

**Study suggests most teens break abstinence pledges****By John Hall****Associated Baptist Press - [www.abpnews.com](http://www.abpnews.com)****December 4, 2003****Volume: 03-109-3968**

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HIGHLAND HEIGHTS, Ky. (ABP) – Signatures on most sexual-abstinence commitment cards may not be worth the paper they are written on, according to a recent university study.

A survey by Northern Kentucky University revealed 61 percent of students who made abstinence promises broke them. And of those who said they kept their pledges, 55 percent indicated they participated in oral sex.

The survey queried 527 Northern Kentucky students, 16 percent of whom made pledges not to have sex until marriage.

The study noted, however, that pledge breakers delayed sex for a year longer than non-pledging teens – until an average of 17.6 years old. But pledge-makers who became pledge-breakers were less likely to use protection, such as condoms, when first having sex.

While the survey represents only a small segment of the population, it offers some of the earliest research into the effectiveness of virginity pledges.

Angela Lipsitz, a professor at Northern Kentucky University who was involved in the study, said the information should serve as a warning sign. But further study is needed before nationwide conclusions can be drawn, she said.

"To me it sends up cautions," she said. "I would say we need to be skeptical at this point. It is only one study. I would say this is showing some interesting things, but I would like to see them replicated."

Richard Ross, a spokesman for the grass-roots abstinence effort True Love Waits, indicated the survey's findings did not surprise him.

Following the enormous popularity of True Love Waits, the government started funding more than 200 abstinence programs that are used in the majority of school systems across the country. Often these efforts consist of a short lecture about reasons for abstinence and a request for students to sign a piece of paper in a notebook, he said. There is sparse follow up and the pledge carries little weight, he said.

"Even though I am very supportive of any programs that talk about abstinence, I think many of the pledges signed lack the power to shape long-term decisions," Ross said.

Ross said True Love Waits is more effective because it adds an element secular efforts lack – God. The addition of the supernatural gives the promise more power. "Promising a notebook means almost nothing," Ross commented. "Promising to God is extremely important to most young people."

True Love Waits works through local churches and with families, a key element in providing accountability, support and encouragement that differs from secular programs, said Ross, who started the movement at Tulip Grove Baptist Church in Nashville in 1993.

Additionally, large True Love Waits events – like stacking the pledge cards up to the roof of the Georgia Dome in Atlanta or collecting pledges at the upcoming Olympic Games in Athens – provide celebratory occasions that help teens know they are not alone in their commitments, Ross said.

These celebrations create a bond among students and encourage them to be proud of their stance, said Ross.

David Hager, director of the obstetrician and gynecology training program at Central Baptist Hospital in Lexington, Ky., affirmed Ross' belief in the necessity of continuous support for a pledge to be successful.

Supportive friends and family are key to encouraging young adults to stick to their promises, Hager found. When an individuals support group becomes less supportive of a sexual purity pledge, the chances of keeping that oath drop

drastically. "The teaching of abstinence and abstinence education is no a one-time event," he said. "It has to be a continuous thing."

Joe McIlhaney, director of the Medical Institute for Sexual Health, a nonprofit educational group based in Austin, goes even further to say that the pledges should be renewed to keep them fresh on the teen's mind. "The kids are really asking for help staying sexually abstinent," he said. "They just aren't receiving the support."

Such support will not guarantee all teen pledges will be followed, McIlhaney said, but the longer young adults delay their first sexual encounter, the less likely they are to contract sexually transmitted diseases.

Ross said the effort to create a virginal community through True Love Waits has worked so well that it helped account for a statistical national drop in teen sexual activity during each year of the program's large-scale work. Slightly more than 50 percent of middle and high school students are virgins, he said.

"Behavior is changing," Ross stated. "It has not changed for every teenager."

Other research suggests large-scale abstinence events – such as a majority of students in one school signing abstinence pledges – may actually limit success, according to the U.S. government's 2001 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. As the number of pledges in a school increases, the study found, compliance decreases.

When the pledges are successful, the report said, it's because students get a sense of community apart from their peers.

In spite of these findings, Ross contends the government must continue to fund secular abstinence programs. They not only are morally right, he said, they also save the government money on social services every time they prevent a teenager from getting pregnant.

Ross opposes condom distribution in schools as an alternative to abstinence because, he said, condom distribution encourages sex.

"I grieve [that] a teenager breaking a promise might be at a higher risk of pregnancy and disease, but the implications of that are not as dangerous as parents and church leaders telling them, 'We want you to always carry protection because we expect you to fail.' That would be self-fulfilling prophecy," Ross said.



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## **Young adults who wait debate: Is it sex or something else?**

**By John Hall**

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DALLAS (ABP) – Young adults appear to be turning to oral sex as a way to remain sexually "pure" as they wait longer for marriage, according to sexual-health experts.

