

PRACTICAL RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING

# WESTERN RECORDER

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## Kentucky to get new laws on abortion, alcohol

By David Winfrey  
News Director

LOUISVILLE—Despite key concerns, lobbyists for several issues of importance to Kentucky Baptists say they are pleased with many of the votes taken this legislative session.

Three bills favored by anti-abortion lobbyists were passed, and the Temperance League of Kentucky is happy with at least four votes on alcohol-related issues.

The three bills regarding abortion ban "partial-birth" abortions, set health regulations regarding abortion clinics and require a 24-hour "informed consent" waiting period for women seeking an abortion.

Gov. Paul Patton last week vetoed the waiting period bill, and votes are scheduled for Wednesday by the legislature to attempt to override.

Kentucky Right to Life President Margie Montgomery said she was disappointed the governor vetoed the bill, but added that she is optimistic about the chances of an override.

Overall, she added, "I just couldn't be more pleased. We've passed three excellent bills and they should withstand the scrutiny of the courts if anything should be filed."

Temperance League President Claude Witt said he, too, was happy, despite losing the vote that will tie college scholarships to money from the state lottery.

"You want to win everything, but what we did accomplish in this session was overhaul the entire alcohol beverage control system and increase the fees tremendously on alcohol licenses," he said.

□ See Kentucky ..., page 3

## Crisis prepared pastor for Paducah tragedy

By Matt Sanders  
Southwestern Seminary

PADUCAH (BP)—Pastor Tim Percy isn't convinced, but some people say God prepared and protected him for last year's ministry to families in the wake of the shooting at Heath High School.

In 1993, Percy was shot during an after-school job while attending Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth Texas.

"I thought I was dead," said Percy, who now is pastor of 12th Street Baptist Church in Paducah.

He was delivering a pizza to two teenage boys, but as he turned to take the pizza out of his car, the older boy, 17 years old, pulled out a gun and pointed it at Percy.

He remembers crying out to God before hearing an explosion, seeing fire in the gun barrel and tasting gun-

powder.

Within minutes the paramedics arrived and one told him the words he had hoped to hear. "You're going to live."

Suddenly lips that had not shared Jesus in the nine months Percy had been at seminary could not be silenced.

"My right cheek was gone, and I must have sounded drunk, but I told the people looking down at me, 'The only reason I am still alive is because of Jesus.'"

His evangelistic fervor didn't die as his wounds healed. He looked for opportunities, including during an interview with a local television station.

"When we'd travel, Tim looked like a bum because he couldn't shave and he didn't have any teeth," Percy's wife, Sherri, said. "People wouldn't think we were together so they would stare at him. I would ask

them 'Do you know how he got that way?' It became a great opportunity to witness."

Even two and a half years later, the heart of an evangelist still beat strongly in Percy. In a Texas court, he faced Derrick Crow, the man accused of trying to kill him.

There, in front of the judge, the attorneys, the clerk reporter and a number of office workers who had come in for a lunch break, Percy did not lash out at Crow. Instead, he showed Crow, who was sentenced to 40 years in prison, a photograph of his family.

"You were once a beautiful child (like my children), but something has gone drastically wrong," Percy said. "It's called sin."

He shared the plan of salvation with the young man and the others in the court room.

"I told him, 'You and I can have a

□ See Percy's own tragedy ..., page 13



**SUMMER MISSIONARY** Cager Thompson (right), a student at the University of Kentucky, greets Bettie Kingkade and her husband, H.K., who is Baptist campus minister at the University of Kentucky. Thompson, who will serve this summer in Russia, and 77 other Kentucky Baptist students were commissioned April 4 at Thornhill Baptist Church in Frankfort to be summer missionaries. Story on page 3.

## Discoveries led couple out of Mormonism and into Christianity

By James Dotson  
SBC North American Mission Board

SALT LAKE CITY (BP)—It was nearly 2 a.m., and Dennis Higley—a sixth-generation Mormon—was approaching a realization that would shatter the illusions of a lifetime.

Spurred by his wife, Rauni, the two were examining contradictions in Mormon teachings she had discovered as a translator for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

Finally, Higley stood up, slammed all of the books shut, and said, "That's enough."

"That night is when the bubble of Mormonism I had been living in burst," he said.

That pivotal moment came in 1982. Since then, despite persecution

that cost them their businesses after they left the church, the Higleys have helped lead hundreds of Mormons to faith in the Jesus Christ of the Bible.

The Higleys are Mission Service Corps volunteers with the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board, relating to its interfaith witness evangelism team.

Mrs. Higley converted to Mormonism in her native Finland in 1963. A nominal Lutheran, she was impressed by the friendliness and warmth she felt from the Mormon missionaries and church members.

She approached her new faith with

an enthusiasm not unnoticed by Mormon leaders in Finland. In less than a year she was asked to serve an 18-month "mission" in full-time service to the church. It was during this time that she met Higley, an Idaho native who also was serving a mission in Finland.

Questions about her new faith began, however, during her first visit to the Mormon temple in a village near Bern, Switzerland. There she was introduced to the secret ordinances required in Mormonism for entrance into the highest level of heaven.

She was asked to remove all her

clothes, and a "shield" was placed over her body. Then she was ceremonially "washed and anointed" by a temple worker. She was given a new name and an undergarment that she was supposed to wear 24 hours a day for the rest of her life.

But more alarming were the secret handshakes, accompanied by oaths of secrecy signified by signs that included a swipe of the thumb across the throat. The signs indicate how life can be taken if the handshakes are revealed to anyone outside the temple.

"I could not figure out how a loving God would hold the handshake so secret that if I was to tell somebody I would be killed the way shown in the temple," she said.

Mrs. Higley said she later learned

□ See Discoveries led ..., page 9

**Which way is right?**  
The differences between Mormonism & Christianity

Moving? See page 4 (0414)

## Hunger fund gifts on the rise this year

### National CP gifts rising at mid-year

NASHVILLE (BP)—Giving through the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program unified budget is up 3.68 percent at mid-year.

As of March 31, the halfway mark in the SBC's fiscal year, Cooperative Program gifts sent to the SBC Executive Committee totaled \$79.34 million, up from \$76.52 million in the same period the previous year.

The giving so far exceeds the SBC's budget by \$5.25 million.

Also at mid-year, designated gifts totaled \$95.29 million, up 8.41 percent from \$87.9 million the previous year. Designated gifts include special offerings such as the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and Annie Armstrong Easter Offering.

