U.S. House passes ban on 'partial-birth' abortions
By Robert Marus
Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com
June 5, 2003
Volume: 03-51-3629

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- For the first time since the Supreme Court legalized abortion nationwide more than 30 years ago, a federal measure restricting abortion will likely be signed into law.

After rancorous debate late in the evening of June 4, the House of Representatives passed House Resolution 760, which bans certain late-term abortion procedures that anti-abortion groups call "partial-birth abortion." The bill passed on a 282-139 vote.

Abortion-rights supporters prefer not to use the "partial-birth" moniker and say it, as defined by their opponents, could encompass a whole range of abortion procedures the Supreme Court currently finds legal. However, they do acknowledge an abortion procedure, labeled "dilation and extraction," that is similar. It involves a physician partially delivering a late-term fetus, then inserting a sharp instrument into the base of its skull and suctioning out its brain tissue.

Anti-abortion groups hailed the bill's passage. "Partial-birth abortion is a gruesome and grisly procedure that 70 percent of Americans agree should be illegal," said Family Research Council President Ken Connor, in a press release.

President Bush vowed to sign the bill into law after lawmakers resolve differences between it and a Senate version that passed in March. "I applaud the House for passing legislation banning partial-birth abortions," Bush said, in a statement issued shortly after the House vote. "Passage of this important legislation is a shared priority that will help build a culture of life in America. I urge Congress to quickly resolve any differences and send me the final bill as soon as possible so that I can sign it into law."

During the last session of Congress, a similar bill passed the House but died in the Senate, which was then under Democratic control. Previous versions of the bill passed both houses in recent years, but were vetoed by former President Bill Clinton. Congress could never muster the two-thirds majority necessary to override Clinton's veto.

Opponents say the bill is substantially identical to a law overturned by the Supreme Court three years ago. In that case, Stenberg vs. Carhart, the court invalidated a Nebraska "partial-birth" ban because it failed to include an exemption to the ban allowing the procedure to preserve the health of the mother.

Supporters of the bill attempted to address that concern by including in the legislation a congressional "finding" that the procedure "is never medically necessary and should be prohibited."

As in the Senate version, lawmakers voted down an amendment that would have included an exception to the ban to protect the health of the mother.

The bill defines "partial-birth abortion" as a procedure in which a doctor "deliberately and intentionally vaginally delivers a living fetus...for the purpose of performing an overt act that the person knows will kill the partially delivered fetus."

Opponents of the ban said such language is intentionally vague so as to ban far more procedures than dilation and extraction -- including procedures that happen earlier in the pregnancy. "This bill arises from a campaign of inaccurate, incomplete and otherwise misleading information, including the invention of the political term 'partial-birth abortion,'" read a statement from leaders of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. "That the purpose of this legislation is not just to outlaw some abortions but to undermine the legality of all abortions is made clear by the supporters' refusal to include an appropriate health exception."

Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.), in floor debate on the bill June 4, called it unconstitutional as well. "Mr. Speaker, today we have a very bad combination, a combination of members of Congress who want to play doctor and members of Congress who want to play Supreme Court. When you put the two together, you have a prescription for some very bad medicine for the women in this country," Nadler said. "This bill is so vague that it could be read to prohibit many common procedures used during the second trimester [of pregnancy]....The bill as written fails every test the Supreme Court has laid down for constitutional regulation of abortion. It reads almost as if the authors went through the Supreme Court's controlling decision in Stenberg vs. Carhart and went out of their way to thumb their noses at the court."

Abortion-rights supporters have vowed to challenge the bill in court as soon as it is signed into law. That may happen within a few weeks.

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Living simply with children
By Marla Pierson Lester
Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com
June 5, 2003
Volume: 03-51-3622

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- I thought it was about stuff.

When I was pregnant, I sneered at the nursery sets at Pottery Barn. Babies, I thought rather confidently, don't need coordinated bed sets, don't need matching wallpaper. Or possibly I was just overwhelmed by the numerous things I couldn't afford and didn't have space for.

