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**Americans of 'two minds'  
on abortion, polls say**

By Sarah Griffith

PRINCETON, N.J. (ABP) -- Though abortion is hotly debated among presidential candidates, a majority of Americans remain "of two minds" on the issue, according to a new review of poll data.

Conflicting opinions in America on abortion result from a simultaneous respect for life and desire for autonomous decision-making, wrote Karlyn Bowman, a resident fellow of the American Enterprise Institute, in a January article reviewing the Gallup polling information.

"Americans do not want to outlaw abortion, because they value individual choice," wrote Bowman. "They are, however, willing to see some restrictions put on its use because of their reverence for life, and they don't want abortion to be undertaken simply for convenience."

In an April 1999 Gallup poll, 48 percent of Americans said they are pro-choice and 42 percent pro-life. But a majority (55 percent) said they want abortion to be legal only under certain circumstances. Less than a fourth (16 percent) said it should be illegal in all situations, while 27 percent said abortion should be legal in all situations.

Acceptable circumstances cited by the majority "include cases of rape, incest, or when the mother or fetus's health is seriously endangered," said Bowman.

While abortion divides Americans, most voters (51 percent) said it is not a major issue in choosing a candidate. One in five voters said they would vote for a candidate who shares their opinion on abortion.

Protestants and Catholics usually do not differ widely on abortion, Bowman said. But the April poll shows Catholics are more likely than Protestants to be pro-choice.

A Baptist ethicist observed that single-issue groups on both sides inflame the issue, especially in presidential politics, by framing the debate "in terms of false choices."

"They insist that Americans decide between being either totally anti-abortion or completely pro-choice," said Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, Tenn., "keeping the nation away from common-ground agreement and constructive solutions."

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### **Professor resigns suddenly at Mercer theology school**

ATLANTA (ABP) -- A popular Baptist preacher and founding professor at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology has resigned suddenly.

Paul Duke, professor of preaching and worship at the 3-year-old school in Atlanta, resigned effective Jan. 31 "for personal reasons," according to a statement released by officials of the theology school.

A spokesman for the university refused to elaborate. Duke did not respond to an e-mail requesting comment.

Duke came in 1996 as one of the original faculty members of the theology school, which awarded its first master's degrees last year. The official statement described him as "a major contributor to the success and development" of the school.

As pastor of Kirkwood Baptist Church in St. Louis and Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., Duke earned a reputation as one of the elite preachers among moderate Southern Baptists. He gave major addresses at the General Assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in 1992 and 1998.

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-- By Bob Allen

### **Tim Norton to head Lord's Day Alliance**

ATLANTA (ABP) -- A career Baptist denominational worker has been named to head the Lord's Day Alliance of the United States, a 112-year-old ecumenical group that promotes keeping the Sabbath.

Tim Norton, business manager for Georgia Baptist newspaper The Christian Index, will become executive director of the Atlanta-based alliance April 1. He succeeds Jack Lowndes, a former Georgia Baptist official who once edited The Christian Index and is retiring after eight years.

"As we enter this new century there is no more vital time than now for a renewed emphasis on the need for a day of rest and worship," said Norton, who was elected to the post by the organization's board of managers.

Norton, 38, has worked at the Index since 1996. He previously held development, marketing and business-management posts at Palm Beach Atlantic College, the Southern Baptist Convention Brotherhood Commission and Home Mission Board and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He is a graduate of the University of Central Florida and Southwestern Seminary. He is married and has a 5-year-old son.

Christian Index Editor William Neal described Norton as "an invaluable member" of the newspaper's staff who will be missed.

Neal also announced the hiring of Gregory Brett as managing editor of The Christian Index, effective March 1. Brett is currently vice president for institutional development at Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, Ga. He will fill a vacancy created by the resignation of John Pierce, who started Feb. 1 as editor of the independent newspaper Baptists Today.

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-- By ABP staff

-- Mug shot available on request from ABP

## **Texas ministry reaches thousands but revolves around one woman**

By Toby Druin

ARLINGTON, Texas (ABP) -- It's 4 a.m. at Mission Arlington, and Tillie Burgin already has been there half an hour. She has completed her morning quiet time and has put on the coffeepot, and now she is writing on the message board.

"Every one of us, tell the story to someone," she writes. "Don't fall into the trap of them saying they've already heard it."

The "story," of course, is the gospel. Burgin's aim is that everyone who comes through the large social ministry at First Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas, will hear and respond to "the Jesus story."

"Everyone" in the case of Mission Arlington is thousands of people.

