brain tumor

TAMPA, Fla. (ABP) -- Tim Hedquist, a former administrator at the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, died of a brain tumor Oct. 24 in Tampa, Fla.

Hedquist, 56, worked 13 years at the Executive Committee before resigning as vice president for business and finance in 1990. He left the SBC post to become an assistant pastor for administration at Bellevue Baptist Church in suburban Memphis, Tenn. He later took a similar position at First Baptist Church in Dallas.

He moved to Florida in 1996 to become associate pastor of Idlewild Baptist Church in Tampa.

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-- By ABP staff

Billy Graham returns to Tampa, preaching to record crowd

TAMPA, Fla. (ABP) -- Sixty years after surrendering to preach the gospel in Tampa, Fla., evangelist Billy Graham returned to lead a Tampa Bay-area crusade Oct. 22-25.

About two weeks before his 80th birthday, Graham shared familiar themes of judgment and God's love before record crowds at Tampa's brand-new Raymond James Stadium. The crusade was the first non-sporting event to be held in the stadium, which opened Sept. 20.

The Tampa Sports Authority said an estimated 78,000 people who gathered for the crusade's closing session was a record for any stadium in Tampa. The four-day event drew a total of 283,000.

Celebrity guests included former President George Bush and Christian rock artists Michael W. Smith, Jars of Clay and dc Talk. The crusade also featured Graham's first live Internet webcast.

Graham, who surrendered his life to God's service while attending Florida Bible Institute between 1937 and 1940 and preached many of his early sermons on street corners in Tampa, told the crowd he at first fought God's call.

"I never wanted to be a preacher," he said. "I never wanted to be anything in the church." In November, however, "I'll be 80 years old. I continue to go on and on and on. That was my call ... and that call has never left me."

The crusade was Graham's third in Tampa, and probably his last. Earlier Tampa crusades were held in 1953 and 1979. Graham crusades in 1999 are scheduled June 3-6 in Indianapolis and Oct. 14-17 in St. Louis.

More than 1,000 churches representing 70 denominations participated in the Tampa Bay crusade, and some 20,000 people helped with two years worth of preparations. The budget for the crusade was \$2.46 million.

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-- By ABP staff. Information for this story was compiled from reports in the Tampa Tribune and from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

Oates continues 50-year legacy as teacher of pastoral care

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- If a minister in your Baptist church excels at pastoral care, or if you've been touched by the ministry of a Christian chaplain in a hospital, military or business setting, you probably have a professor in Louisville, Ky., to thank.

Wayne Oates may never have set foot in the church, hospital or military base where you received ministry, but his writings and teachings over the past 50 years have influenced the ministers and chaplains you encountered.

Not only is Oates the nation's most prolific writer of books on pastoral care, with his 58th volume soon to be published, he's one of three or four people credited with giving birth to the modern concept of pastoral care and counseling.

In the minds of many ministers, counselors and chaplains, he is the patriarch of the pastoral care and counseling movement, having taught from 1948-74 at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and then since 1974 at the University of Louisville School of Medicine.

"He has made a significant impact on generations of Southern Baptist ministers who have made pastoral care part of their ongoing ministry simply because of their course with Wayne Oates at Southern Seminary," said Andy Lester, one of Oates' former students who now teaches pastoral theology and pastoral counseling at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas.

In addition, Lester said, "There are very few pastoral care specialists who are Baptists who couldn't track their roots back to Oates."

But his reach has extended well beyond Baptists, too, added Vicki Hollon, director of the Wayne Oates Institute in Louisville. She recalled a recent phone call from a high-ranking chaplain in the Air Force who called Oates "the grandfather of clinical pastoral education for the Air Force.

"I got the program started," the man said, "but he's the one I learned from."

Oates is credited most often with being among the first to integrate theology with psychology and psychiatry.

"He put together the practice of pastoral ministry ... with the wisdom and resources of psychiatry and psychology in a masterful way," said Roy Woodruff, executive director of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. "He became bilingual (in theology and psychiatry) and could move back and forth with amazing agility."

Oates, now 81, admits the improbability of someone from his background making such a far-reaching impact on Christian ministry and academia.