Dallas psychologist Dan McGee and Joe McIlhane, director of the Medical Institute for Sexual Health in Austin, said oral sex is becoming an increasingly popular alternative to vaginal sex, especially among teens.

Young adults today fight their sexual desires longer because they are marrying later, said McGee, director of Counseling and Psychological Services for the Baptist General Convention of Texas. While it was the norm for earlier generations to marry in their early 20s, young people are now commonly getting married in their late 20s or early 30s.

Observers also argue the social stigma that was associated with oral sex has lessened. Though McGee remembers his generation viewing the act as perverted or primarily practiced by homosexuals, younger adults view it as acceptable behavior in the wake of the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky affair.

Like the former president, many teens and young adults believe oral sex is not sex.

A recent study by Northern Kentucky University, which revealed 61 percent of students who made abstinence pledges broke them, also found that among the 39 percent who said they kept their promise 55 percent indicated they had engaged in oral sex.

And a University of Wisconsin study reported 78 percent of new genital herpes cases could be linked to a virus that causes cold sores.

Rather than narrowing the definition of sex, young adults need to broaden it greatly, warns McGee, a clinical sexologist. Not only is oral sex sex, but so is any sexual touching with the intention of arousal, he said.

"Just because the president of the United States says it isn't sex doesn't make it so," he said.

McIlhane agreed. "Young people need to be taught physical contact for the purpose of arousal is sexual intercourse," he stated.

McGee outlines three stages in the human sexual response cycle. The first, desire, triggers the second step, biological sexual arousal. Up to these points, individuals have some power over their sexual actions.

People can control their actions largely by avoiding situations where they will be sexually tempted, McGee noted. But adolescents are particularly susceptible to moving on to arousal because their hormones are highly sensitive and they feel the societal push toward sex.

"You can't help it if you have interest in sex or desire for sex. [But] we do have control over how much we let ourselves go into arousal," he said.

Though individuals can fight against acting on their desires, once the orgasmic reflex is triggered, control is no longer an option, McGee continued. That God-given design can be beautiful inside marriage, he said, but destructive outside it.

McIlhane noted a relationship that includes oral sex can be damaging to a young adult's self-esteem if the individual feels used or unloved.

Young people often make the incorrect and dangerous assumption they can't get diseases through oral sex, they said. Both experts pointed out the numerous sexually transmitted diseases that can be contracted through oral sex.

"Every risk you have, except pregnancy, is still there with oral sex," McGee said.



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## **CBF church-planting partnerships produce 54 new congregations**

**By Krista Carnet**

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ATLANTA (ABP) – Since 1999, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's church-starting ministry has helped begin 54 congregations nationwide that are either holding services or are in the planning stages.

Steve Abbe is the pastor of one of those new churches – CrossRoads Fellowship in Waco, Texas.

"Not everyone is called to do this," Abbe said of church planting. "You have to have the faith that God is going to lead you through. And you've got to be a leader. The gift of leadership is very necessary. You have to know how to resource and network."

CrossRoads Fellowship held its first service June 1 with 15 people. Six months later, the church has 72 members and is preparing to baptize 15 more people.

The CBF's 54 church plants include ethnic congregations for Koreans, African-Americans and Liberians.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a national organization of moderate Baptists, counts approximately 1,800 churches that fund its missions and ministries.

To start a church, the CBF first determines if there is a need – whether there is a moderate evangelical church in the community, explained Phil Hester, CBF's associate coordinator for church starts.

The next step is determining if there is enough financial support. Usually \$50,000 to \$200,000 is needed to plant a church. Then Hester works with local partners to fund the church and recruit a pastor.

Hester has developed partnerships with CBF organizations in 18 states and regions to help research and fund church starts. In larger states like Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida and North Carolina, he works with local missions coordinators. CBF also partners with institutions like the National Ministries of the American Baptist Churches USA, the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Virginia Baptist Mission Board.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas is partnering with the Fellowship to start three churches, in San Antonio, Belton and Midlothian.

There are certain essentials that are needed for starting churches, said Abe Zabaneh, director of the church multiplication center for the BGCT. "You need a good church planter and the right pastor," he said. "Choosing the right pastor for the church is most essential to the life and growth of the church. You also need solid prayer support and quality training and development."

Much of the Fellowship's early success in church planting is due to the commitment of one congregation, Hester said. "Dunwoody Baptist Church in Atlanta was the visionary for church starts," he said. In 1999, Dunwoody Baptist sold a piece of land and donated \$1 million to endow the CBF's position of associate coordinator for church starts. Hester assumed the position in 2000.

Daniel Vestal, the Fellowship's national coordinator, welcomed the new "enthusiasm" for church planting among Fellowship members. "There is a growing awareness and awakening in Cooperative Baptist Fellowship concerning the strategic importance of church planting," he said.