We would do this simply, I said then. We didn't, of course. Things seeped in -- toys, gifts, the bouncy seat and the swing that made our lives mercifully easier. The ads seeped in -- subversive messages in the mail telling us how we could boost our son's brain power, fliers for classes to help his body get a jump start. One cheerily informed me that I could enroll my child at any time but to remember, development starts at birth.

The flier was stuck to my refrigerator for weeks. Each time I opened the door, I obsessed a little more about whether nine-month-olds need exercise classes.

I didn't purchase a package of classes, but I certainly bought into the underlying notion that I wasn't doing enough for my child, that perhaps there was more stuff I needed to buy.

And I began to get the idea that living simply, at least for me, doesn't work very well when it's only about not buying.

Indeed, those who have spent years with the topic say simplicity at its best is not what you live without but what you live for.

David Sorensen and his wife, Barbara DeGrote Sorensen, have written several books about carving out a simple lifestyle, including the recent Escaping the Family Time Trap. They say they are inundated by a recurring question from readers: What stuff can we own and still live simply?

David Sorensen's response is to ask, Can you still live in a way that is generous?

The real issue, he stresses, is what you believe in, not what you have. Addressing that issue leads to others, of course: How hard do you have to work to afford more things? How much labor is involved in maintaining those things?

So far so good. I could handle that part. But then Sorensen stepped into unexpected territory -- my time. A lifestyle survey in the Sorensens' earlier book, Six Weeks to a Simpler Lifestyle, poses diagnostic statements like "I don't rush too much" and "I am not secretly proud of being too busy."

Ouch.

"It's a matter of saying one God instead of many," explains David Sorensen. "It's more than just lifestyle. It's not letting the clutter of our lives become our gods. I think our society is in real danger of that."

How that struggle plays out in real life varies widely from family to family.

Mark Bateman, executive associate dean in the School of Education at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, likes to think in terms of life integration. How can he use the daily tasks he is doing anyway to spend time with his children?

For instance, when a colleague's father died, Bateman took his youngest daughter to the viewing. He needed to be there. She was too young to know what she was attending but was overjoyed by alone time with Daddy.

His wife prefers to shop for the girls at garage sales. But they don't scope them out in newspapers and drive all across town. She keeps an eye out for signs when jogging on Saturday morning, checks out sales if she sees any and then takes the children back.

The Batemans work hard to live below their means, setting their own salaries and skimming what is left over into retirement and savings. The girls share a bedroom. It is important to the Batemans they learn now to be in community.

Living simply is the cornerstone of family decisions. Mark Bateman defines that as whatever is most simple on all levels, including emotionally and spiritually.

"We realized sometimes we actually had to spend more money to be simple, to take the clutter out of our heads," Bateman says. They will pay someone to mow their lawn or clean their house so they can get more time with their girls, who are 1 and 2.

It's all too easy for children to get caught up in getting things done as well -- from sports to choir to classes.

"I had no idea there were so many things kids could do with their free time," says Grace Burton-Edwards, a Methodist minister in Anderson, Ind.

Simplicity, she notes, might seem like an overarching big-picture decision. "It really enacts itself in little bitty choices. What are we going to do on Tuesday nights for the next six weeks."

She and other parents are opting for limits, asking children to choose one sport, one music activity. Because they have piano lessons, they don't sing in the church choir. Some parents are giving their kids a recreational budget, for instance allowing them to spend it all on something more expensive like gymnastics or use it to play a couple of sports.

Parents are not compelled to enroll children in everything that might help them, says Marie Sherlock of Portland, Ore., author of Living Simply With Children. "It's like our kids are products to be improved upon. But they aren't. They're kids," Sherlock says. "It's a time of nurturance, rather than a time to be improved upon."

No matter how wonderful the activities are, parents need to ask how they fit in with the family's priorities. If family time is important, are there still hours left to allow for it?

"A real simple thing a lot of families do is reclaim the family dinner hour," Sherlock says.

For Living Simply With Children, Sherlock interviewed 60 families striving toward simplicity. "I think every one of them ate their evening meal together," she says.

Some families light candles each night and ask everyone to name something they are thankful for. "We go around the table and tell high points and low points," says Sherlock, who has a 10-year-old and a 13-year-old. "It sounds kind of hokey, but it is amazing how kids love that ritual. And it really does tell you what goes on with the kid .... It just gives you another look at their world."