"I grew up in poverty in the cotton mill area of South Carolina," he said in a recent interview. "None of my people went past the sixth grade."

His mother worked in the cotton mills. Oates' father had left the family when he was born, although his mother still wore her wedding ring when she was buried in 1972.

"I saw my way out of this was education," Oates said. "I got through the eighth grade, and then was appointed a page for Congress in Washington." After completing high school, he went back to work in the South Carolina mills for two years before earning an undergraduate degree from Wake Forest University.

Finally he landed in Louisville at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he met Gaines Dobbins, a pioneering professor in several practical ministry disciplines. Through the influence of Dobbins, Oates developed an interest in what he calls "sick religion." (Oates book titled "When Religion Gets Sick" is still in use and was recently republished on CD-ROM by the Wayne Oates Institute.)

The integration of theology and psychiatry not only was a new concept in the 1940s, but was considered heretical by some in the seminary community. After graduating from Southern with both a master's degree and a doctorate, Oates assumed a full-time faculty post at the seminary in 1948, much to the consternation of other academics.

When his second book, "The Bible in Pastoral Care," was published, five professors went to then-President Duke McCall to protest, Oates recalled. They "complained that I didn't have any right to write on the Bible."

McCall, he said, was unimpressed by the protest and told the professors they ought to write their own books about the Bible instead of criticizing Oates.

One of Oates' first students was Myron Madden, who later went on to become a major figure in pastoral-care education. Madden recalled the emerging tension of those early days.

"When I was in the seminary, the assumption was you're just given the Bible and that's enough," he said. "But that's not enough. You've got to relate it."

What Oates advocated was putting feet to theology, Madden said, although it was a "one-man battle" to get this added to the curriculum.

That's why the seminary department Oates founded was called "psychology of religion" rather than "pastoral theology," Lester added. "They would not allow the word theology to be used."

Although most of the academic emphasis Oates established at Southern has been dismantled in recent years, it was a "classic program" in the field of pastoral care, said Woodruff, who also was one of Oates' students. "It was one of the two or three most outstanding degree programs and a very exciting place to be with him."

In the final analysis, it was Oates' survival in a difficult upbringing that created in him the kind of pioneering spirit to accomplish what seemed impossible, said Hollon. "Anybody who knows him can see the pioneer side has come out of his independence and commitment to basic disciplines."

That commitment has been a guiding force in Oates' life, Hollon and others close to him said. They credit him with doggedly insisting that the training of pastoral caregivers remain rooted in the Bible and not "sell out" to psychology and psychiatry.

Oates wrote his doctoral dissertation on Sigmund Freud, but never published that work because of concern that he would be labeled a Freudian. In fact, the aim of Oates' dissertation was to critique Freud and those who blindly subscribed to every theory Freud put forth.

Instead of publishing his dissertation, Oates chose instead to write his own credo first, and he called it "The Christian Pastor." First published in 1951, this volume now is in its fifth printing.

"I decided who I was and who I intended to be," Oates explained. "I thought of myself as a pastor."

When people would ask if he were a Freudian or a Rogerian or a follower of some other figure in the world of psychiatry, Oates said he always would respond, "No, I'm a Christian pastor."

"He always kept pastoral care grounded in theology and the Bible," Lester said. "There are many who would thank Oates for holding the field's feet to the fire of biblical and theological roots and relevance."

"He has been a very healthy influence in helping pastors not get seduced by psychiatric influences. He's one of just a few who have held the line," said Madden, who retired as director of pastoral care at Baptist Hospital in New Orleans and taught at the Louisiana State University Medical School.

This is important, Madden insisted, because psychology and psychiatry can do only so much.

As an example, Madden cited a time he needed counseling himself. He had a good friend who was a psychiatrist with no theological training. But he didn't think this man could bring him to complete healing. "So he helps me through the process, but he cannot come back and affirm me and bless me," Madden explained.

This sense of restitution is an important part of what a pastoral counselor offers that bridges the world of psychiatry and theology, Madden said. To explain, he recalled a woman who once came to him from the care of a psychiatrist. She wanted to see a pastoral counselor to answer a question her psychiatrist could not: "Can I be forgiven?"

Madden is considered an authority on the need for people to feel a sense of "blessing" to function wholly. This concept, he said, is something that flows naturally out of Oates, his mentor and colleague.