NASHVILLE—Giving to Southern Baptist world hunger funds increased by nearly \$1 million in 1997, reaching a total of \$7.97 million.

Hunger relief officials said the 14.8 percent increase may be due in part to adoption of a resolution on hunger last summer by messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting as well as intensified media coverage of the famine afflicting North Korea.

Hunger relief work is not financed through the SBC's unified budget, the Cooperative Program. Instead, designated gifts to hunger relief are used 100 percent for hunger ministry, with nothing taken out for administration.

SBC missionaries already on the field, funded by the Cooperative Program, administer the aid.

State conventions also administer their own hunger relief efforts at home and abroad.

"We praise God for the generosity of Southern Baptists and many Christians of other denominations in their response to the world's hungry people," said Richard Land, president of the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

"I truly believe this is only the beginning of a great outpouring of the compassion of Christ through his disciples for millions of poor both in the U.S. and around the world," he said.

"This year proved other Christians want to get involved, as 71 Christian bookstores placed change canisters next to their cash registers, which generated thousands of dollars in gifts."

The need for hunger relief funds is increasing, not decreasing, Land noted. He cited the worldwide effects of an El Nino weather pattern and the domestic effects of welfare reform.

"It is time for the church to reaffirm its commitment concerning compassion for the poor," Land said. "God has given us the opportunity to show his love in a very tangible way. Compassion opens hearts to hear the good news of Jesus Christ."

*Based on a Baptist Press report*

## Resources published for church schools

NASHVILLE (BP)—Less than a year after officially receiving a ministry assignment from the Southern Baptist Convention to assist churches with Christian schools, the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention has released the first of its resources for students and teachers.

Scheduled for release from April through early July are 11 new books, including "Kingdom Education: God's Plan for Educating Future Generations" by Glen Schultz, manager of the board's Christian school and home school section.

Included in the volume are sections on the definition, purpose and result of kingdom education; the roles of the home, church and school; and the future of kingdom education.

Schultz said the purpose of the book, to be released June 1, is not to convince every church to start a school, but "to make every Christian aware of God's plan for training children and youth and, then, to motivate them to be sure their children are receiving such an education."

"If we are successful in this effort, it is my sincere belief that the next generation can be trained in such a way that they can go out and turn their world upside down for Christ," he said.

Other books being published this year include:

■ "Character Quest," Vols. 1 and 2, a seventh-grade Bible text and teacher's edition.

■ "Teaching for the Master" by Glen Schultz, a professional develop-

ment periodical for teachers.

■ "Across the Centuries," with volumes for grades 1-2, 3-4, 5-6 and 7-8, provides teaching guides for timeless children's literature from a Christian perspective. Biographies, historical fiction, animal stories, true-life adventures, allegories and humor are included.

■ "Storytelling in a Nutshell: A Primer for Storytellers in Christian Education" by Maxine Bersch, is a complete guide to storytelling designed for parents, librarians and educators.

Schultz said future resources will include Bible textbooks for students through high school grades. A plan for the coming 10 years includes the release of other curricular items in various subject areas.

## Children's music curriculum now has new look

NASHVILLE (BP)—The first major redesign of Southern Baptist children's music curriculum in almost 30 years will be unveiled with the Fall 1998 publications for pupils and their leaders.

Rhonda Edge Buescher, preschool/music team leader for the Sunday School Board's music ministries department, said an emphasis on spiritual objectives, along with music education goals, will be paired with a more user-friendly approach in the Children's Music Series for churches using traditional or blended music.

The last major changes for traditional children's music curriculum came in 1970. A new curriculum for praise and worship, "Made for Praise," was introduced in 1996.

"Music and Me" is a new resource for use with 3-year-olds. Other publications in the series are "Music Time," a 24-page, full-color magazine for ages 4 and 5; "Children's Choir," a 56-page publication for small churches combining grades one through six; "Music Makers," 56 pages, including 24 activity pages, for grades one through three; and "Young Musicians," 56 pages, including 24 activity pages, for grades four through six.

*It's the end of the month,  
only a few days left!  
Deal of the century!*

*Don't pass by this once  
in a lifetime  
opportunity,  
VACATION BIBLE  
SCHOOL!*



Ex-used car salesman Carl Burlington joins the ministry

## BAPTIST BITS

■ **ABP to launch magazine.** Directors of Associated Baptist Press voted April 3 to proceed with the launch of a new Christian magazine this summer, pending achievement of a fund-raising goal. The first issue of the national news-and-feature magazine is scheduled to be published in July. Three issues are scheduled for 1998, with production moving to monthly in 1999.

■ **First McCall awards presented.** The first Abner V. McCall awards for humanitarianism and religious liberty were presented March 20. The awards are named after the 10th president of Baylor University, who died in 1995. Roberta Keys Torn, who has visited cancer patients an average of three days a week for more than 24 years, is the first recipient of the McCall Humanitarianism Award. The first McCall Religious Liberty Award was presented to James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

■ **Blevins to Garder-Webb.** Cooperative Baptist Fellowship missionary Kent Blevins will join Gardner-Webb University's faculty after he leaves faculty and administrative posts at International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic, at the end of the current semester. Blevins will end a 16-year

missionary career in Europe to become associate professor of religion at the school in Boiling Springs, N.C.

■ **Lottie goal raised.** Due to the anticipated success of the 1997 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for international missions, the Woman's Missionary Union executive board has approved raising the 1998 offering goal from \$100 million to \$110 million. International Mission Board officials projected in March that receipts to the 1997 offering would reach \$102.6 million, surpassing the \$100 million goal.

■ **Howell joins Boyce.** North Carolina pastor Mark Howell is joining the faculty of the new James Boyce College of the Bible at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Howell, who will be assistant professor of preaching and pastoral ministries for the new college, currently is pastor of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Greensboro and an adjunct professor of homiletics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

■ **Golden Gate adds degree.** Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., has approved a new master of divinity concentration in African-American studies to better equip students for leadership in predominantly African

American churches and communities. The concentration, the first of its kind in Southern Baptist Convention seminaries, was developed by Leroy Gainey, associate professor of Christian education and intercultural studies and pastor of the multicultural First Baptist Church of Vacaville, Calif.

■ **Southwestern gets collection.** Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary has acquired the 10,000-volume Beryl and Geoffrey Breed British Baptist History Collection. Seminary officials said purchase of the collection of Geoffrey Breed, a leading Baptist history scholar in the United Kingdom, will allow people in the United States to study English Baptist primary sources without traveling abroad. The volumes include an original letter by Baptist theologian Andrew Fuller, dated Aug. 9, 1810; 1858 first editions of Charles Spurgeon's published sermons; and four leather-bound volumes of Spurgeon's "Illustrated Almanack" from 1857-1904.

