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Early church, Baptists, excised women to conform to culture, article contends

By Bob Allen

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Women were leaders in the early church but were later "excised" to make institutional Christianity credible in a male-dominated culture, says a female Baptist seminary professor in a recent article.

Linda McKinnish Bridges, professor of New Testament and Greek at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, describes a "Lydia phase" in the New Testament era, named after the woman who according to the book of Acts was the first convert in Europe and a leader of the house-church movement in Philippi.

The trend has repeated itself in church history, including among Baptists in the United States, Bridges contends in the lead article for the Summer 1998 issue of *Review and Expositor*, a scholarly theological journal supported by a consortium of moderate Baptist schools. Bridges cites the case of Martha Stearns, a Baptist who preached in Virginia and North Carolina in the 18th century.

Martha Stearns worked alongside her brother, Shubal Stearns, and Daniel Marshall, whom she later married, to form in 1755 the Sandy Creek church in what is now Randolph County, North Carolina. The church "formed the center of Baptist life in North Carolina and later the entire Southern Baptist Convention," Bridges says.

The Southern Baptist Convention carried on the revivalism, uninhibited worship style and emotional conversions associated with what historians alternately call the "Separate Baptist" or "Sandy Creek" tradition, Bridges says. But by 1845, when the convention was established, its founders were "determined to organize a convention without the presence and influence of women."

While the pressure to conform to culture has in the past mitigated against women's leadership in the church, Bridges argues the opposite is happening today. To remain culturally relevant in the future, churches will have to take the role of women seriously, she says.

"The church intentionally excised women's leadership from religious life in order to be culturally relevant; now the church must welcome her daughters home in order to be spiritually effective," Bridges writes.

Bridges says women were involved in the life of the church's early missionary phase both for theological and practical reasons. Early churches met in homes, a public arena where women of the time moved very

comfortably. Later, the church's priority on creating a comfortable setting in which the gospel could be shared took a back seat to fears of heresy, heightening concerns about orthodoxy and prompting styles of organization that conformed to standards of the culture.

By the early second century, Bridges says, cultural gender divisions had become codified and traces of the feminine erased in church writings.

Bridges said "Lydia" phases also occurred in the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, where women served freely before the pope enforced universal male celibacy for the priesthood, and in the "Separate Baptist" tradition in the southern United States.

Martha Stearns was "one of many active women leaders" of colonial Baptist life, Bridges says, who influenced the faith of both her brother and husband. Like some other Baptist forebears, she was jailed in Virginia for refusing to stop preaching the gospel, though unlike male preachers, she was three months pregnant at the time. Her preaching was powerful enough to convince a young man named Cartledge to become a preacher. Her arresting constable and magistrate were soon converted and baptized. "This woman could preach!" Bridges observes.

Despite such early influence, Bridges says no women were present at the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention. Women were not allowed to vote at the annual meeting until 1918. They were relegated largely to working behind the scenes, either as missionaries or raising money through Woman's Missionary Union, an auxiliary formed despite widespread opposition in 1888.

"For Southern Baptists, it would be more politically expedient to develop a denominational structure to match the cultural realities of gender construction than to allow the full participation of women in a religious tradition that they had worked to establish," Bridges observes.

But for once, culture is changing in favor of women, Bridges says.

"The conditions are right for women's inclusion in the church," she writes. "The church of the future will be much like the early church of the past. The faith will be less corporately structured and oriented more along the lines of the family. Just as women contributed much to this environment in the first century, women, likewise, will be the future leaders of the church in the next century."

Bridges says the future church will need leaders who know how to encourage participation, who are not afraid to share power and information and know how to enhance the self-worth of others and energize people.

"Women can do it!" Bridges says. But first they need to "find personal healing for the wounds of the past." Women also must continue to learn in order to stretch their natural leadership abilities and to "develop a spiritual attentiveness to the matters of family and church community" that will be increasingly important in congregational life.

"Women need the church, and the church needs women," she says. "Our role now is to lead on in a new reformation of church structure, religious imagination and expression, so that the community of faith can continue to find meaning in the next millennium."