Oates said he "never made a theological point of this" but thinks the concept of blessing people is "one of the functions of a Christian pastor." And it was something he attempted to model for his students, both at the seminary and at the university medical school.

"I had students bring their new babies to class for a time of blessing," he said. "It taught the students that little babies are a miracle of God."

Oates also believes in the power of laying hands on people, not just at ordinations but in everyday situations of blessing. The power of touch conveys a comforting sense of blessing, he said.

This is such an integral part of Oates' life and ministry that those he touches may not distinguish it, Hollon suggested. "It doesn't stand separate in a way that sometimes I've experienced in pastoral care people. It's not, 'Now let me give you a big hug.'"

For many former students, the Oates legacy does not end at the graduation line. Hundreds have kept in touch and call or write or visit him regularly.

"He has been a pastor with a capital P," Lester said. "He's been their comforter, their counselor, their confessor, their priest. ... His ability to hear you out, to know where you're hurting and give the care you need is an unbelievable part of his legacy."

For Oates himself, these relationships are a blessing. "The crucial test of maturity," he said, "is the capacity of a person to form and maintain durable relationships."

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-- Photos to accompany this story are available from the Western Recorder. Contact David Winfrey at david_winfrey@kybaptist.org or call (502) 244-6471.

Evangelist finds hope in tragic circumstances

By Debbie Sanders

GULF SHORES, Ala. (ABP) -- As a convicted felon who spent years in prison and a grieving grandfather who lost two young grandsons in the Oklahoma City bombing, evangelist Richard Coss has built a ministry which reaches people with the message: "I've been there."

In his early years, the red-haired, freckle-faced Coss was the poster boy for bad behavior. From his first trips to a detention center at age 9, a state mental institution at age 11 and a state reformatory at age 12, it was obvious he was getting a head start on a life of crime. Between the ages of 15 and 25, Coss compiled 32 arrests and spent time in city jails, county jails and prisons. He had assaulted police officers, was known to possess firearms and was considered dangerous by the FBI.

Then two men and a Bible changed all that.

While serving his third prison term, a 10-year sentence, Coss gave his life to Jesus Christ. As Coss puts it, what counselors, psychologists, sociologists, corrections officers, special schools and prison had been unable to do for him in 16 years, God did in one day.

On March 15, 1969, 40 Christian businessmen, mostly Baptists, went to the prison that Coss and 1,200 other men called home. The purpose was an all-day revival, and the men began by eating breakfast with the prisoners.

"Two Baptist deacons, one black and one white, asked me at the breakfast table to participate in the revival," Coss said. "I responded to their love, not the gospel."

While attending the services, Coss made the decision that would change his life. The decision eventually would impact the lives of thousands of others through his ministry.

"The word of God began to get to me," he said. "Prior to that day, I didn't think he loved me. They read John 3:16 to me, and inserted my name, personalized it for me. They took me down the Roman road. I started crying, and I'm not a crying person. I trusted Christ."

Coss still was not home free. He served another year and a half in prison, but he began helping in the prison chapel until his release in 1970. By 1971, Coss had started a jail and prison ministry and had been ordained as a minister. The route he took seemed a perfect fit for him, and it is one he continues to follow almost 30 years later through his "Christ bars None" evangelistic organization in Gulf Shores, Ala.

"I knew before I got out that I was called to be an evangelist, to work in prisons," Coss said. "God has equipped me in the past to do the ministry I have today. Prison ministry is an easy ministry. The inmates will love you to death. I preach about being overcomers, because the challenges with them are overcoming anger, unforgiveness, hatred, resentment, loneliness -- and letting Jesus take care of those areas."

Coss is the author of two books, "Wanted" and "Full Pardon." He was pardoned by President Gerald Ford in 1975.

His dramatic past has helped make Coss, 54, a popular speaker nationwide -- not only for church revivals but also for lectures at schools, colleges and civic clubs. To audiences of all sizes, he talks about his personal life, prison reform, prisoner reform, the death penalty, victim rights, gun control and the drug problem.

Usually, more than 50,000 students hear Coss' message during each school year.