Sherlock was a lawyer when she had her first child and quit to spend time with him. Her husband declined promotions to spend time with family and eventually decided to work part time. They learned to get by on less so they could work less. It was a decision that one child is comfortable with but another has a harder time accepting.

"For kids it can be tough. They can be real impressed with material items. They see it all around them," Marie Sherlock says.

Communication is vital part of fighting that, she says. "What I found was that it helps to explain things to the kids. It's really respectful to explain why you do what you do. Bring it back to the values you have as a family and also connect it to how you value your children."

But no matter how hard we try, the pressure of the world breaks in. Some of the families Sherlock interviewed dealt with that pressure by homeschooling. Sherlock is adamant her children will remain in public school. She tries to explain why they don't have designer clothes, why her youngest son won't have a cell phone like some of his elementary school classmates.

She and her children volunteer in a local soup kitchen, allowing them to get a taste of helping others but also a view of a world wider than their neighborhood and school friends.

"It's been so wonderful to volunteer with your kids and see them enjoying helping others and seeing that other people don't all live like your friends and live in nice homes," Sherlock says.

The Batemans intentionally bought a house in a racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood, and their children's friends reflect that decision. Instead of driving their children somewhere to expose them to other lifestyles, they have only to walk outside.

But each family's decisions for simplicity will be different, Mark Bateman stresses. "Just like we have different callings and vocations related to ministry, we have to have different callings in simplicity," Bateman says.

As St. Francis is quoted as saying: "Do as you are able."

For the Sorensens, that didn't mean minor changes. David and Barbara cut their jobs in half, their house payments in half. "When we started making changes, we jumped in at the deep end of the swimming pool," David recalls.

He expected it to be painful. He found it felt more like a backrub.

Having less by choice frees "the gnawing sense you're not as successful as someone else. It gives you time for gratitude," Sorensen says.

That time is not something society encourages. "I think too often we compliment each other on how busy the other person is," he says. "We compliment each other for things that are potentially damaging."

In his prior life, Sorensen would take on committee after committee. They were important. He was honored to be asked. "You don't have to do everything just because you can," he says. "It's hard to say 'no.' We don't help each other to say 'no' all the time."

Radical change is seldom easy and often looks impossible on the surface. But Sorensen points out, "We have more choices than most people will acknowledge."

Before LeDayne McLeese Polaski of Charlotte, N.C., left her job a year ago to spend more time with her daughter, "it's not what I ever, ever expected to do." But every night as she put her daughter to bed, she recalled, "My first thought was, 'I didn't get enough time with her today.'"

She told everyone she was suffering from mommy guilt. But quitting her job never made sense on paper. "When I looked at the money, it seemed impossible."

The key, though, was looking inward. "When I stopped thinking about it as guilt and I started thinking about it as the longing of my heart, it started to seem possible. It was an amazing change. It was a big shift in me that sort of made everything else fall into place." A decision for simplicity often becomes a journey. An initial round of cost-cutting often becomes a regular practice of fine-tuning what you buy and in what you invest time. Some people who cut their purchases in the name of good stewardship find they can make do with less electricity, less water, less of the world's other resources.

Some relish the financial freedom, others the time left empty. Mark Bateman believes quiet is part of the reward too. Quiet? I check my notes to make sure he really has two children under three.

It may not be a reverent silence, he adds, but a quieted head. It is turning off the television so the sound of the girls' chatter takes center stage. It is setting aside the to-do list, the concerns about the next day, the yard that needs edging, his own determination to be productive.

And it's amazing what you can learn, Bateman notes. His work as a college administrator requires him to handle queries, concerns and complaints from a variety of faculty and staff. But from watching his girls fully concentrate on one specific task, Bateman has learned how to stop and really listen, how to be completely focused on the colleague before him.

Watching his girls, he sees a model of how he hopes to live.

"They migrate through their environments. They just follow their hearts through their environments without planning it out. We get this tunnel vision, so we don't migrate very well. We miss the neat experiences they don't miss. That's the simple way."