Another article, in the issue of the journal titled "Women's Leadership in the Church," studies experiences of women who were involved in doctoral studies at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary between 1982 and 1992.

The article, by Oregon State University professor Susan Shaw and Montreat College professor Tisa Lewis, describes the decade as a "Camelot" era when the seminary became more open to women than ever before. But despite those good intentions, women recall a "chilly" campus climate in which they were made to feel out of place in a male-dominated structure and because of controversy over women's roles in the Southern Baptist Convention.

The article reports on a study by the authors funded by Pew Charitable Trusts. It was based on interviews with 26 of the 34 women who graduated from Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs at the seminary in Louisville, Ky., during the 10-year period.

While describing overall positive feelings about the seminary, women in the study reported sexual harassment, differential treatment in the classroom because of gender, an "old boy" culture, a lack of women in curriculum or on faculty and ignorance of women's issues on the part of professors while they were at Southern.

While participants in the study lamented that the seminary they attended "does not exist anymore" since a new conservative president reversed the trend toward encouraging women in ministry, they also criticized new moderate ventures, including the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which are still largely directed by white males.

Of 21 women in the study who were Southern Baptists when they attended seminary, only three still consider themselves Southern Baptists, say Shaw and Lewis, who both earned their doctorates at Southern during the period covered in the study. Six identify with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate Southern Baptist splinter group. Ten have joined other denominations and two no longer participate in a religious community.

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Drama troupe presents Christmas dinner theater

By Stacey Hamby

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. (ABP) -- "In Bethlehem Inn" was the name of the first-ever Christmas dinner theater presented by the St. Joseph Baptist Association drama troupe. Eleven volunteers presented the drama Dec. 1-5 in five Missouri churches. A total of about 535 people attended the production.

"It's a simple idea, but very effective," said the play's director, Jim Terrill, a member of McCarthy Baptist Church in St. Joseph, Mo. "We encourage churches to give tickets away to people to use as an outreach."

Terrill said the goal of the drama team is to be evangelistic. "We don't consider [the play] an entertainment -- although it is entertaining," he said. "The purpose is to reach out in the community to unchurched people."

The play is set in the inn on the night Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem. All of the dinner theater participants are "guests" of the inn and are served dinner between drama scenes. Each of the five churches was responsible for providing the meal and servers.

Nola Coates, a member of First Baptist Church of Savannah, Mo., where the dinner theater opened Dec. 1, said this was the first time her church ever had a dinner theater. "It presented the gospel in a unique way, and it was a good way to start off the Christmas season," she said.

"In Bethlehem Inn" also was presented in First Baptist Church, King City; and in Green Valley Baptist Church, First Baptist Church and McCarthy Baptist Church, all in St. Joseph.

The play focuses on how the innkeeper might have responded to Jesus' birth in his stable. It even includes an outdoor scene where all of the guests go out to a "stable" to see the baby Jesus. At the end, the innkeeper asks the audience if anyone knows what this all means. That's the pastor's cue to explain the true meaning of Christmas.

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'Scrapbooking' growing into popular pastime

By Vicki Stamps

(ABP) -- Putting photographs in albums the usual way is "out." What is "in" is a new pastime called "scrapbooking" -- cropping photos and otherwise enhancing their presentation with creative use of text and colorful touches, such as stickers and die-cuts.

Not only is the finished project more appealing than an ordinary photo album, but "scrapbookers" have a lot of fun with the process. Many of them get together for scrapbooking work sessions called "crops."

Barb Cummings, a scrapbooker and a member of First Baptist Church of Harvester, Mo., compared the crops to old-fashioned quilting bees. "It is just fun to get together and talk as we work on our albums."

Cummings began scrapbooking with the birth of her two children. She has done pages for her album featuring vacation Bible school, MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers), and her church's mother-daughter banquet.

Cummins says scrapbooking promotes her family's values. "Our books go along with what is important in our lives," she explained. "We want our kids to look back and remember what is important to us."

Susan Brandt, associate executive director for Hobby Industry Association, said scrapbooking has taken off during the last two to three years. The New Jersey-based international trade organization conducts research every two years on the buying habits of hobbyists.