"With the students, I talk about home life, drugs, suicide, alcohol and peer pressure," he said. "I give them five reasons to stay in school, to obey their parents, to obey the law and to not go to prison. I tell them about the worst of prison life, and what could happen to them if they enter prison."

His 55-minute lecture is not religious, but a 10-minute question and answer session inevitably leaves room for a question that never fails to come: "What was it that changed your life?"

Since the question is initiated by a student, Coss is then able, even in a public-school setting, to share his salvation experience.

Coss turned a life of despair into an example of hope. His ministry grew, with appearances on Christian television shows, including the Trinity Broadcasting Network and the "700 Club" with Pat Robertson. Family life was comfortable, including a wife and four children. Coss even became a doting grandfather.

But fate's calendar had April 19, 1995, waiting.

Coss was conducting a revival near Topeka, Kan., when the news first flashed on television screens everywhere about the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. His daughter, Edye Smith, worked a few blocks from the federal building, and her two sons, 2-year-old Colton and 3-year-old Chase, were in the day-care center housed in the building.

Colton and Chase were killed in the explosion, part of the death toll of 15 children and 154 adults. Their bodies were found by their uncle, Coss' son, Danny, a police officer in a nearby suburb who had been dispatched to help at the scene.

A few days later, Coss preached the funeral of his two grandsons. He told the nearly 1,000 people in attendance, "Jesus has been in the search-and-rescue business for a long time."

While a nation mourned with them, the Coss family struggled with pain and hurt and the loss of their future. Romans 8:28, "...all things work together for good to them that love God," became a promise for making sense out of senselessness.

"During the bombing, that became a special verse for me and my family," Coss said. "It literally jumped off the pages of the Bible. Those were hard days, but as I look back, I'm a better person now. My grandchildren are safe; we get to see them again, as my daughter said. I'm a better lover, soul winner, warrior. God has made me a better person."

Initially, Coss was a rock for his grieving family. "Knowing that God is all-sufficient helped," he said. "I know the Scriptures are valid. There were many scriptures, many tears during that time. I prayed for understanding for my family. God gave me the strength for my wife and I to help everyone through."

Then, a year later, the full extent of the loss finally hit Coss. He also dealt with migraine headaches and an attitude of unforgiveness toward the men accused of the bombing.

"God would speak to me," Coss said. "He would say, 'You work with other killers, people who killed other families.' God spoke some real harsh words to me, including, 'Are you going to be a liar in the ministry?'"

In the end, it was Coss's daughter who forgave first. Her urging for him to do the same started the healing process for Coss, who sent letters of forgiveness and copies of his books to the men accused and convicted of killing his grandsons.

"You've got to come to a point of forgiveness," he said. "It's not up to us to see that retribution is done. God will deal with them. He will avenge us. There are more Terry Nichols out there who need to be saved. The only thing that will change those lives is the good news."

Coss said his life story so far is characterized by extreme highs and extreme lows.

"To have those mountaintop experiences, you have to experience the valleys," he said. "We've got to put up with a bunch of junk, but we have a lot of promises. God has a lot of 'school time' for us."

And what has Richard Coss learned?

"I trust the Lord more," he said. "I always used to think that the worst thing that could happen to me was if one of my children were killed. But it was my grandkids, kids I wanted to play ball with, take fishing."

What would make many people bitter, Coss sees as a sign of God's plan for his ministry. "God has told me he would use that for good," he said. "I can talk to people about forgiveness and say, 'I've been there.'"

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-- Debbie Sanders is a correspondent for the Missouri Baptist newspaper Word and Way.

Missourians square off over gambling amendment

By Rob Marus

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Missouri voters will decide Nov. 3 whether casino games of chance should be legalized in the so-called "boats in moats." If voters pass proposed Amendment No. 9, legal sanction for boats in moats will be enshrined in the Missouri Constitution.

In 1992, legalized gambling was sold to voters as a few picturesque riverboats offering a hand or two of poker on short tourist cruises on the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. Today, massive non-floating casinos operate several hundred feet from the river in man-made moats.

Gambling opponents say such creeping expansion is the nature of the casino industry.

"Casinos spent over \$12 million promoting riverboats, but, in the long run, the terms of the agreement conflicted with their strategies for expansion," said Steve Taylor, spokesman for the St. Louis anti-gambling group Casino Watch.