– Photos by Matt Lester available

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Simply starting
By Marla Pierson Lester
Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com
June 5, 2003
Volume: 03-51-3623

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Are you interested in living more simply? Here are some suggestions to get you started:

-- Decide what you value most.

Write them down, advises Marie Sherlock. What things really speak to you? What does the word "success" mean to you? "Most people, if they really think about it, don't put a financial label to that," she says.

David Sorensen says start with Micah 6:8: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Think about what that means. What is God telling us to do?

-- Listen to your body and mind.

How would we live if we thought we'd die soon? asks Sorensen. "I bet it wouldn't be more complicated. I bet it'd be simpler. Why don't we live like that all the time?"

-- Notice the messages that TV and print ads send.

Sherlock moved her television to the basement, where its consumer messages are less a part of her daily life. For some families, ditching the TV would be a logical next step. For others, that would be monumental. "You don't have to go to that extreme," Sherlock notes. Have one night a week when you don't turn the TV on. Or simply watch with your children and critique the ads. "I think it's empowering for kids to see their parents talking back to the television."

-- Add good things.

In addition to removing things from your life, brainstorm what gifts or habits you would like to pass on to your children, says Sorensen. His wife, a musician, has taught music to their children.

-- Beware of a new legalism.

We can become as "consumed" with simplicity as with materialism. While some people calculate how soon they can afford a better house, those attempting simplicity can become focused solely on what they can get rid of. "Then you're constantly inventorying your things. That's not simplicity," notes Mark Bateman.

-- Don't judge others.

Simplicity is as much about what happens beneath the surface as what you see. Even when a family appears to live simply, "you can still be ruled by a schedule," said Grace Burton-Edwards, a Methodist minister. It's knowing what you really value and what really matters and hearing God in the midst of the choices you're making. "We're really not there yet," Burton-Edwards says.

She quotes John Wesley on money: "Earn all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can." "The thing that's not in there," she says," is 'spend all you can.'"

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Toys aren't us
By Marla Pierson Lester
Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com
June 5, 2003
Volume: 03-51-3624

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- In today's rush to provide a stimulating environment for their children, many parents turn to specially developed toys or classes. While many are wonderful, parents can forget they're not required.

"We sometimes lose sight of how meaningful a simple life is for young people," said Roni Leiderman, associate dean of the Nova Southeastern University's Mailman Segal Institute for Early Childhood Studies. "It's the cuddles and the quiet time and the cooking together."

Simple doesn't mean taking away experiences. But those experiences don't have to come in prepackaged sets. Stimulation can mean pointing out the squirrels in the park or looking at the color of the trees.

You don't need a flash card to teach colors (or one of those bleeping toys that keep haunting me). Pull out the lemon in the kitchen. Point to a butterfly. "There are so many different ways to teach yellow," Leiderman says.

When picking up toys with your child, put away the yellow blocks first. Search for a way for the lesson to run through music and play and storytelling.

"In reality, there are a lot of hands-on activities, simple toys, that are just as effective in some ways, if not more effective," Leiderman says.

Toys that are automated or computerized tend to involve solitary play and outcomes that are predetermined. More simple tools -- books, blocks and crayons -- provide for more interaction and imagination and allow different uses and outcomes each time.

"That's how children learn. That's how children connect to families. That's how children learn to love learning."

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Rick McClatchy named coordinator for CBF Texas
By Lance Wallace
Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com
June 5, 2003
Volume: 03-51-3625

ATLANTA (ABP) – The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) Texas coordinating council has hired Rick McClatchy as its new full-time coordinator.

McClatchy, who has served as coordinator of CBF of Oklahoma since 1995, will assume his duties in Texas July 1. Judy Battles, CBF Texas part-time administrative coordinator since February 2002, will work alongside McClatchy for an interim period before phasing out her position.

"We are pleased Rick has accepted the call to return to Texas in this key leadership role of CBF Texas," said Duane Brooks, chair of the search committee and pastor of Houston's Tallowood Baptist Church. "Rick brings a broad knowledge of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship movement and has had experience as coordinator with CBF Oklahoma. He has demonstrated his commitment to CBF and will provide positive leadership in assisting the state coordinating council in building a great future for CBF Texas."