"Scrapbooking existed before in various pockets of the country," Brandt said, "primarily through Creative Memories (a major distributor of scrapbooking supplies). But, in the last two years, we've seen a jump in scrapbooking purchases from \$200 million to \$250 million."

Brandt acknowledged the numbers are difficult to measure, because so many scrapbooking products are used for other hobbies.

"However, there is no question that scrapbooking has captured the imagination of the U.S. consumer."

Deborah Mock, managing editor of a national magazine for scrapbookers called Memory Makers, agreed. She has seen an incredible jump in the magazine's distribution.

"We began the magazine in 1996 with a distribution of 14,000. Within a two-year time frame, we're up to 160,000 copies."

Scrapbookers have discovered a way to add worth to their already valuable pictures. By developing page layouts, the scrapbooker can choose the best photos as well as the best way to display them. In addition, "journaling" -- describing in text the scene in the photo -- captures and preserves the memory.

"There is definitely an increasing emphasis on taking care of memories," Mock said. "Scrapbookers are interested in preserving their heritage for future generations."

Jill Sanders, a member of First Baptist Church of Ferguson, Mo., and a Creative Memories consultant, said looking at old photo albums points out the need for protecting and preserving photos. "Many of the photos have acid deterioration," she said, "and the magnetic and pocket pages let the photos yellow and fade."

Sanders and other scrapbookers recommend using buffered pages and acid-free stickers, papers and pens on the pages.

Mock attributes some of the growth of scrapbooking to the social interaction at "crops."

"These cropping times bring women together to expand the circle of friends," she said. "The scrapbookers talk about experiences and memories in a shared environment. The old and the young share stories and advice. They may never have met in any other situation."

Sanders pointed out that the crops also serve a practical function. "When we are working on albums, an evening of cropping provides a commitment time to work. Otherwise, we never have extra time in the day to sit down and work on it."

She also discovered another positive idea for scrapbooking at one of the crops.

"I've had clients put together albums about people who are no longer with them," she said. "It really seems to be a healing process to put together a treasure of memories about the person. I've also seen celebration albums of life for children and grandparents."

Sanders said she approaches the task with a spiritual purpose: "I sprinkle Bible thoughts throughout my books. I believe the words of Psalm 78 can be carried out through my albums. I want the generations of my children to read my praises for God."

When Sanders visits relatives, she always packs the albums. "My family and my husband's family live out of town," she said, "so they love looking at our albums and catching up on daily activities."

Mock sees only growth in the future of scrapbooking. "Our magazine began as a medium for sharing ideas around the nation," she said. "We are seeing a constant trend toward higher quality in the albums and in the products used by scrapbookers.

"Small companies for scrapbooking are springing up with innovative and creative marketing. Many women are succeeding as entrepreneurs."

Jill Sanders, a member of First Baptist Church of Ferguson, Mo., and a Creative Memories consultant, offers a variety of suggestions for getting those boxes of photos out of the closet and onto the pages of an album.

-- Sort photographs chronologically. "Focus on the type of album you want to do," Sanders said. "Do you want a family album? One for each child?"

-- Don't get overwhelmed. "Start out simple. Use current photos, and then move to your backlog. By starting where you are, you will develop a style."

Basic scrapbooking tips for planning pages:

-- Remember that you do not need to use every photo. "Use only the best to tell the story. Then, crop to enhance the photo. The photo could be trimmed, cut in a shape, or the excess background could be cut out altogether."

Sanders reports that she has changed her method of photography since beginning her scrapbooks. "I take pictures differently now. I have an idea or purpose in mind."

-- Keep all scrapbooking supplies in one location. "That way, you don't have to track everything down each time a few scrapbooking moments become available."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: For more suggestions about scrapbooking, call Creative Memories at 800-468-9335. Photos or sample scrapbook pages to accompany this article are available from Word and Way.

Missouri family endows industrial chaplaincy

By Debbie Sanders

JOPLIN, Mo. (ABP) -- A father's vision for his company didn't happen in his lifetime. But, thanks to his children, it has become a reality.