In 1994, the Missouri Supreme Court ruled that "games of chance" -- slot machines, roulette and other games based purely on luck -- were forbidden by the Missouri Constitution. Legalizing such games would require a constitutional amendment.

The gambling industry then bankrolled a new effort to pass an amendment allowing games of chance. The amendment appeared on ballots in April 1994, and was defeated by a margin of less than 1 percent of the popular vote.

Gambling supporters regrouped, stepped up their campaign efforts (spending nearly \$12 million in the process) and passed an identical amendment in the November 1994 election by a 54-to-46-percent majority.

The amendment legalized gambling "upon the Mississippi and Missouri rivers only."

In the time between those two elections, the Missouri Legislature passed Senate Bill 740, which authorized games of chance to operate in "any natural or artificial space" within 1,000 feet of the main channel of the rivers, as delineated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The first boats in moats were licensed by the Missouri Gaming Commission in 1996, shortly after Missouri Rep. Todd Akin (R-St. Louis County) filed a lawsuit to force the commission to enforce the state constitution, which he contended had not been changed by passage of the bill allowing boats in moats.

In 1997, the state Supreme Court agreed with Akin, ruling unanimously that the legislature had no right to approve the boats in moats without a constitutional amendment.

Gambling supporters then began organizing to get Amendment No. 9 placed on the 1998 general election ballot. They succeeded in August of this year, when Secretary of State Rebecca McDowell Cook approved their petitions.

Gambling interests launched a media campaign that, at the end of the last reporting period, had spent \$5.5 million. Their pro-gambling political action committee Missourians for Fairness and Jobs contended the court's decision was unfair to the casinos and that it could cost Missouri as many as 10,000 jobs.

Taylor considers the fairness argument poppycock. "The casinos received their licenses only after the lawsuit was filed, and hired employees knowing that the Supreme Court decision was still pending," he said.

"Now that they've been caught in their own bait-and-switch, the casino power brokers that were certain their vast wealth and political influence would allow them to operate above the law have no problem attempting to blackmail Missourians with threats of the loss of jobs and tax revenues."

Don Poston, spokesman for Missourians for Fairness and Jobs, said: "We think that, in fact, those losses of jobs will happen. These games of chance that are the real issue -- it means existence or non-existence for these casinos, because these games account for about 70 percent of their revenue."

Taylor cited David-versus-Goliath in noting what his organization has spent fighting Amendment No. 9 (\$34,000) compared to what Missourians for Fairness and Jobs has spent (\$5.5 million).

Poston said Taylor has the Goliath-and-David metaphor backwards, because much of the opposition to Amendment No. 9 is religious. "By publications like your own, by congregations every Sunday listening to this, you have a huge base," he told the Missouri Baptist newspaper Word and Way. "We have to get our message to people that don't come and visit with us every Sunday. The congregations are a huge listening ground, a huge place to get votes and a huge place to organize."

On Nov. 3, the voters will decide who gets to play David and who gets to play Goliath in the end.

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Gambling employee will vote against Missouri 'boats-in-moats' measure

By Rob Marus

NORTH KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- "Stephen" (not his real name) doesn't care if he loses his job at a casino in North Kansas City if Amendment No. 9 fails in this fall's Missouri election and the so-called "boats in moats" are forced to close. In fact, he says he will vote against the measure, which would legalize slot machines and other "games of chance" in casinos -- like the one where he works -- outside the main channels of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

That's despite heavy pressure from his employers not only to support the measure with his vote but also to campaign for it actively.

Stephen, a mid-level administrative employee at the casino, spoke to the Missouri Baptist newspaper Word and Way on the condition that his identity be protected. "If 9 fails, and they find out I'm against it, then there are going to be some harsh consequences," he said. "But I'm looking for a new job anyway."

Stephen said the controversy and politics surrounding the proposed boats-in-moats amendment has soured him on working for the gambling industry in Missouri, which he has been doing since 1994, when the casino

opened. "I thought working at a casino would be a lot of fun, and it is," he said. "But that's if you ignore what you see and become blind to your surroundings.

"I see homeless; I see drunks; I see convicts; thieves; cheaters and every other walk of life come through these doors."

