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IN THIS ISSUE:

- Violence toward women focus of national program
- Wake Forest Divinity School to open Aug. 25 with 24 students
- Charlotte church chooses pastor
- Mexican city blitzed with 'Jesus' film showings
- Once-reluctant witness now missions advocate

**Violence toward women
focus of national program**

By Ken Camp

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Violence in America literally begins at home, according to Diana Garland, director of the graduate social work program at Baylor University.

Garland led a conference on "Project HELP: Violence," a national focus of Woman's Missionary Union, during Texas Leadership Conference in Waco, July 22-24.

Researchers estimate that 30 percent of American wives are victimized by physically aggressive husbands. And in homes where spousal abuse occurs, the risk of child abuse is 15 times the national average, Garland said.

"During the Vietnam era, 58,000 American service people died as a result of combat. During those same years, 54,000 women in the United States were killed by their husbands, ex-husbands or boyfriends. But that's a death toll that went unreported on the evening news," she said.

Some Christian women remain in violent situations out of a mistaken belief that if they leave their husbands, they are guilty of breaking their marriage vows and violating the Bible, Garland said.

"We need to teach a theology that says God does not like violence, and he does not like people using violence and power to control others," she said. "Breaking covenant happens when the violence is perpetrated."

Garland said violence in America is at its heart "a spiritual problem."

In a nation where the sense of community has broken down, she added, "The community of faith can be the community -- not just for our own children, but for all God's children."

Children learn violence from adults, from their own experience and especially from the mass media, Garland said.

"The most significant teacher of violence in society is TV," she said.

As a commercial medium, television is dominated by the three most effective attention-getters in modern society -- violence, sex and humor, she noted. And children spend an average of 32 hours per week watching TV and playing video games.

Garland offered tips to help families tame their televisions:

-- Keep the television turned off unless someone specifically has made the conscious decision to watch a particular show. "Don't just turn it on in the morning and leave it on all day as background noise."

-- Limit the number of hours of television time per day or per week.

-- Watch television with children. "It can be a meaningful shared family activity when it's 10 minutes of plot followed by several minutes of discussion."

-- Prohibit TV watching during family meals, except as a rare treat when there is a special program the family can enjoy together.

-- Keep TV sets in shared family space, not in bedrooms. "Keep it down to one shared television in the house -- and maybe one in the closet, in case somebody comes down with the measles."

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Wake Forest Divinity School to open Aug. 25 with 24 students

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (ABP) -- Wake Forest University Divinity School will open this fall with 24 full-time students from a variety of denominational backgrounds, officials at the Baptist-affiliated university in Winston-Salem, N.C., have announced.

Nineteen women and five men will comprise the first class seeking a three-year master-of-divinity degree through the new program. They range in age from 21 to 74, said Scott Hudgins, director of admissions and student services, and come from religious traditions including Baptist, Lutheran, Catholic, Moravian, Presbyterian, Episcopalian and United Church of Christ.

Classes open Aug. 25, with an official inaugural celebration scheduled Oct. 12-13.

Trustees at Wake Forest first approved the establishment of a divinity school in 1989, pending the raising of adequate funding for the venture. To date, more than \$10 million in pledges and gifts have been raised for the divinity school.

The school's curriculum will be centered on classical disciplines of biblical studies, church history, theology and ministry studies including pastoral care and preaching.

Dean Bill Leonard said the new divinity school links the university to its past. One of the founding visions for Wake Forest was to train ministers, said Leonard, a Baptist historian who was named the divinity's school's founding dean in 1996.

Wake Forest opened in 1834 as the first institution of higher education founded by the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. Today the school is self-governing but retains a fraternal relationship with Baptists in North Carolina.

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-- By ABP staff

Charlotte church chooses pastor

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) -- Texas minister Stephen Shoemaker has been named pastor of Myers Park Baptist Church, a historic congregation in Charlotte, N.C.