Nearly 4,000 needy families shopped at Mission Arlington's Christmas Store last year, and more than 2,000 got Christmas trees. While there, they listened as a volunteer told them the Christmas story.

An average 3,700 attend Bible studies each Sunday led by Mission Arlington volunteers in more than 200 locations around the city. More than 5,000 people a month receive food, and 3,500 receive other assistance, including furniture.

Other ministries include driving people to work or school in donated vehicles, medical and dental care, a homeless shelter and day care. It all adds up to 42,000 families and 189,000 individuals a year who receive some type of ministry from Mission Arlington.

While Mission Arlington occupies buildings all over town, most of the day-to-day ministry is carried on in a complex almost at the back door of the 6,000-member First Baptist Church.

That way, says Charles Wade, the church's longtime pastor who Feb. 1 became executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, church members won't forget "it is us."

"Having it close means we pray every time we drive by it -- every time we come to church," he said.

At the center of the mind-boggling swirl of activity at Mission Arlington is the 63-year-old Burgin. She is in perpetual motion, striding constantly through the sprawling complex, talking on a cell phone or on one or two radios clipped to her belt. Shouts of "Tillie!" emit almost continuously over a radio or above the parking-lot noise. She rarely has a conversation that isn't interrupted by call or by someone asking her to sign a voucher or check or approve some action.

Thin and white-haired, Burgin appears almost frail. But she is indefatigable. Her day starts at 3:30 a.m. and ends somewhere around 10 or 11 p.m. -- seven days a week.

As administrator, she oversees the massive operation just as any other executive might. But if the area around the trash dumpster requires cleaning, a floor needs mopped or a pile of orange peels needs to be scooped up near the doorway of the medical clinic, she does it herself.

She meets and talks with hundreds of people each day. Many are in need or under stress. She ministers personally with as many as possible with a hug, a smile, an encouraging word. "No one you pass today will be of no significance," she tells staff meeting for an 8 a.m. devotional.

The Mission Arlington model is being copied -- as much as is possible without a Tillie Burgin -- by others across the nation. Observers come to the office daily to see how it's done and go home to try to replicate it.

Burgin said God has put it all in place. "The only idea I ever had was, 'Let's start a Bible study,'" she said. "Everything else has come because of a need."

Arlington, a city of 260,000 in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, is Burgin's home. She and her older sister grew up in a home across the street from First Baptist Church, just a block from where her Mission Arlington office is now located. Her father, Erman Lester, ran a service station in the city seven days a week for 40 years, and she credits him for her work ethic.

"He was a servant," she said. "When he would come in late at night, he would explain it with, 'There's always one more to fill up.' He knew and took care of everyone. When he died, his pallbearers were six former mayors of Arlington."

Her father nicknamed her Tillie when she was about 4 years old, she said, after the cartoon series "Tillie the Toiler." Her industriousness must have been apparent from the start. As a youngster, she helped at the service station, filling cars with gas, cleaning windshields and fixing flats.

"He believed everyone should work for a living," Burgin said of her father. "When I was about 15, the owner of the 5-and-10-cent store, Mr. Caton, called and said he wanted me to go to work for him. I didn't learn until five years later that my dad was paying my salary."

She grew up in the shadow of First Baptist Church. At 9, she made a profession of faith in Christ, at 15 recommitted her life to Christ and in a Girls Auxiliary meeting felt a calling to be a missionary.

Burgin met her husband, Bob, in a history class at what was then Arlington State College (now the University of Texas at Arlington). They were married within a year.

When he was drafted in 1957, it opened the door for her to answer her missionary calling. She couldn't accompany him as a military dependent, but while he served with the Army at Inchon, Korea, she became a teacher with the Methodist Mission in Seoul. When he left the military, they returned to Arlington as schoolteachers.

Bob Burgin, who earned a degree in secondary education at North Texas State University, hadn't been inclined to be a missionary at first, but after a few years he, too, felt God was calling him to missions. The Burgins -- by this time with two young sons -- returned to Korea in 1966 as Southern Baptist missionary teachers.

Tillie had listed Korea as her first choice for a place of service on her missionary application form and Arlington as her second and third choices. She believed if she couldn't serve in Korea, she should be a missionary in Arlington.

After five years in Korea, the Burgins returned home on what was to be a yearlong furlough. It stretched because of health problems for their younger son. They managed to return to Korea briefly, but the child's problems persisted, and they eventually had to resign as foreign missionaries.