Stephen was employed on the gambling floor as a dealer when he first began working at the casino. He said he saw things there that left him disgusted. "Everyone that walks in the casino to gamble must be 21 years or older. That means you've got to be an adult, but it doesn't mean you've got to act like one," he explained. Sometimes two gamblers want to play the same "lucky" machine. "I've seen and heard of men and women fighting each other over a slot machine when there are a lots of slot machines not being used," he said.

Some of the things he has seen have turned his stomach, Stephen said -- including gamblers so glued to a slot machine or blackjack table that they relieved themselves on the spot. "It doesn't happen often, but it happens," he said. "They even go outside on the deck of the boat."

But Stephen acknowledged that those kinds of problems can happen to anyone addicted to a particular behavior, and he doesn't think some forms of gambling are inherently bad. "I think the riverboats cruising is fine," he said. "That can be fun."

But, he pointed out, at least 10 of Missouri's 15 "riverboat" casinos aren't even capable of cruising. Stephen has other reasons for opposing Amendment No. 9.

"Because I don't like liars -- and I see a lot of lying on the casino industry's side," he said. "When the casinos come in and build these land-based things that are surrounded by puddles of water, then, that's lying to the voters four years ago."

Stephen also said he is uncomfortable with the way his employers are pushing the issue on their workers. "The last Thursday and Friday of September, we had five special pep rallies, and they were mandatory," he said. "I'm not too big on politics, so I didn't know much about the issue, and all I was told was that this was an 'informational rally.'"

"Everyone who walked in -- even if you said 'no' -- they slapped a little sticker on you," he said. "So, they're forcing you to be political." Stephen said workers also were given pro-Amendment No. 9 T-shirts and told to wear them to work two days a week.

"They're not forcing anyone to do this, but they are trying to nail it into your head -- two e-mails a day," he said. "It's like they're trying to slam it down our throats."

Stephen showed a reporter a copy of an e-mail message employees received from the casino's human resources department. It touted "the top 10 ways you can still get involved with Election '98" and encouraged employees to, among other things:

-- "Write letters to the editor in newspapers and respond to radio talk show programs...(H.R. can assist you).

-- "Write postcards to friends and family living in Missouri -- a personal request to vote YES is more effective than direct mailing -- postage is on us!"

-- "Wear your blue election shirts on designated days."

-- "Help us on Election Day with precinct or poll work -- we want to be out in force -- please postpone everything that is not absolutely necessary that day."

-- "Let me know if you are committed to completing at least 8 of these items in the next 19 days!"

Stephen said he has quietly refused to wear the T-shirts or stickers, but has not made an issue of it for fear of reprisal. But he said he feels intimidated nevertheless -- and he's not the only one of the casino's employees who feels that way.

Officials with the casino's human resources department directed a reporter's questions to a public-relations consultant working for the casino. He did not return calls made to his office.

Despite the feelings of fear and intimidation, Stephen says he still plans to cast his "no on 9" vote proudly on Nov. 3. He cited the pro-gambling forces media appeals to "fairness" as something that particularly galvanizes his resistance. "What is fair is that the voters who voted for 'gaming' [in 1992 and 1994] voted for floating riverboats with fun for the whole family.

"Well, they got the fun for the whole family, but they also got a makeshift land-based casino floating on a spoonful of water called a 'moat.'"

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Once a Jewish convert, now gospel-music star

By Stacey Hamby

SULLIVAN, Mo. (ABP) -- "If I didn't give up that crazy religion, I could forget I ever had a family." Those words were spoken to Lily Isaacs by her father 27 years ago.

Today, Isaacs is part of the Dove Award-winning bluegrass gospel group, The Isaacs. But 27 years ago, she was a new wife and a new Christian. And she was Jewish.

"My parents were very upset with me when they got word about my conversion," Isaacs recalled Oct. 17 while her family was at Meramec Caverns near Sullivan, Mo., for the Fall Festival of Gospel Music. "My father said he would rather see me dead than believe in Jesus."

Isaacs, whose parents had survived the Holocaust, had a decision to make. "I couldn't turn my back on the joy I felt in my salvation. So I told my parents that I loved them, but I just couldn't give up what I'd found."