McClatchy, 46, is a native of central Texas and earned his bachelor's degree from Howard Payne University, and his master of divinity degree and doctorate from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. A pastor, professor and church historian, McClatchy was ordained into the ministry at Rockwood Baptist Church in Rockwood, Texas, in 1979. He has pastored churches in Texas and Oklahoma, including University Baptist Church in Shawnee, Okla., and Woodcreek Baptist Church in Brownwood, Texas. McClatchy and his wife, Janie, have two children – Kristi, 16, and Scott, 9.

"CBF Texas is at an exciting place and time," McClatchy said. "CBF Texas can become a force for positive leadership among Texas Baptists and a source of strength for a positive Baptist witness west of the Mississippi River."

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CBF military chaplain ministers in forgotten war zone of Afghanistan
By Lance Wallace
Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com
June 5, 2003
Volume: 03-51-3626

ATLANTA (ABP) - While the world's eyes have been focused on Iraq in recent months, military operations and the personal ministry of U.S. Navy Chaplain Lt. Joseph Primeaux continued in war-torn Afghanistan.

The Greenville, Miss., native who now calls Yuma, Ariz., home, recently returned from a six-month deployment in Afghanistan, his first wartime deployment since becoming a chaplain in December 2000.

"My primary responsibilities for the deployment were to provide religious and morale support to the 200-plus Marines and sailors that made up our detachment," said Primeaux, who is endorsed by the Fellowship. "This included planning and running a gym, movie theater and cyber café along with establishing a chapel program."

Primeaux conducted services in what the military calls an "air maintenance clamshell," a big mechanized tent set up on the flight line. He also had responsibility for daily counseling with young men and women facing the hardships of being away from their homes, families and all that is familiar.

"Some of the more poignant moments involved helping Marines and sailors deal with personal tragedies, such as having their wife leave them, and talks with pilots and others who struggled with the realities of war, separation, boredom and stress," said Primeaux, who had to cope with being away from his wife, Cheryl, and their daughter, Natalie. Although he was not allowed to pass out Bibles or witness to local residents, Primeaux also found a way to minister to the local people he met.

One day when Primeaux was walking to the showers, an Afghan construction foreman asked where he had purchased his bath towel. Primeaux told him he would get one for him. The next day, Primeaux bought a bath towel and washcloth at the military post exchange and presented it to the foreman.

"He introduced me to his son and offered to give me lunch," Primeaux said. "He spoke of our friendship and asked what gift he could give me. I told him his friendship was the greatest gift I could ask for. It was a neat moment of ordinary time made special by the bonds of mutual respect and filial love that characterized, in my mind, the true ministry of Christ."

While in Afghanistan, Primeaux was burdened about the conditions during the reconstruction and has urged U.S. Christians to pray fervently for the safety of the people there, particularly the children.

"They live in a world that is hard for us to fathom," he said. "They live in a world where one wrong step can take a leg, an arm, a life. They play and work in areas filled with land mines. They are beautiful, friendly, playful children whose smiles belie a tremendous amount of hardship."

Primeaux is scheduled to next serve as the chaplain of the U.S.S. Shiloh, a guided missile cruiser at port in San Diego, Calif. For now, he is enjoying time off in Yuma with his wife, daughter, and two pets, their dog, Rahab, and cat, Kitty.

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(Photo available) -- CBF-endorsed Navy chaplain Lt. Joseph Primeaux of Yuma, Ariz., left, receives the Navy Achievement Medal from Lt. Gen. Earl B. Hailston, Pacific commander of the U.S. Marine Corps, for his service in Afghanistan.

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'We're All In This Together' when it comes to AIDS
By John Hall
Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com
June 5, 2003
Volume: 03-51-3627

HOUSTON (ABP) — Consider the past 10 years in the fight against HIV and AIDS: advances in medical research, a deeper public understanding of the disease, and people living longer with the virus.

But much remains the same. A cure has not been found, tens of thousands of people are infected annually, and Brentwood Baptist Church continues reminding its community, "We're All In This Together."