Both Tillie and Bob took positions with the Arlington school system: he as a principal and she as director of personnel. They were active at First Baptist Church, where she led a Wednesday night Bible study group.

Her move back to an active missions role began in 1986 after Wade, her pastor, attended a "key

church" meeting in Dallas. When he heard another pastor describe starting an apartment ministry with seminary students, he said, "I thought, 'We can do that,' and I thought of Tillie."

The "key church" program offered assistance from Baptist General Convention of Texas to any church hiring a minister of missions and committing to starting six missions.

"The key church minister-of-missions program was perfect for Tillie," Wade explained. "We had to come up with \$14,000 to complement the BGCT's commitment, and I offered to cancel our radio program, which cost exactly the amount we needed.

"The missions committee members looked at me and apparently thought if I believed in it enough to give up the radio program, they should approve it. They certainly all believed in Tillie."

Today, the church budgets \$100,000 for salaries for Mission Arlington and another \$30,000 for programs.

Burgin resigned her job to become the church's minister of missions but after a few months accepted an offer from the school district to be its personnel officer and operate Mission Arlington at the same time. That worked for two-and-a-half years, until she came back to the ministry full time.

What would eventually become Mission Arlington began to take shape with a phone call from a woman who needed help paying her electric bill. Burgin helped her and asked if she could have a Bible study in the woman's apartment. The woman consented but said she had no furniture. Burgin arranged for her to get some and then realized she had no one to teach the Bible study.

She asked Lauren Musgrave, who started attending First Baptist as a college student and was a member of Burgin's Bible-study group on Wednesday nights.

"Lauren said she had never taught," Burgin said. "I told her not to worry, probably no one would come anyway." But 17 came to the first session.

Though the walls of Burgin's office are decked with awards from the governor of Texas, local government and denominational agencies, she may be proudest of a photo of that first Bible-study group, mounted in a broken ceramic frame.

The woman who opened her home to that first Bible study came with Tillie to a deacon's meeting several weeks later, Wade recalled, and thanked them for what the church had done for her and her family. Her two daughters had become Christians and been baptized in the apartment-complex swimming pool.

"She said it was the first time anyone had ever thought she could help with anything," Wade said. "She said, 'You gave me back my dignity.'"

Soon, Bible studies were going at six apartment complexes. Word began to spread among apartment managers that they had a positive impact on tenants' behavior. That opened many more doors.

They also had a positive impact on the church, as First Baptist members came forward to lead the studies. "Our lay people began to do it and found they could teach and could make a difference in people's lives," Wade said.

"What we and they found is that people in our churches know a lot more than they think," he added.

Ellis Sodd, an older deacon, led one of the first Bible studies.

"One day I said to Ellis that he could be traveling and doing so many things other than staying around Arlington to teach his Bible study," Wade recalled. Sodd replied: "Pastor, in all my life I have never seen lives changed like in this ministry. I'm making a difference."

Mission Arlington workers exhibit supreme loyalty to the ministry. Debbie Musgrave, who is the Mission Arlington business administrator and leads Bible study at the women's shelter, has been at it 15 years. Barbara Webb, who directs pickups and deliveries, has been there 14 years. Jack and Imogene Longgear have taught a Bible study at Woodlawn apartments for 10 years. Edna Goodyear has directed the medical clinic for 10 years.

More than 2,000 volunteers work in the ministry each year -- "We need 2,000 more," Burgin remarked -- and many of them have been coming for years.

Bob Burgin has been involved with his wife in the ministry from the outset. He now is pastor of Abram Street Baptist Church, a ministry of Mission Arlington. Their son Rick has worked for the ministry eight years, and both he and his brother, Jim, and their families are involved in leading Bible studies.

Lauren Musgrave, now in her 14th year with the ministry, is in charge of fieldwork. She enlists Bible-study leaders for the 215 locations where studies are held each week. She also is in charge of the Christmas Store during the holiday season.

All Mission Arlington asks of a Bible-study leader, Burgin said, is that they be Christians and that they pray.

"They are to knock on doors, visit the people and hang out on the property until they know their people," she said. "That's our basic philosophy: 'Hang out on the property and hover around John 3:16.'"

A children's curriculum has been developed for those who work with the youngsters, but people working with adults are encouraged to start and stay with John 3:16 until they get to know the people and learn their needs.

Burgin leads one group, meeting with 12 to 15 women every Wednesday at noon. She also takes every opportunity to speak to school groups. Schools remain special to her, she said.