■ **Ministers' wives seek nominees.** Nominations for the 1999 presentation of the Southern Baptist Ministers' Wives distinguished service award are being sought. Nominations should be sent to Lynda Estep, P.O. Box 1000, Columbia, S.C. 29202.

## Director of Missions Stack celebrates 40th anniversary

By Ken Walker  
State Correspondent

OWENTON—While the number of churches has remained level during the past 40 years at the two associations where George Stack is director of missions, he is pleased to report that their mission support has increased 10 times.

"I think there's been a change in the overall attitude toward missions and giving," said Stack, director of missions for Owen County and Ten Mile Baptist associations.

"One of the things I've worked toward has been education with conferences, clinics and training, and raising the vision of the people to a world vision," he said. "I think we've done that."

That accomplishment and Stack's steady record of service brought an overflow crowd to First Baptist Church of Owenton March 29, to recognize his 40th anniversary as director of missions.

Church representatives presented Stack with a plaque and his wife, Joyce, with a large Afghan. They also

gave the couple a love offering for a special vacation.

Speakers included Owenton native and Kentucky Baptist Convention President Gayle Toole; Bob Jones, former director of the KBC's direct missions (now town and country) department; and Stack's youngest son, Greg. About a dozen audience members also offered spontaneous accolades.

"It's a remarkable tribute to anybody who can stay in ministry for 40 years in the same place," said Jones, a graduate of the same class at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. "George isn't colorful and flashy, but he's consistent and stayed with things."

"He's one of those persons who doesn't talk much but when he has something to say it's significant. He is always positive and is a man of integrity and very humble," Jones said.

"George is a fine Christian man," said his pastor, Paul Chitwood of First Baptist in Owenton. "He's committed

to the Lord's work and has been a faithful servant. I learned how much he was appreciated for his years of service."

Voted Kentucky's "Director of Missions of the Year" for 1984, during Stack's tenure he has led Owen County and Ten Mile associations to become self-supporting.

In addition, members' giving to outside causes grew remarkably. In 1959 the 40 churches in the two associations gave just over \$27,000 to the Cooperative Program, compared to more than \$270,000 for 1997.

Meanwhile, gifts to the association and state, home and foreign mission offerings jumped from approximately \$9,500 to \$121,000.

Stack promoted reaching out by holding a world missions conference every four years since 1962. He purposely delayed the 1998 event until next year to call attention to the significance of missions entering the 21st century.



Stack

## Students commissioned as summer missionaries

FRANKFORT—With destinations as close as Hazard and as far flung as Hong Kong, 78 Kentucky Baptist students were commissioned April 4 to be summer missionaries.

Wyndee Holbrook, Baptist campus minister at Berea College, gave the commissioning message, praising the students' enthusiasm and their parents' support.

Recalling the story of David and Goliath, Holbrook compared the summer missionaries to the giant slayer, who had both youthful innocence and eagerness to serve God.

"It's not their job to fight. It's their job to be available," she said. She also reminded the students that they would be serving "with God" and not "for God."

"If we're serving for God then God's out there somewhere and we're all alone," she said. "You aren't alone in this process."

Recalling her two summers as a student missionary, Holbrook said the 10-week assignments this summer would be growing experiences that would last students throughout their lives. "There are unique and wonderful things that can happen when we can give ourselves completely for that 10-week period," she said. "When you're thinking, 'This is bigger than I am,' that's OK because God is bigger than it is," she said.

Ralph Hopkins, associate director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's student department, said students are working toward a goal of \$98,000 to support summer student missionaries. An offering collected at the commissioning service brought in \$1,350.

Of those commissioned, 29 students are serving in Kentucky, 36 students are serving in other states and 13 students will serve in foreign countries.



COMMISSIONED Aaron Dowdell was among the summer missionaries commissioned April 4. Dowdell will serve in Australia.

## Kentucky legislature passes abortion & alcohol bills

Continued from page 1

A collection of bills, including House Bill 550, helped restructure the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board.

Other key votes regarding alcohol included:

■ The defeat of House Bill 323, which would have allowed precinct votes in so-called "third-class cities" that were dry. Instead of requiring a city-wide vote, the bill could have made it easier to get liquor sales in such dry cities as Somerset, Mayfield, Glasgow and Corbin.

■ Passage of House Bill 757, which tightened the authority of "second-class" cities to control alcohol sales.

■ Defeat for Senate Bill 287, which would have allowed local option elections in a dry city precinct containing a private club with a golf course.

Among those that the Temperance League didn't win: House Bill 327, which would have lowered the legal level for driving under the influence

from 0.10 to 0.08. The bill stalled in the Senate, where it never got a vote.

"That was a big disappointment but it just shows the strength of the liquor lobby plus the restaurant lobby," Witt said. "They were afraid that if they lowered the alcohol level then people wouldn't buy as much alcohol."

Witt worked with Louisville liquor store owner Ken Singer on several unsuccessful measures, including a ban on drive-through alcohol sales at package stores, stronger training for liquor retailers regarding underage sales laws and eliminating cold-beer sales at gas stations.

While those issues were defeated, Witt said it often takes the General Assembly a couple of sessions to learn about an issue before passing a new law.

"We made the legislature aware of a problem and we quickened the thought process of the industry as

'Hey they're getting ready to do something. We better get on the stick.'"

Liquor sellers, for example, already are considering changes regarding the placement of drive-through windows and other issues that hinder enforcement of under-age sales laws, he said.

In an item related to churches, the legislature amended a bill regarding concealed weapons permits that would allow pastors and church officials to carry concealed weapons in church.

Previously, Kentucky law banned concealed weapons from churches. Sen. Vernie McGaha, who sponsored the Senate amendment, said pastors concerned about transporting money from the collection plate had requested the measure.

The amendment passed on a voice vote and the bill passed the House 76-9, after which it was delivered to the governor.

**"I've enjoyed the overall opportunity to be involved in everything Baptists are about—missions, Bible studies, teaching and training."**

*George Stack, director of missions for Owen County and Ten Mile Baptist associations*

### BLUEGRASS BURGEOO

■ **Adoption orientation set for May 14.** Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children will hold an orientation meeting May 14 in Louisville for families interested in adopting children with special needs. According to the state's special needs adoption program, about 200 children with special needs are awaiting adoption. Those interested in attending the 7 p.m. meeting at Highland Baptist Church, 1101 Cherokee Road, are asked to call (505) 568-9115 by noon May 13 for reservations.