Shoemaker, 51, was elected to the post July 25. He will preach his first sermon at Myers Park Sept. 12, according to the Charlotte Observer.

The 1,800-member congregation has long been known for its "high church" worship style and ecumenical tradition. Former pastors include the legendary Carlyle Marney, acknowledged as one of the best - albeit controversial -- preachers of his day, who led the church from 1958 to 1967.

Shoemaker has been senior pastor of the 2,000-member Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, for seven years. He previously was pastor of another leading moderate church, Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky.

Shoemaker and his wife, Cherrie, a schoolteacher, have two children. David, 21, is a senior at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Ann, 19, is a sophomore at Furman University in Greenville, S.C.

Shoemaker calls Charlotte his hometown. He graduated from high school there. His mother, brother and sister and their families all live there.

His predecessor at Myers Park, John Walsh, resigned in April 1997 after two-and-a-half years.

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-- By ABP staff

Mexican city blitzed with 'Jesus' film showings

By Mark Wingfield

JUAREZ, Mexico (ABP) -- Jesus was seen all over Juarez, Mexico, in July, thanks to efforts by First Baptist Church of Midland, Texas, Campus Crusade for Christ and several hundred evangelical Christian churches in Juarez.

Every night from June 30 through July 30, the "Jesus" film was shown on portable outdoor screens at anywhere from 70 to 100 locations.

On city plazas, in public parks, in parking lots, even on blocked-off city streets, the Spanish-language version of the time-tested evangelistic tools was being shown to crowds averaging 200 people per showing.

An extensive media campaign saturated the city with news of the film, declaring "He Visto A Jesus en Ciudad Juarez," or "I've Seen Jesus in the City of Juarez."

"The most popular phrase in Juarez right now is 'I've Seen Jesus,'" said Francisco Presendo, media director for Campus Crusade in Mexico.

This message -- and a similar one, "Jesus is Close to You" -- were painted on billboards and walls, printed on posters and fliers, sent over the airwaves in radio and television ads and even displayed on an electronic board over one of the main bridges from Juarez into El Paso.

"We want to wake up a desire in people to see the film," Presendo explained.

It would be hard not to have seen or known about the film if you were anywhere in Juarez in July, especially after dark. With 70 to 100 free screenings per night, the project aimed for a total of about 2,500 showings by the end of July.

Judging by attendance at early screenings, as many as a half-million people were expected to see the film depicting the life of Christ as told in the Gospel of Luke.

In the first week alone, 11,000 spiritual decisions were recorded on response cards given to people who viewed the film.

Each person making such a decision was visited within 48 hours by volunteers from local evangelical churches. In addition to the spiritual counseling offered at the screening site, the Christian volunteers offered additional counseling, discipleship materials and prayer during the subsequent home visits.

Campus Crusade officials cited the involvement of hundreds of local churches as the key to the success of the "Jesus" film strategy for mass evangelism.

"Churches that are participating are experiencing a revival, and it's very different from a stadium crusade," Presendo said.

Churches across Juarez prepared for the July campaign for months. Campus Crusade staffers trained 2,000 people in evangelism and discipleship, and also provided the expertise for church-based volunteers to run the 100 16-mm movie projectors that were shuttled around the city for each night's showings.

The portable screens are made of material that allows the film to be viewed from both sides. So in the plazas and streets of Juarez, crowds camped out all around the screens.

The two-sided viewing came in especially handy in locations where not everyone wants to be seen viewing the film in a crowd. At one showing in the Bella Vista colonia of Juarez, a community known for its violence and drug deals, volunteers from a Christian church blocked off a short section of a street and set up the screen in the middle. Some people watched the film while sitting in folding chairs set up on one side of the screen. Others sat in or on top of cars parked along the streets. Others peered out the windows of their homes, and some stood on the shadowy street corners behind the screen, watching and trying not to be seen.

At some locations, volunteers handed out popcorn and snacks to those watching the film. At all locations, they handed out response cards and Christian literature.