She is arguably the best-known person in Arlington. "Hi, Miss Tillie," is on the lips of almost every person she passes and frequently is shouted from passing cars. She is embarrassed frequently when introduced as the "Mother Teresa of Arlington."

She is still every bit a missionary, she said, and she flinches when someone refers to her as a "former" missionary to Korea. Once a missionary, always a missionary, she says.

If she has a favorite Bible verse, she said, it's John 3:16, because it says "whosoever."

"That means we are to go to the people wherever they are, to hang out there and tell them about Jesus," she said.

Her only hero is Jesus. "No one but him," she said. And rather than thinking of it as work, Burgin says coming to Mission Arlington is "fun," even if it's for an 18-hour day.

She scoffs at the idea that the ministry revolves around her and dismisses questions about who will direct it when she is gone.

"There are a whole lot of people here who could manage it," she said. "Besides, I only kind of hang out here. The rest of the people do the work."

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-- Photos to accompany this story are available upon request from Mark Wingfield at the Baptist Standard in Dallas.

### **Info box: What is Mission Arlington?**

-- 215 weekly Bible studies attended by 3,700 people in apartment complexes, mobile home parks, retirement centers, nursing homes, office buildings and homes.

-- 3,500 families per month given assistance, 42,000 families and 189,000 individuals last year. Assistance totaled \$310,895.94.

-- 2,500 patients seen annually in a free dental clinic.

-- 2,200 patients treated annually in a free medical clinic.

-- \$2,000 monthly spent to assist needy with prescription costs.

- 50 children of homeless and at-risk families cared for daily.
- 2,000 volunteers worked at Mission Arlington during 1999, not including more than 100 out-of-town mission groups with 2,000 students from 18 states and more than 1,000 people assigned by legal entities to do community service work.
- \$150,000-plus in direct financial assistance given to approximately 35,000 people to help with rent utilities, gasoline and prescriptions.
- 350 pickups weekly of furniture, clothing and housewares and delivered at no cost to people in need. More than 45,000 people a year are assisted.
- 5,000 individuals monthly assisted with food.
- 2,000 people a week helped with clothing.
- 650 children each week participating in after-school programs at 26 sites.
- 12 English as a Second Language classes held each week.
- 12,768 people in 3,766 families aided through the Christmas Store. -- (ABP)

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-- By Toby Druin

## **St. Louis health professionals bring light to children's lives**

By Heather Kensinger

ST. LOUIS (ABP) -- Proverbs 17:22 says, "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." Four members of Rockhill Baptist Church in St. Louis take that mandate seriously. Well, not too seriously.

Medical doctor Dana Abendschein and his wife, Jane, a hospital employee, along with friends Curt and Diana Patty, spend many hours with patients at St. Louis Children's Hospital. They aren't just regular visitors, though. They see patients as Doctor Dude, Doctor Tickles, Doctor ICU and Nurse Sniggles.

"Caring clowning is where we use the clowning skill to raise the hope and joy of those not doing so well," Dr. Abendschein said.

The "Clown Docs" go on rounds just like a normal doctor, but their procedures are anything but orthodox. Red-nose transplants, spinning-platelet tests, an oversized stethoscope and prescriptions for hugs and smiles are administered to amuse the children.

"We do the silly things to distract them, to make them forget where they are," Jane Abendschein explained. "We try to take the medical treatments and make them different and fun. We are a ministry of presence."

The Clown Docs do not intrude on patients or interfere with medical treatment. They ask the patient if they can come in for a few minutes. "In a hospital where everything is decided for the children, we are a refreshing change," said Dana Abendschein.

The Clown Docs began last September. Over the past few months, they have established relationships with patients and their families who are often at the hospital. Many children eagerly await the arrival of the Clown Docs.

The Abendscheins and Pattys are not new to clowning. Both are active in the "Fools for Christ" at their church and have participated in an annual Missouri Baptist Convention-sponsored Show Me Clowns for Jesus Conference.

"There's a quality about clowns that people warm up to," Dana Abendschein said. "They are cartoon-like characters. It tends to break down the barriers between people because of the disarming effect of the clowns. It allows us to show the gospel truth in a way they have never seen before."

The Abendscheins view clowning as a ministry tool. "The clowning is a fun way to present the gospel," Dana Abendschein said. "The truth gets to them before they realize it sometimes."

The Clown Docs hope to expand upon the ministry they have begun. They hope not only to spend more time with the patients, but also to involve others. Students at the Washington University School of Medicine have approached Dr. Abendschein about internships with the Clown Docs.

"We delight in what the Lord is doing through us and with us," he said. "We want more people to be involved in it."