Isaacs has never looked back. She and her husband, Joe, had become Christians during the same church service. They began singing in churches.

Both had musical backgrounds. Before they married in 1970, she already had recorded a folk album, and he was traveling with a bluegrass band. They met while she and his group, the Greenbriar Boys, were performing at Gertie's Folk City, a club in New York. Neither was a Christian when they married.

"I had been raised Jewish, and Joe was the youngest of 17 kids of a Pentecostal preacher," Lily said. "But he had never been saved." She said the differences in religious beliefs led to many conflicts.

"We'd argue about the Messiah. He believed Jesus was the Messiah -- even though he had never made a commitment to him. And I'd say, 'Yeah right, if you believe it, why don't you serve him?'"

About 10 months after they married, while they were living in Cincinnati, one of Joe's brothers was killed in a car accident. "I went with Joe to his brother's church. I went to be a devoted wife, basically, but it was that night we both got saved."

During the altar call, she recalled, Joe got down on his knees, and she got down with him. "I didn't know how to pray, and even though I didn't know the words to say, [God] knew the humbleness of my heart."

For the first time, she began reading the New Testament. "I began to learn about Jesus and all the miracles, and it all began to fit together -- about my people and why they rejected the Lord," she said. "I became a strong believer of Jesus as Messiah. I also learned something I never knew before: Jesus was Jewish -- just like me."

Eventually, her parents accepted her into their home, but no one talked about salvation. "I made up my mind, I'd live a good life and be an example of what Jesus wanted me to be with them, and I knew that was the best witness."

Her father died in 1980. "Before he died, he received the Lord in the hospital," she said. She and her mother now have a close relationship.

"She knows I believe and I pray, but she is still Jewish." Although Isaacs has become a Christian, she hasn't forgotten her Jewish origins. "My family tries to celebrate Hanukkah, because I didn't want my children and

grandchildren to forget their roots," she said. "We talk about other holidays, such as Passover, but we don't necessarily celebrate them."

The family -- which includes children Ben, Sonya and Rebecca and spouses -- has made six trips to the Holy Land, leading tour groups. "I've tried to teach the children their heritage because my parents suffered to survive that tradition," Lily Isaacs said.

The Isaacs have been in the bluegrass-gospel music ministry full time since 1987. In 1993, the family's No. 1 song, "From the Depths of my Heart," launched them into the national spotlight.

The song, written by Ben and Sonya, was No. 1 for three consecutive months. The group also was nominated for a Grammy in 1995 for "The Gospel Gathering with Rick Stanley."

In 1997, The Isaacs' album, Bridges, took home the group's first Dove Award for bluegrass-gospel album of the year.

Lily said her family didn't set out for a career in gospel music, but that's where their niche is. "Gospel music is a family tradition," she said. "People singing in church environments brings families together and keeps them together."

"The gospel is a message of hope, love and commitment. And that's what family is."

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Color photos available on request from Word and Way.

Teacher helps student immigrants

By Stacey Hamby

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Peggy Seitz helps students learn their ABC's, helps them identify foods and leads them in singing "I've Been Working on the Railroad."

But this isn't kindergarten. It's middle school.

Seitz teaches a "New American" class at Northeast Middle School in downtown Kansas City, Mo. The class is a year-long orientation into American school and society. Students enrolled in the class have been in the United States less than six months.

"We teach the alphabet, math basics and several skills, like telling time in English and how to say their names and addresses," said Seitz, who co-teaches the class. "We do a lot of one-on-one."

They also teach nutrition and personal hygiene. "For example, in some countries, it's considered attractive to have body odor," Seitz said.

"We have to try to teach them that here, that's offensive." As part of the study of American culture, she also teaches about the holidays celebrated in America. At Christmas, she sets a nativity scene on her desk, which she noted is legal because they teach about many religious holidays.

"Being a Christian makes a difference, because if I wasn't, all they'd learn about Christmas would be Santa Claus."

But she emphasized the class doesn't exist to change the students, who come to America from around the world, including Mexico, Vietnam, Somalia and Bosnia.

"We don't try to get them to change their ways -- just understand our ways."