■ **First partnership church named.** Saloma Baptist Church of Campbellsville has become the first church to become a partner in the Partnership 2000 campaign of Campbellsville University, Cumberland College and Georgetown College. Partner churches are those that commit a half tithe per year for three years of their 1996 undesignated receipts.

■ **Keyboard conference scheduled.** Kentucky Baptist keyboard conferences will be held this spring in three cities. Conferences in London and Paducah will be May 9, and the Louisville meeting will be May 16. For more information, call Nina Belle Durr, keyboard consultant for the Kentucky Baptist Convention's church music department, at (502) 245-4101 or toll-free outside Louisville, (888) 254-5707.

■ **Senior adult celebrations set.** The family ministry department of the Kentucky Baptist Convention will sponsor five daytime senior adult conferences. The conferences will be April 27 in Mayfield, April 28 in Bowling Green, April 30 in Somerset, May 12 in Burlington and May 19 in Hazard. Registration is \$6. For more information contact the department at (502) 245-4101 or toll-free outside Louisville (888) 254-5704.

■ **Noe named chairman.** Larry Noe, a Campbellsville attorney, was appointed chairman for the Campbellsville University board of trustees. He replaces John Chowning, who recently was named assistant to the president at the Baptist school.

■ **All-State children's choir scheduled.** All-State Children's Choir Weekends will be hosted in Hardin and Louisville April 24-26 for both the east and west choirs. For more information, contact the KBC church music department at (502) 245-4101 or toll free (888) 254-5707.

## WESTERN RECORDER

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*Earnestly contend for the  
faith which was once for  
all delivered to the  
saints.—Jude 3*

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## Emily Whitt. 8

By Marc Whitt

Being a parent in the 1990s is no easy task. As one parent recently told me, being a parent today is not for sissies! I totally agree.

Trying to balance the responsibilities of work and home and everything else in between such as commitments with church committees, civic activities, ball practice, piano lessons, art lessons ... well, if you're a parent, you know exactly what I'm speaking of. Only through God's guidance can we even attempt to make all these demands work.

As an administrator at Campbellsville University, I, like many other parents, find my work calendar filled with important committee meetings, appointments and other demands that come with the job.

While sitting in an out-of-town

office a few days ago making phone calls to arrange even more appointments, I glanced down at my April calendar to find one very important date with three words boldly written on it that left no other room for any other appointment: "Emily Whitt. 8."

Somehow when I wasn't looking, my daughter Emily had taken my planner and written this.

Wow! For my oldest daughter, nothing was or could ever be more important than her birthdate on April 22. And I couldn't agree more.

My wife, Jennifer, and I praise God for blessing us with two beautiful, healthy girls. I find no other responsibility more important than providing them with as much love as I can within a home centered by

God's guidance.

In the rush of life for each one of us, moms and dads alike, I pray that we all consider what in life really matters. As I approach the magic "4-0" in a couple of years, more of my thoughts tend to analyze that very subject. Our children are extensions of us, and they will impact the world more than anything else we ever accomplish.

Don't get me wrong. I love my work and I thank the

Lord for allowing me to touch lives through the ministry of Campbellsville University.

But we should all evaluate what must take priority in our lives. And for my wife and me, that typically is taking time with our children, even when it may not be convenient—even if you've had the worst day of your life.

We have learned that parenting is

not a job of convenience. Rather it is one of love, patience, guidance and understanding.

Our children, our most precious gifts from our Heavenly Father, are little for only a short period of time. And while we have them in our households, we have the awesome and exciting opportunity to make their lives filled with the love of Christ so that one day, they, too, will make a difference in this world for him.

So, come April 22, Emily Whitt, age 8, will fill my day as I take time to share lunch with her at school and spend precious time with her once I get off work later that day.

In the simplicity of Emily's thinking, Daddy had nothing more important to do than to make sure my schedule for April 22 would include only her. I can't think of a better way to thank God than by doing just that.

*Marc Whitt is vice president for advancement at Campbellsville University.*

## FIRST PERSON

## A biblical proposal for dealing with Iraq

By Tony Campolo

As the war drums were banging and it looked like we were heading for another war with Iraq, there were a host of political pundits giving their opinions as to what our national policy should be.

Some called for an all-out invasion of Iraq to the end that the tyrant there might be removed from power once and for all. Others sought a diplomatic solution to the threat posed by the instruments of destruction being developed by Saddam Hussein. And then there were those who thought the bombing option proposed by the president, with all its limitations, would be the most prudent plan to follow.

In the midst of all these proposals I wondered what would happen if we as a nation simply adopted a foreign policy that took the direc-

tives of Scripture literally. Paul wrote, "If thy enemy hunger, feed him" (Romans 12:20).

What if we obeyed Jesus and did good to our enemies (Matthew 5:42-44); lifted the economic embargo against Iraq, sending in food to feed their hungry children and sending in huge amounts of medical supplies to meet the desperate needs of their sick?

What if we started buying Iraqi oil and got their economy into gear again? Might not Iraq suddenly find itself dependent on the nation it presently calls "The Great Satan?" Might not Iraq, finding itself dependent on us as a market for its oil, have to redefine us as a friendly nation?

There are those who would say following Jesus so literally would be naive. They might contend that "doing good to those who would harm us" (Romans 12:14) was never intended to be taken seriously in such circumstances? But might they be wrong?

## COMMENTARY



Tony Campolo

The spokespersons for political realism argue that doing the kind of good that would "heap coals of fire" (Romans 12:20) on Saddam Hussein's head would be sheer insanity. But might it be that ultimately the only thing that would work with our enemy in Iraq is to love him (Matthew 5:44)?

Lord Chesterton once said, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting, but rather it has been found difficult and never really tried." Would it not prove wonderfully ironic if after everything else in the way

of foreign policy was tried we discovered that only the simple but difficult directives of Jesus offer any real possibility for peace in this world?

A couple of years ago I was invited to Iraq to lead evangelistic meetings. Because of scheduling difficulties, I did not go. But as the war rhetoric heated up in recent weeks I decided to contact the Iraqi Christians who had earlier invited me and let them know that now in the face of war between our nations, I would be willing to take up their offer.

As frightening as it would be in Baghdad preaching when the bombs started falling, I believe that unless we are ready to take the risks that go with taking the words of Jesus literally, we ought not suggest that others follow his message about loving our enemies and doing good for those who would harm us.