This year's clown conference is set for Feb. 18-20. Traditionally, the conference has drawn hundreds of participants from Missouri and the surrounding states. But for the first time this year, it has been promoted to a national audience.

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-- Heather Kensinger is a correspondent for the Missouri Baptist newspaper Word and Way. Photo to accompany this story available on request from Word and Way.

## **Baptist college student relates struggle with homosexuality**

By Shawn Hendricks

HANNIBAL, Mo. (ABP) -- Ryan Black spent most of his teen-age years feeling like an outsider. At 12, Black, now a junior psychology major at Hannibal-LaGrange College in Missouri, says he began having feelings he classifies as "homosexual tendencies."

He eventually acted on those desires a couple of times in high school, he said. Those were difficult years for Black, because he had low self-esteem, and he didn't feel like he fit in with the other guys.

He didn't talk about those feelings with any of his friends or family for fear he would be rejected. "There was no way I was going to let this out," he said. "I was really good at keeping things inside. I guess my biggest fear was that I wouldn't be accepted."

In high school, Black tried to find acceptance through sports. He participated in football, wrestling and track, but nothing seemed to fill the void in his life. He eventually came to believe he would always feel different.

"Since I didn't know Christ, and I wasn't raised in a Christian home, I pretty much accepted that this was the way things would be," he said.

Black said he believes some of those feelings were triggered by his strained relationship with his father. "Looking back now, I know he loves me, but when I was growing up, it seemed like mostly a material love, where he took care of my physical needs like having the right car or clothes."

So Black sought love in other places. It wouldn't be until the summer after his senior year of high school, however, that he discovered, he said, what love really is.

After graduating from high school, he attended a Christian youth camp with a group of friends from First Baptist Church of O'Fallon, Mo. It was there he realized that he was spiritually lost, and he accepted Christ.

The next day, while listening to a message focusing on "sin in people's lives," he decided he would have to abandon his homosexual desires.

"There it was right in the Bible, talking about how homosexuals 'will not inherit the kingdom of God' (I Cor. 6: 9)," he said. "After I saw it, I wandered around for a while just crying. I was having one of the greatest and at the same time one of the worst experiences of my life."

Black said it wasn't easy to let go of what he had accepted as his identity. "There was a time when I didn't think there was any way these feelings were going to change."

For a while, Black thought he would have to live a celibate lifestyle with homosexual feelings bottled up inside. He eventually slipped into depression and contemplated suicide.

"It got to the point where I didn't want to feel any more," he recalled.

Realizing he needed help, Black attended a Promise Keepers rally in Dallas in 1995 and spotted a booth with a banner "Healing for Homosexuals."

He snatched a pamphlet on the edge of the table while walking past the booth and kept walking. "I was so afraid someone was going to see me," he said.

He later read the pamphlet, which talked about an organization called Exodus International, a non-profit, non-denominational organization that preaches that men and women can find their way out of homosexuality.

While some find that message controversial, Black, like many others who have gone through the program since 1976, testifies that it worked for him.

It would be months before Black worked up enough courage to call the organization. He then began attending Exodus meetings near his hometown of Lake St. Louis.

At first, he recalled, he was a little nervous discussing his personal life with strangers. But by attending weekly meetings, he was able to redefine his role as a Christian man.

"The sessions focused on what it means to be a man of God rather than what society defines as a true man," he said.

Being able to open up and share his feelings with others was another important part of the healing process, Black said.

"The accountability is so important; it's something you have to have to get through it," he said. "Secrets are the most damaging things in a person's life."

Black credits Exodus International with helping him to discover an identity he never knew was there. He hopes one day to marry and have children. "I want to be a daddy," he said.

The organization also helped him develop a confidence in sharing his story with people in his church, he said, adding he hopes his testimony will help others who are struggling with similar issues.

Black's pastor, Gary Taylor, recalled the day Ryan shared his testimony with him.

"I was naturally a little surprised, but as a preacher, you always want to show concern, interest and love," Taylor said. "It is magnificent to see what the grace of God can do in a person's life, and Ryan's testimony is evidence of that."

Black only recently shared his past struggles with his parents for the first time. The conversation was long and at times uncomfortable, he said, but it was honest and from the heart.

"I felt pretty good about it," he said. "I think they are just more concerned about me and what all this means for my life. "

After he graduates from college, Black plans to seek a full-time position in counseling with Exodus International. He said there is a growing need for Christians who can counsel in this area.

"The church needs to be willing to address it, because it isn't going away," he said.