At the conclusion of each showing, all those who wanted to know more about a personal relationship with the Jesus shown in the movie were invited to small-group gatherings with counselors. Children huddled in one group, teenagers in another, adults in yet other groups.

In addition to the presentations of the 16-mm film, some churches adopted a strategy of delivering videotaped copies of the film door-to-door in neighborhoods where residents were affluent enough to own televisions and video players. Campaign organizers hoped to distribute 10,000 of these video copies of the "Jesus" film.

The month-long film project was to conclude with a free concert in an 18,000-seat stadium featuring the popular Christian singer Yuri. Once called the Madonna of Mexico, she later became a Christian and now presents a strong testimony of how God's love changed her life.

Organizers anticipated several thousand decisions for Christ could result from the concert alone.

The overall project received its major funding from First Baptist Church of Midland and Border Ministries, an affiliate of First Baptist Church. The west Texas church conducts extensive year-round ministries along the border, even employing a full-time on-site coordinator, Butch Villareal.

Deborah Fikes, a layperson who chairs the Mexico missions committee at First Baptist, believes cooperating with other evangelical Christians on projects like the "Jesus" film is a wise investment. It's also the way to build the kingdom of God, she said.

"We're really sold on the 'Jesus' film because it's a kingdom thing," she said. "It unites the churches. It's God's plan, and we're just proud to be a part of it."

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Once-reluctant witness now missions advocate

By Mark Wingfield

MIDLAND, Texas (ABP) -- Deborah Fikes considers herself the least likely person to chair the Mexico missions committee at First Baptist Church of Midland, Texas.

A self-described "little housewife from Midland," she never would have predicted that she would end up guiding and promoting the west Texas church's extensive ministry along the border.

"I'm Mexico missions chairman by default," she explained. "God seems to be raising up unlikely people."

When first approached about taking on the lay leadership role for the ministry that handles hundreds of thousands of mission dollars every year, she protested: "But I do not balance a checkbook. I never have in my life."

Others assured her they would handle the finances if she would give the committee leadership. That she has done with great enthusiasm.

"She's been a tremendous example and inspiration to a lot of laypeople with her enthusiasm and the way she goes about her ministry," said Dale Pond, minister of missions at the church. "There are people involved in Mexico missions, who would not have been otherwise, because of her enthusiasm and her getting the word out. She's a great advocate for missions in our church."

But just three years ago, Fikes didn't have the burden for reaching Mexicans with the gospel that she has today. In fact, she admits, she was outright prejudiced in the past.

As a schoolteacher before her own children were born, she resented the Hispanics who required extra time in her classroom because of their language barrier, she recalled.

Today, however, the 41-year-old mother of two is a vocal advocate for cross-cultural missions. She and her family have personally participated in numerous mission projects in Mexico; she has become an advocate for a Spanish-language congregation in Midland; and she is the foremost promoter of First Baptist's Mexico missions endeavors.

An experience three years ago sparked her passion for Mexico missions. The father of Elvia, a Latino woman who did housekeeping for her, was dying of cancer. Though he lived in Mexico, he had collapsed while visiting in Midland and been taken to a local hospital.

"I was burdened for his soul," Fikes explained. "My husband encouraged me to call a Hispanic pastor to minister to him."

She did, and then she accompanied pastor to the man's hospital room where together they told the man about God's love.

"I can't get you off my mind," she told the housekeeper's father.

As the Spanish-speaking pastor shared the plan of salvation, the man began to sob. "I have been wanting to make my peace with God," he said.

He professed Christ that day, starting a chain of conversions that has since extended to 20 or more family members in west Texas and Mexico.

That is because of a promise Fikes and the pastor made to Elvia's father, who died soon after his conversion. "Please tell all my family about this good news," he implored them.

"It has just been the power of God," Fikes explained. "It took just a little bit of obedience and then some prayer."

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