*Tony Campolo, a popular author and speaker, is professor of sociology at Eastern College in St. Davids, Pa.*

## The fundamental flaw of "Titanic"

By Terry Mattingly

Soon after "Titanic" opened in the United States, director James Cameron ventured into cyberspace to field questions from waves of stricken fans.

One mother described how her young daughter sat spellbound through the three-hour-plus romance between a first-class girl trapped in a loveless engagement with a cruel fiancée and a starving artist who liberates her, then surrenders his life to save her in the icy North Atlantic. As they left the theater, the mother said her daughter noticed older girls weeping.

"It's OK; don't worry," the child said, giving one girl a hug. "Rose is with her Jack now."

"That's so sweet," wrote Cameron. Nevertheless, he told another participant in the Online Tonight session that he wouldn't answer one common question: Did the now-elderly Rose die in the last scene, to be reunited with her lover aboard the Titanic in a vision of heaven, or was she merely dreaming?

As he immersed himself in Titanic

lore, Cameron said he reached one conclusion: "I think I discovered the truth of its lesson—which is all you have is today."

In another public statement, he described his film in more sweeping terms. "'Titanic' is not just a cautionary tale—a myth, a parable, a metaphor for the ills of mankind. It is also a story of faith, courage, sacrifice and, above all else, love."

With receipts of \$1.2 billion and rising, "Titanic" has filled a hole in the hearts of millions of romance-starved moviegoers. Whether Cameron intended to or not, Hollywood's most successful movie of all time also has changed how at least one generation views one of this century's most symbolic events.

For millions, the Titanic is now a triumphant story of how one upper-crust girl found salvation—body and soul—through sex, modern art, self-esteem lingo and social rebellion. "Titanic" is a passion play celebrating the moral values of the 1960s as sacraments.

Rose sums it up by saying that she could abandon her old life and family

because her forbidden lover "saved me in every way that a person can be saved."

Millions are walking their children down theater aisles, often making many such pilgrimages, in support of this cathartic message about the power of romantic love. Major religious groups that have greeted similar films with howls of protest are silent. A few people wonder why.

## COMMENTARY

"Titanic" reminds me of the distinctions between people of faith and secularists," said conservative commentator Elizabeth Farah. "While all agree that death is inevitable and very often unexpected, the religious and secularists do not agree on the behavior life's fragility should promote. Those of faith know they may meet their Maker at any moment, at which time they will account for their sins. Their fear and deep love for God inspire them in their constant struggle for righteousness. To the secularist, life is short—get what you want, when you want it and in whatever way necessary."

The heroes of this modern "Titanic" fit into this latter category, Farah said. Their sins become virtues, because they are rebelling against peo-

ple who are portrayed as even worse. This isn't just a bad movie, she added, it is "manipulative" and "fundamentally immoral."

Philosophy professor and Orthodox priest, goes even further in the next issue of the ecumenical journal Touchstone. He calls the movie "satanic." The people who built the Titanic were so proud of their command of technology that they boasted that God couldn't sink their ship. Today, the creators of the movie "Titanic" substitute romantic love as the highest power. Jack becomes Rose's savior, and he does more than save her life.

"Had that been all that happened, I would not have complained," Reardon said. "The line that set me off I believe also to have been the ... defining line of the film: the assertion that the sort of saving that Jack did was, ultimately, the only kind of saving possible. If that was the thesis statement of the film, then I start looking for the cloven hoof and sniffing for brimstone." (BP)

*Terry Mattingly teaches at Milligan College in Tennessee. He writes a weekly column for the Scripps Howard News Service. Used by permission.*

## HE SAID/SHE SAID

### It's painful to admit, but women cope with pain better than men

#### SHESAI



Alison Wingfield

According to new research, women apparently are better able to cope with pain than men. Tell me something I don't already know.

This research, which was done on arthritis sufferers, also revealed that women are more sensitive to pain. Since we are the more sensitive gender in general, this makes sense also.

So, even though we tend to feel more (40 percent more!) pain than men, we cope with all that pain better. Why? We know when to take action by taking medicine when we need it, and by getting help from others when we need it. And we're not afraid to cry when it does hurt.

Granted, Mark, unlike the men cited in the study, is not the "suffer-in-silence" type. When he is sick, which isn't very often (thank goodness), I hear about it. Every ache and pain is catalogued and he lays on the couch or in bed and gives me these pitiful requests for food. Men do not make the best of patients, due to their lack of patience.

Being the more sensitive gender, I naturally give him plenty of sympathy and TLC—I move downstairs as far away from him as possible, so I won't catch whatever he's got.

What's wild to me is that even though we supposedly feel more pain, women manage to endure childbirth not just once, but often two and three times or more.

All I know is that God knew what he was doing when he chose women instead of men to bear children. Otherwise, none of us would be here, because the men would have said forget it a long time ago.

#### HESAI



Mark Wingfield

OK, so women are able to bear more pain than men because they're equipped to handle things like childbirth. Fine with me. That's not a contest I'd like to win.

I'll have to agree with Alison on this one: If it were up to men to have the babies, the human race would have been finished centuries ago.

I don't know where these researchers got the idea that men suffer in silence. That may be true in macho John Wayne movies, but not in real life.

I know I'm not the only male who milks an ailment for all it's worth. We males do pitiful really well. Women would say we're so emotionally weak that we need the attention; I say we know a good deal when we find it.

There's no argument women have a lot more practice coping with pain than most men. After all, they marry men who both create pain and then can't manage their own pain without help. God knew what he was doing when he created women with the coping mechanisms they have.

However, I'm puzzled by the finding that women are less likely than men to report a negative mood due to coping with pain. This research cycle obviously didn't last through a full month. Well, maybe I'm getting hormones and pain mixed up here.

But the bottom line is the government, or whoever funded this study, could have saved a lot of money if they had just understood one basic principle: Men are more stubborn than women.

Related to pain, that means we won't admit we feel any pain until we feel it intensely. The researchers said it well: we tend to get ambushed by pain and then cope poorly.

But women intuitively know the advance warning signs of pain and prepare for what's to come. That makes good fodder for conversation both before and after the pain; no wonder women also talk more than men.

This all goes to show the Scripture is right when it says we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." I'll leave it to you to figure out who represents the fearful and who represents the wonderful. Ouch!

## Perspective needed on 'conservatives'

Where does one person's conservatism stop and another person's fundamentalism begin? Depends on which side of the line you stand on—and on who gets to draw the line.

In religious circles, the label "conservative" has taken a severe downsizing in recent years. To be classified a conservative has become more a political description than a theological one.