Seitz also is involved with helping the students' families. "The parents look to the teachers if they need help with something," she said. It's all part of the job. "I believe I'm where God wants me to be," she said. "It takes extra time, but it pays off. I can see them grow by leaps and bounds."

The school's vice principal, Charleen Hunter, said Seitz treats her students with respect and acceptance.

"She's just a good person in her heart, and that's something that transcends all cultures, religions and languages."

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-- Color photo available by request from Word and Way.

Volunteer missions have ripple effect, pastor says

By Robert O'Brien

MORROW, Ga. (ABP) -- As a stone tossed into water creates ripples, a volunteer missions project can continue to affect a local church long after its initial impact, testifies Georgia pastor Jim Lewis.

"Mission trips and focus on missions have a rippling effect on the life of a church," said Lewis, pastor of First Baptist Church in Morrow, Ga.

Volunteers continue to be moved long after they touch human need and their stories cause compassion to spill over into the lives of fellow church members, Lewis said.

The Morrow church has sent volunteers to Romania, Bali, Southeast Asia, China, Czech Republic, Buffalo, N.Y., and five Georgia locations. And it's taken in and cared for Kurdish refugees fleeing Saddam Hussein's reign of terror.

The church's volunteers are among a growing cadre of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship volunteers working around the world at their own expense -- beginning with 575 in 1994-95 fiscal year, more than tripling the next year, and escalating to 3,449 by 1997-98.

"A trip done with a sense of calling and purpose of mission affects a lot of things," said Lewis, a member of Atlanta-based CBF's national Coordinating Council and missions chairman for CBF of Georgia.

"It affects the money we receive and spend. It affects the local community we seek to reach. It affects the life and spirit of the church when people realize we're interested in doing the Lord's work in a significant way."

"It challenges the church to go beyond our abilities to do things that stretch our imagination, resources and strength," Lewis said. "When that takes place, there's a unifying sense of God's call to what we do."

The 100-year-old Morrow church has done plenty since sending its first volunteers to help flood victims in Albany, Ga., in 1995, and to begin construction of a church in Summerville, Ga., in 1996. "Those trips created a renewed commitment to missions and willingness of people to go again," Lewis said.

That willingness sent Lewis and Morrow members on their first mission trip overseas in 1996 as the first in a wave of volunteers to construct the Ruth School for neglected Gypsy children in Bucharest, Romania.

Volunteers, moved by memories from Bucharest, quickly followed up on that ministry and then assumed major roles in resettling Kurdish refugees.

They also:

-- Told their story in other churches, in their work places, and through an extensive electronic-mail network developed by Lewis -- and other people began to respond.

-- Began classes to teach English as a second language in the community -- a direct result of working with Kurdish refugees.

-- Cooperated with others in Morrow to build a house for Habitat for Humanity and opened up to many other local missions opportunities.

-- Increased giving to the church budget and to missions through CBF's global-missions offering -- and in the process developed a new attitude about money.

The Kurdish refugees needed help after the church had already closed its budget process.

"What about the cost?" members asked when Lewis approached them about starting the ministry. That question might have ended the discussion in earlier years.

Instead, the church voted to start a separate account in which to deposit over-and-above budget contributions to raise the \$1,500 a month it would need for at least three months to support a Kurdish family. Then, another family needed help. The same question resulted in the same answer. And so on.

The money came in -- including donations from outside. And a visitor at one service, impressed by what she heard, wrote a check for \$1,000.

"Stepping forward in faith to respond to missions has created the kind of ripples that are part of the great victory we've had as a church," Lewis said.

In earlier years, most churches held two-week revivals, Lewis noted. "In many ways, mission trips have replaced those revivals," he said. "Folks get a chance to 'lay hands on' missions and experience deep spiritual development."

"If it's done correctly, it's a consecrated time of Bible study, giving aid in the name of Jesus Christ, opening up opportunities to lead people to him, fellowshiping with other Christians, and getting another view of what the world is like," he said.

Lewis compared the gift of love by volunteers to the true spirit of Christmas -- a spirit he said now prevails at First Baptist Church.

Christmas came shortly after the volunteers had returned from Romania.

"Some of our men asked others to give them nothing for Christmas but the gift of \$180 for a year's tuition for a child at the Ruth School," Lewis said.

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