The Joplin, Mo., area now features a business-and-industrial chaplaincy ministry. The David L. Sitton Memorial Endowment Fund, provided by Sitton Motor Lines, Inc., is administered by the Missouri Baptist Foundation.

"The chaplaincy ministry is something my dad had always wanted for his company," said Cindy Tignor, daughter of the late David Sitton. "This seemed to be the right timing. It was wonderful when God put it all in place."

Keith Jackson, a Joplin native with experience as a pastor and hospital chaplain, received endorsement as a business-and-industrial chaplain with the North American Mission Board in late 1997.

The mission of the industrial chaplaincy is to provide spiritual and emotional support and encouragement to individuals in the work place, with the goal of helping them meet their needs.

Jackson's ministry operates out of a variety of settings, including an office in the renovated Spring River Baptist Mission Center and three businesses in the Joplin area.

He typically spends most of the morning in the office, and afternoons are devoted to visits to the companies supporting the chaplaincy. Sitton Motor Lines, which employs about 550 truck drivers and 85 office personnel receives daily visits, and two other business are visited at least once a week.

After the endowment was established and the Sitton ministry was well under way, Jackson approached others about taking part in the project. Level Ride Manufacturing in Diamond, Mo., employing about 20, joined the chaplaincy ministry in September. Ozark Machine in Webb City, Mo., employing about 55, joined in November.

"All three businesses have Christian administrative teams," Jackson said. "They've been very supportive, very helpful. That makes my ability to do the ministry much easier. All the teams have been very encouraging."

Tignor, like her father before her, sees a need for the industrial chaplaincy.

"In the trucking industry, there is a different atmosphere," she said. "Drivers are not home every night, and this causes a strain on family relationships. In addition, today, lots of people aren't associated with a church. This is a real opportunity for Keith to visit with these people on a one-to-one basis. The chaplaincy is a tool where we can tell them the gospel."

Jackson doesn't keep a set schedule. Instead he varies the industry visits according to need. At Sitton, he does most of his ministry in the drivers' lounge, which is equipped with televisions, telephones and showers. Drivers wait there while trucks are being serviced or for families to pick them up.

"I try to be evangelistic and be open to sharing the gospel," Jackson said. "I think that's the most important thing a Christian can do."

At the other two companies, Jackson visits with office personnel and walks through the plants for visibility. At the same time, he is careful not to hinder any work that is going on. "I try to be very approachable," he said. "That's important for a chaplain. But I also try to go to them because that's what Christ did."

In addition to on-site visitation in the work place, Jackson offers counseling. He is available to minister to spiritual and emotional needs, including marital, family and personal issues.

These areas seem to be the most vital, Jackson noted. "In the trucking industry, marital problems are a big factor because of the driver being gone for such long periods of time," he said. "Once in a while, it will be a family matter, maybe dealing with children or discipline."

Other aspects of his ministry include prayer, Bible study, referral services, and letters of spiritual encouragement or sympathy to the employees. He also makes it a point to visit the employees or their family members who are hospitalized.

Another area, crisis counseling, has been used recently, and Tignor is appreciative of the support Jackson's ministry provided.

"It's really been amazing," she said. "We had a couple of drivers die from heart attacks, and Keith was there to handle the families, even to the point of having to inform them of the deaths. He's been great. He knows just what to say to them."

Jackson knows the skills that are necessary to make a good chaplain. "Most important is to be a dedicated Christian who loves the Lord and wants to help people," he said. "Talking and listening are important skills, and a chaplain needs pastoral ministry and pastor skills as well."

As the ministry grows, Jackson hopes to enlist the help of volunteer chaplains, and perhaps even another full-time chaplain.

"I'm really amazed with the employees of these three businesses," he said. "They're very receptive. It's been a growing thing for them to be aware I'm available."

Tignor is pleased with Jackson's efforts, and she encourages any business to try a similar ministry.

"The drivers like having him around," she said. "My dad would be absolutely thrilled for Keith to be the chaplain. The drivers really can relate to him and feel at ease."