That's unfortunate.

But the reality of politics is that he who first defines the terms usually prevails in drawing the lines. And only the really stout of heart want to be labeled "fundamentalists."

An attempt is underway to do the same thing with the term "evangelical." Some who are fundamentalists more than evangelicals are attempting to hold themselves out as the authentic evangelicals. The theory is if you say it loud enough and long enough, eventually people will believe it.

But already nearly 20 years of our current epoch of Southern Baptist strife has left us with a perverted understanding of the word "conservative." What all too many people have forgotten is that any Southern Baptist, by definition, is conservative when viewed on a national or global measuring stick.

To attempt to define shades of conservatism within a world that already is conservative is to strain at gnats. Or so it would seem to someone on the outside looking in.

I've been around the Baptist block more than a few times, and I've yet to meet more than a few authentic Southern Baptist liberals. Yet the common perception exists today that thousands of liberals have been kept at bay or sent packing as a result of our denominational holy war.

If you really want to see a religious liberal, get out of the Southern Baptist bubble for awhile. Go to the religion department of most major state universities or Ivy League schools.

That's evidenced clearly by the recent Frontline

documentary aired on PBS about the early church. Frontline rounded up a dozen New Testament scholars who apparently don't believe the heart of the New Testament story, that Jesus really died and really rose from the dead, that the New Testament is history as well as literature.

That's liberalism.

Discount the resurrection, and you've got no reason to believe. There's no reason to go to church, much less have a church.

Yet we still hear a lot of talk about liberals among us in the Baptist world. We are told by some that Kentucky Baptist churches need new leadership that will teach people the truth, implying that current pastors and staff members are liberals and gospel liars. Broad generalizations are made to imply that the current generation of Kentucky ministers doesn't believe in the basics of the Christian faith: that Jesus was born of a virgin, died on a cross, conquered death and sin and rose from the grave and is coming again.

If those people are out there, I don't know where they are. In fact, I challenge anyone who can find them to come forward with specifics. Where is the Kentucky Baptist pastor who doesn't believe all people are lost without faith in Jesus? Where is the Kentucky Baptist pastor who doesn't believe Jesus was born of a virgin? Where is the Kentucky Baptist pastor who doesn't believe Jesus died and rose again? Where is the Kentucky Baptist pastor who doesn't believe Jesus is coming again?

We are a conservative lot, all of us. And it would be wise for us to reclaim the word "conservative" as distinct from strife-producing forms of fundamentalism.

The reality is that people who are theologically conservative demonstrate a breadth of opinion on political and social issues and even have differences of opinion on some important but non-essential theological issues. Failure to acknowledge this is a fundamental mistake.

— Mark Wingfield

## Why do you look for the living among the dead?

By Bob Browning

*In their fright the women bowed with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!" (Luke 24:5)*

People have been looking for Jesus ever since he came into the world. They have done so for a variety of reasons.

The shepherds looked for him at his birth after the angel announced his arrival. The wise men sought him so they could worship him and bring gifts. Nicodemus went to Jesus at night so he could talk about theological issues.

The rich young ruler came to Jesus searching for eternal life.

Mary and Martha approached him so he could help with their grief over losing their brother, Lazarus. The centurion begged Jesus to heal his son. A sinful woman approached him during dinner at a Pharisee's home to anoint his feet with oil and express appreciation for forgiveness.

The search for Jesus did not end, however, with his crucifixion and burial.

On the first Sunday after his death, Luke tells us some of the women went to the tomb to anoint his body with spices and complete the burial process.

To their dismay, they did not find his body. Instead, they discovered two angels who asked them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

It was as much a reprimand for not remembering Jesus' words about his Resurrection as it was a question, but it was a good question nonetheless. No one is his right mind would look for the living among the dead, because no sane person would live in a graveyard.

You must remember, though, that these women did not go to see the living among the dead. They went to see the dead among the dead. As far as they were concerned, a graveyard was where Jesus should have been. They witnessed his crucifixion and burial.

How their hearts must have jumped when they realized why the tomb was empty. Frustration, sorrow and despondency turned to excitement, joy and hope when they understood that Jesus was alive and needed that borrowed tomb no longer.

This is good news for us, too. Our world is filled with people looking for Jesus just as they did in biblical times. The names may be different, but the needs are the same.

Our deepest needs can be met when we confess our sins, repent of our wrongdoing, ask for forgiveness and invite Jesus into our hearts.

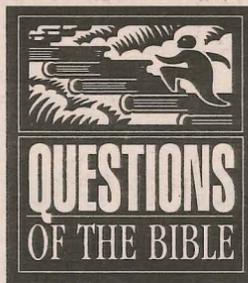
Like many others who have gone to Russia, I have been to Lenin's tomb in Red Square. I was impressed with all the efforts of the authorities to preserve and display Lenin's body.

I was deeply saddened, though, when I thought of the numbers of people who have approached this mausoleum hoping to find something or someone inside that would meet their deepest needs. Their search was in vain. Lenin is dead and can help these people in no way.

How different it is with Jesus. Like Lenin, he died and was buried. Unlike Lenin, though, Jesus arose and lives forever. We'll not find him enclosed in a glass case in a climate-controlled mausoleum. Instead, we'll encounter him in this world as he is busy about his Father's business of saving and taking care of people.



Bob Browning is pastor of First Baptist Church of Somerset.



# RESOURCES

## This week's questions:

- Should I tell my spouse about my concerns with our relationship?
- I keep getting "stuck" in the various areas of my life. How can a single adult begin to move forward in life's journey?

**Q. My husband and I seldom argue but recently I've been having some real problems with a particular issue in our marriage. Should I tell him about my concerns? If so, how should I approach him?**

**A.** Couples who desire genuine intimacy need to be open and honest with one another about their concerns. That's my "rule-of-thumb" or general answer.

Couples often go in one of two extremes when it comes to differences. Some couples are sweet and pleasing, seldom bringing up problem issues. Other couples seem to argue constantly and be in a constant state of uproar. Neither of these approaches enhances intimacy.

In the first approach, the couple keeps distance by being pleasing and agreeable. You may never have thought of it, but being overly pleasing can actually add distance by not allowing the other person to know the real you.

On the other hand, being in a constant state of uproar hardly creates intimacy. Who wants to hug a porcupine?

A balance between the extremes seems to strengthen healthy intimacy. This is best achieved as each person grows in his or her ability to tolerate differences and also have the courage to voice concerns.