This fall marks the 10th anniversary of Project W.A.I.T.T., a federally funded AIDS care program by the church's non-profit outreach organization, the Brentwood Community Foundation. The project was one of the first church-related efforts to help AIDS clients in the country.

The effort began with church members visiting AIDS patients in the hospital, according to Willie Sylvester, director of the project, and multiplied to become one of the premiere outreaches in the country as the congregation discovered more ways to help.

"We can really thank those early volunteers for getting out and doing the hands-on ministry for those who really needed more than a phone call," said Sylvester.

As a federally funded program, the foundation's AIDS outreach cannot officially be evangelistic, but many volunteers are church members who show their faith as they minister. Volunteers and staff provide food for more than 500 people, and many receive counseling and financial assistance with rent, mortgages and utilities through the program.

The church also encourages better community understanding of the disease through forums for youth and adults. Earvin "Magic" Johnson, former Los Angeles Lakers star who was diagnosed with the disease in 1991, recently spoke to several crowds at the church.

The crown jewel of the outreach is Brentwood Cottages, three residential units built in 1997 that temporarily house up to 18 HIV-positive and AIDS-infected male residents for as long as a year. Applicants are screened for drug and alcohol abuse, and men with criminal histories go through counseling to determine if they are a threat to the surrounding community.

Many residents' lives have been "devastated" in the wake of becoming infected. They lose their jobs, friends and families, Sylvester said. And on top of these stresses, they must cope with the reality of having a life-ending disease.

William Watts, who moved into the complex from Alabama on Jan. 6, described being unable to talk with anyone about having the disease before he came to the Brentwood outreach.

"There you got to hide it," Watts said of living in Alabama. "You want to be honest but they don't understand.

"I can't tell you or my mom how I feel," he said, tears welling up in his yellowed eyes.

However, Watts, a Baptist, has started to bond with the other cottage residents and has drawn strength from the comradery.

"You have people who are dealing with the same problems you have," he said. "You have someone to talk to who understands."

The program aims to rebuild residents emotionally and financially. A caseworker guides each man through counseling and finding a job. Support staff help residents put together resumes and attain job skills.

After their yearlong stay, many residents are financially independent and find their own housing, according to Sylvester.

"Brentwood staff delivered a comprehensive service that touches each resident," wrote a client who moved into an apartment

following his stay. "It was during my stay at Brentwood that I realized how much the community affected by HIV/AIDS needs help from a group like yours. Your pioneer work speaks the existence of humanity,"

Such letters remind Sylvester the outreach is impacting lives.

"It's a great thing to see that," Sylvester said. "It's great to hear after they've been here for a while how much they appreciate it."

Project staff are witnessing more than a new financial start for residents. The strong Christian influence of the outreach infiltrates the lives of many clients. Several joined Brentwood Baptist Church, and others have been spiritually revitalized.

The HIV-positive diagnosis altered Watts outlook on life, he said. He is "more at peace" because he has "put it in the hands of the Lord." He concentrates on the "bigger picture" of life and doesn't get upset as much.

That attitude change has translated into his spiritual life, he believes.

"I pray more. I thank him [God] a lot more. I wake up and thank him," Watts said. "I notice the trees, the birds. I appreciate life a little more."

Sylvester said he enjoys hearing that people are revived in the Lord. According to him, every person is on a journey in which they can only follow God and see where it leads. Sylvester followed and was surprised to become the director of an AIDS outreach program.

HIV/AIDS clients have futures too, he noted. And Sylvester can't wait to see how God works with them.

"HIV/AIDS doesn't mean they're dying. They're living with it. They have to make lifestyle changes."

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Dying people still living, according to new book
By Mark Wingfield
Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com
June 5, 2003
Volume: 03-51-3628

DALLAS (ABP) -- "People who are dying are still living."

That's the key message of a new book based on 10 years of interviews with people who are terminally ill. And it's a message the author, David Kuhl, wants caregivers, ministers and family members to understand before it's too late.

Kuhl, a medical doctor, developed a palliative care program for cancer and AIDS patients in Vancouver, British Columbia. From that, he obtained a grant from the Soros Foundation to study the emotional, spiritual and physical issues facing those who know the end of life is near.