CrossRoads Fellowship found that church planting is also contagious. Three weeks after its first service, several members of the new congregation traveled to Brazil to help start a church. CrossRoads recently made a 10-year commitment to plant more churches in Brazil. Abbe said a group of members will return to Brazil next June to help construct a church building and train leaders.

**Colorado court overturns new state voucher program****By Robert Marus****Associated Baptist Press - [www.abpnews.com](http://www.abpnews.com)****December 4, 2003****Volume: 03-109-3971**

WASHINGTON (ABP) – A Colorado judge has halted the nation's newest school-voucher program before it even gets started.

Denver District Judge Joseph Meyer ruled Dec. 3 that a new program designed to provide tax-funded scholarships to low-income Colorado students to attend private schools – including religious schools – violates the state constitution.

Meyer halted implementation of the program, scheduled to begin with the 2004-05 school year, pending further review of the case. Attorneys for the state promised to appeal the decision to the Colorado Supreme Court.

The program ordered the 11 Colorado school districts containing eight or more schools deemed low-performing under state guidelines to participate in the program. Meyer said that violated a section of the state constitution mandating local control of school districts.

While the goals of the voucher program are "laudable," Meyer wrote in a 15-page opinion, "even great ideas must be implemented within the framework of the Colorado Constitution."

"By stripping all discretion from the local district over the instruction to be provided in the voucher program," Meyer wrote, the state legislature violated the constitution.

A coalition of Colorado public-school parents and religious and civil-rights groups sued the state earlier this year, saying the program is unconstitutional on several grounds. While the plaintiffs alleged the program also violated, among other things, the Colorado Constitution's protections for religious freedom, Meyer said the program's violations of local-control principles were enough to render it illegal.

While the United States Supreme Court ruled last year that an Ohio voucher program that includes religious schools does not violate the First Amendment's ban on government support for religion, voucher advocates still face several obstacles on the state level.

The Supreme Court heard oral arguments Dec. 2 in *Locke vs. Davey*, a case that may require states to fund religious schools in voucher programs if they also fund secular schools.

Colorado Gov. Bill Owens (R), who supports the program, promised to appeal. "Securing school choice for the children of Colorado was a long legislative struggle and there was always the likelihood the struggle would extend to the courts as well," he said. "Children from low-income families should not be facing a dead end if they are in a school that is below par. They deserve a choice and that is why we will appeal the court's decision."



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## Islamic group files slander lawsuit against Republican congressman

By Robert Marus

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WASHINGTON (ABP) – Rep. Cass Ballenger's mouth has gotten him into trouble before, but his most recent controversial comments have earned him a lawsuit from the nation's largest Islamic civil-rights organization.

In federal court in Washington Dec. 2, the Council on American-Islamic Relations filed a \$2 million suit against the conservative Republican, who has represented a district surrounding Hickory, N.C., for nine terms.

The suit alleges Ballenger defamed CAIR in comments he reportedly made to a Charlotte newspaper. On Oct. 4, the Charlotte Observer published an article that quoted Ballenger saying, among other things, that CAIR was "the fund-raising arm of Hezbollah."

Hezbollah is a Lebanon-based militia group that the U.S. government considers a terrorist organization. The FBI has shut down several other Islamic groups in the U.S. since Sept. 11, 2001, accusing them of funding Hezbollah and similar groups. However, CAIR has never faced such charges.

The suit also notes that Ballenger said the stress caused by the proximity of CAIR's headquarters to his Capitol Hill home contributed to the break-up of his marriage earlier this year. According to the newspaper, Ballenger said the opening of CAIR's offices on New Jersey Avenue, just two and a half blocks south of the Capitol, "bugged the hell" out of his wife, Donna.

Ballenger said his wife was disturbed by the sight of women "in hoods" going in and out of CAIR's offices.

The congressman announced Dec. 2 that he would not seek re-election in 2004, thus retiring from 38 straight years in elected office. His office declined to respond to inquiries about the lawsuit.

The Raleigh News & Observer reported Dec. 3 that, speaking to North Carolina reporters following his retirement announcement, Ballenger claimed the comments in question were not meant to reflect his personal opinion of CAIR, but rather to explain why his wife was uneasy living near the organization. "I was quoting my wife's feelings," he said, according to the newspaper. "I couldn't give a hoot about the Muslims across the street."

CAIR said Ballenger's comments had significantly harmed the organization, and that the lawsuit was their only recourse. "With this lawsuit, we are sending a clear message to all those who make malicious and defamatory statements against American Muslims or their institutions that they will be held accountable in a court of law," Arsalan Iftikhar, CAIR's director of legal affairs, said in a statement.

Ballenger has previously sparked controversy for his controversial statements and actions regarding minority groups. Last year, he was forced to apologize to Rep. Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.) for saying that the African-American congresswoman stirred "a little bit of a segregationist feeling" in him.

He also infamously refused to remove a black lawn jockey figurine from the front yard of his North Carolina home. Later a member of his staff painted the face of the statue white.

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