Perhaps our understanding of Scripture adds to our dilemma. Jesus blessed the meek and Paul raised meekness to a new level as he included it in his fruit of the Spirit list.

In actuality, this word does not mean we must always be pleasing.

A more accurate understanding of meekness is "gentle strength." Christian couples can apply this to their relationships as they possess the inner strength to gently but forthrightly express their concerns with their partners.

You manifest gentleness as you speak to the issue at hand without attacking the other person.

Remember to avoid put-downs of the other person since they further erode intimacy. You can allow this fruit of the Spirit to be present in your marriage as you keep your cool but have the strength to confront. — *John Lepper*



**Q. I keep getting "stuck" in the various areas of my life, procrastinating projects, career and relationships. How can a single adult begin to move forward in life's journey?**

**A.** You mention a situation which is not confined to adults who happen to be single. Married people get "stuck" too, and often even more intensely. Still, you likely have the added social pressure to find and enter into a marriage relationship.

You are asking for the empowerment to map out your life in a successful way. Tired of the captivity of the past, you would like to move on to a better future.

A tremendous resource for the journey is a book by John Trent, "LifeMapping." Single adult life transitions which may feel unresolved might include death of a spouse, death

of a relationship or death of a dream. Before moving on to your future, you must revisit the past. The elements of processing your past effectively, according to Trent, are these:

1) Examine your success levels, your accomplishments, your gift and strength areas. Begin from the standpoint that you are a unique, unrepeatable miracle of God, uniquely called to a special task.

2) Acknowledge the emotional freeze points of your life experience. These are the unprocessed seasons of time, often involving multiple layers of unexamined hurt.

3) Remember the flash points that have happened along your way. What sudden events have propelled you into a very different direction?

4) Look at your untied transitions. What's happening physically, spiritually, vocationally and in your core relationships that you are still working on?

It's only when we have honestly dealt with the past that we are ready to take on the future. As you work through the components of an honestly reviewed past, you position yourself to receive the "future and hope" (Jeremiah 29:11) that God desires for you. — *James Stillwell*

*Family Forum writers are David Garrard, minister to children at St. Matthews Baptist Church in Louisville; James Stillwell, minister to singles at Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington; John Lepper, director of family ministries with the Kentucky Baptist Convention; Wade Rowatt, director of the St. Matthews Pastoral Counseling Center in Louisville; and Al Shackelford, editor of Mature Living magazine. Send questions for Family Forum to Western Recorder, Box 43969, Louisville, Ky. 40253 or e-mail us at wesrec@ntr.net.*

## Even senior adults need to hear the gospel

BELTON, Texas (BP)—An AARP card is no automatic ticket to heaven, says a veteran Baptist family ministries worker.

"White hair and sainthood are not synonymous," said Robert Cook, retired director of family life with the Florida Baptist Convention.

Cook, who was the first instructor in Palm Beach Atlantic College's gerontology department, led a seminar on "evangelizing senior adults" as part of the Texas Senior Adult Leadership Summit last month, sponsored by the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Too many people subscribe to a false theology that "the umbrella of God's grace covers sweet old people," Cook said.

The senior years represent the "last chance" for non-Christians to repent and for Christians to share their faith, he said.

Because they were reared in a generation that respected privacy, personal evangelism is "not a natural and easy thing" for many senior adults to do, he said. Many seniors, however, are quite willing to lead a senior adult revival.

Cook offered ideas for organizing and implementing a senior adult revival. Key points included:

■ *Do it in the daylight.* "The best time to reach senior adults is the daytime."

■ *Serve lunch.* Senior adults appreciate not only having someone else cook for them, but also having

the opportunity for socialization that mealtimes offer.

■ *Visit on the way.* "Just make one 'popcorn' visit on the way home right after lunch. That gives the visitor and the visitee time for an afternoon nap. We're dealing with reality here."

Involvement in senior adult revivals does not eliminate the need for one-to-one witnessing, however. While some methods of personal evangelism may be uncomfortable for many senior adults, aging Christians have a special responsibility to share the gospel with those in their own age group, Cook said.

"You bear in your body the marks," he said. "That gives you credibility."

## Speaker: 'It takes a church to raise a child'

SAN ANTONIO (ABP)—"It doesn't take a village to raise a child," says gerontologist Sandy Abernathy. "It takes a church."

Abernathy, director of ElderCare Services for Buckner Baptist Benevolences in Texas, contends that a child's Christian education is incomplete unless it includes interaction with believers of all ages.

"Mutual benefits come when you mix age groups so there is real dialogue," she said while leading a seminar on "uniting generations in ministry" at the recent conference of the Texas Baptist Christian Life

Commission.

"We need to think beyond the age-segregated structure that works so well in our churches," she added.

In addition to introducing children to the wisdom of their elders, intergenerational ministry also helps senior adults stay socially and intellectually active, she said.

Abernathy recommended that churches set up intergenerational committees with representatives from each age-segmented department.

"Get a 9-year-old and a 90-year-old together at the same table," she

said. "Encourage those of ages who usually don't vote on church decisions to be a part of the creative thinking."

Abernathy suggested offering Bible studies to explore the biblical basis for intergenerational learning and ministry and prayer sessions to seek guidance for merged ministries.

Churches should start small, she said. "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water. Remember, intergenerational activities do not have to take the place of age-segmented activities. Let your congregation grow into the 'thinking' of intergenerational activities."

## FAMILY

### The greatest financial commandments

By Jeremy White

Think of all the sources of financial advice: mutual fund companies, your mother, magazines, salesmen, coworkers, newspapers and advertisements.

All this information can be overwhelming.

Jesus once summarized the overwhelming and confusing Jewish laws into two all-encompassing commandments. As I was thinking recently of all the available personal financial advice, I wondered how to boil all the financial how-to steps into two summary statements.

This led to my "Two Doctrines of Successful Personal Finance." If you heed these doctrines, you will overcome your financial challenges. If not, you always will have financial difficulties. We will discuss the first of these below and the second one in my column next month.

**Financial Doctrine No. 1: Recognize how useful and useless money is.**

Money has great potential and empty promise. Like food, its proper use can be a pleasure while its misuse leads to more problems. Proper uses of money include:

■ Providing for the material needs of your family (1 Timothy 5:8).

■ Tithing and giving to God's kingdom (Malachi 3:10).

■ Helping others in need (Matthew 25:45).

■ Inheritance (Proverbs 13:22).

On the other hand, money also is useless, absolutely worthless, in obtaining the very best of life:

■ Lasting, satisfying marriage.

■ Health.

■ Deep, committed friendships.