His book, "What Dying People Want," draws on both biblical and non-biblical texts to illustrate the stories told to him by people from their 20s to their 80s who had been diagnosed with terminal cases of cancer or AIDS. His subjects ranged from his own patients to individuals he never knew before.

Kuhl confesses he wishes he knew earlier what he knows now -- a desire applied to watching both a roommate and a father-in-law die.

"In the case of my father-in-law, my wife and I would not have left his room the last night of his life just because the hospital staff told us to go home," he writes. "The change in his breathing pattern was such that they must have known that he was dying. We left without saying the goodbye we would have said, without speaking the truths we would have spoken. We were not there to hold his hand even in his unconsciousness. That time was so precious, but the opportunity to complete our relationship evaded us because we didn't know what to do or to say--other than to believe the doctors and nurses."

From this platform, Kuhl addresses health-care providers, the dying and loved ones of the dying, imploring them to demonstrate greater sensitivity and seize the time that remains.

Out of his interviews with the dying, Kuhl identifies nine common concerns, ranging from changing perceptions of time to the importance of physical touch to the need to speak and hear truth to the search for spiritual meaning at the end of life.

"For the most part," he concludes, "they wanted to be heard and to be understood simply for who they were in the world."

The announcement of a terminal diagnosis marks a change in the way people perceive time, Kuhl reports. It signals not only an ending but a beginning--"an opportunity to ask what the time remaining in your life means to you."

He quotes the work of two other researchers--James Diggory and Doreen Rothman--who asked 550 people to prioritize seven consequences of death. The No. 1 concern expressed was the grief their death would cause relatives and friends.

Kuhl confirms this finding, but adds that this fear actually may reduce the quantity and quality of conversation that occurs between the dying and their loved ones.

"For some people, the need to take care of others is greater than their desire to alleviate their own fears and anxiety by speaking about those emotions," he explains.

Anxiety may be reduced by engaging in a life review, Kuhl suggests. This exercise "simply means living in the present while looking at the past," he writes. "It enables the individual to reconsider life events, relationships, successes, failures."

Like Adam and Even facing expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the pronouncement of a terminal illness moves a person into a new reality, Kuhl contends. "Our naivete about life as we know it ends. Dying becomes part of our reality. We can't go back."

Life review ultimately should lead to an experience of transcendence, "a spirituality that extends from the core of their being to a spirit that cannot be contained," Kuhl writes.

Among a number of practical tips Kuhl addresses:

– The importance of physical touch. To illustrate the power of touch, he draws on the biblical story of the woman with a 12-year hemorrhage who touched the hem of Jesus' garment and was healed.

"People who are dying often feel 'out of touch' physically and emotionally. They feel that no one knows their experience. They feel isolated. They crave physical contact."

– The sources of pain. The physical pain of a terminal illness may be intertwined with emotional pain of regrets, conflict and mistakes made in life, Kuhl said. "Pain is always a combination of physical and psychological features, and for some it has a spiritual component as well. Pain must be assessed from the perspective of wholeness."

– The need for family members to talk openly. "When the death of a close family member has occurred, it must be talked about – again and again and again. Until that happens, meaningful topics will not be engaged, potentially intimate conversations won't get started – nothing will change until someone has the courage to speak what seems to be unspeakable."

This applies both before and after the death, and it concerns both the dying and those they love, Kuhl asserts. For those who have trouble getting started, he offers this simple formula: "I feel (name the emotion) because (state what happened)."

At several points, Kuhl offers pointed suggestions to his colleagues in the health-care profession.

Chief among his advice is to develop better communication skills: "Poor communication can render ineffective all the good in medicine, as it has the potential to increase suffering."

Good communication skills are essential for telling a patient about a terminal diagnosis and for talking about realistic treatment options, he contends.

The book ends as it begins, with Kuhl recounting the death of a family member. But the experience of walking through a terminal illness with his sister differed from the earlier experience with his father-in-law, he reports, because of what he had learned from the dying patients he interviewed.

"We were able to do and say what needed to be done and said," he reports. "For that, I will be forever grateful."

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