■ Well-adjusted, mature children.

■ Great personality.

■ Self-esteem and self-respect.

■ Peace with God.

We make poor financial decisions by trying to buy one of the above items. Of course, we don't admit (or sometimes know) our hidden agendas.

We act as if a certain car, expensive clothes or a new house in the right neighborhood must bring self-esteem, friendship and peace. When this hope is proven false, our lives and wallets are emptier.

*Jeremy White is a certified public accountant in Paducah. He presents financial seminars and workshops at churches and conferences.*



## U.S. faith has more words than deeds

By Marv Knox  
Texas Baptist Standard

OXNARD, Calif. (ABP)—Americans' river of faith is far wider than it is deep, according to a new survey by religion researcher George Barna.

Barna's latest poll documents disparity between Americans' claims about the importance of religion and their faith practice.

"Religion continues to be a major topic of interest and involvement for most American adults," reported Barna, whose Barna Research Group interviewed 1,006 U.S. adults early this year.

"However," he said, "the much-discussed and anticipated spiritual revival is not discernible through common measures of spirituality."

A large majority of Americans answered survey questions in such a way as to indicate faith is important to them, Barna noted.

For example:

- More than four out of five American adults (83 percent) said religious faith is very important in their lives. That percentage has remained stable throughout the past six annual surveys.

- Eighty-two percent of survey participants said they consider themselves to be Christian. Of those self-described Christians, 50 percent said they are "absolutely committed to the Christian faith." According to Barna's findings, 39 percent of Americans are "born-again" Christians. And 6 percent answered questions to indicate they are evangelical Christians.

Despite their high self-regard in matters of faith, most Americans

### Who qualifies as 'born again?'

Not everyone who claims the label "born again" necessarily is, and some people who don't want the label deserve it, according to religion researcher George Barna's definition.

"The term 'born-again Christian' does not refer to people calling themselves by this label," Barna said of the way his organization, Barna Research Group, uses the term.

Two survey questions are used to classify people as born-again or

not born-again, he said.

"To be classified as a born-again Christian, an individual must say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today, and that after they die they will go to heaven because they have confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior," he explained.

"People who meet these criteria are classified as born-again, regardless of whether or not they would say they are born-again Christians."

don't exercise that faith through a range of practical applications, researchers learned.

"The importance of religious and spiritual matters does not always translate into direct action by Americans," Barna said.

While 80 percent of respondents said they had prayed to God during the previous week, less than half indicated they had participated in five other religious activities in the previous week:

- Forty-three percent said they had attended a church service.

- Thirty-eight percent claimed to have read the Bible other than at church.

- Twenty-five percent had volunteered at church.

- Eighteen percent had attended a small group at church other than Sunday school.

- Twenty-three percent had attended Sunday school.

Research indicates church membership may rotate noticeably this

year, Barna said.

"A significant proportion of adults plans to change their church in the coming year," he said. "Eleven percent of the people who attend a Christian church at least once a month said such transition was likely. If true, that represents more than 15 million people changing their church home in the next 12 months."

Taken together, the research numbers paint a conflicted picture of religious life in America, Barna said.

"God and faith are still hot, but long-term or intense religious commitments are not," he explained. "Despite their fascination with spirituality, most church people are only moderately devoted to their current church, and they are not deeply invested in spiritual growth."

"It seems that many adults are waiting for the next big spiritual fad to explore. The breadth of our intrigue with faith remains much more extensive than the depth of our commitment to genuine spiritual development."

### Adviser: Churches should think about starting up endowments

NASHVILLE (ABP)—Churches should take a cue from other non-profit organizations in America and begin to build endowments, according to Ruben Swint, a former Kentucky minister.

Most churches can benefit from the "\$10 trillion transfer of wealth" taking place in America as the World War II generation passes from the scene and leaves behind a lifetime of assets, said Swint, now president of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Foundation in Atlanta.

That wealth comes from not only well-to-do Americans but "unlikely millionaires"—average, middle-class senior adults who worked hard, saved money, earned a pension, bought life insurance, paid off a house, and therefore come to the end of life with more assets than they ever envisioned.

Many of those "millionaires" are packing church pews, but few churches are actively seeking them out, Swint said. Instead, other non-profits—universities, hospitals, children's homes and other charities—are reaping the benefits.

"Non-profit institutions know the best donors they have are in churches," Swint told church leaders attending a Baptist Center for Ethics conference last month. "We had better be asking too."

One approach: encourage members to tithe from their estates.

Currently 64 Kentucky Baptist churches have established endowments with the help of Kentucky Baptist Foundation, said Laurie Valentine, trust counsel for the foundation.

Swint suggested several appropriate uses for the income from church endowments:

- Pay for capital improvements.

- Provide for building maintenance. A \$1 million building will cost at least as much to maintain during its lifespan, he said.

- Fund mission work.

- Supplement the operating budget.

Some well-heeled churches have grown complacent or stagnant while depending on endowment for operating funds. But Swint said providing up to 15 percent of the operating budget from endowment income is safe and appropriate.

## Church offers parking lot for skateboard ministry to teens

By Tim Ellsworth  
Illinois Baptist

BELLEVILLE, Ill. (BP)—It's been only about a year since Rick Wilson moved from Alaska to the Illinois side of the St. Louis metro area, but he's already become somewhat of a hero to more than 100 youth.

Wilson was the main person responsible for getting Towerview Baptist Church of Belleville, Ill., to start a "skateboard ministry" last May. One person has already made a profession of faith as a direct result of the church's ministry.

It works like this: Towerview allows area youth to skate on the church parking lot every afternoon after school. Anywhere from 20 to 40 kids show up, pull out the skateboard ramps and hang out on church property for several hours. The rules are simple: no smoking, no cussing, 9 p.m. curfew, and the skaters must clean up after themselves.

The response has been "fantastic," Wilson said of kids showing up to skate from all over the east metro area.

Wilson came up with the idea for a skateboard ministry while he was

stationed in Alaska and decided to try something similar in Belleville when he noticed how kids weren't allowed to skate around town.

"They really don't care for the kids to skate downtown," Wilson said. "There's no place available for them to skate."

Wilson approached Towerview Pastor Tom Eggle about the idea, and the church approved the ministry at a business meeting. Wilson doesn't get any funds from the church, but he does collect money from the skaters to defray the cost of repairing the skating ramps.

Wilson said the potential for ministry is enormous. He's got a list of 110 youth who skate at the church on a regular basis. "None of these kids are Christians," he said. "Most of them don't attend church. It's a long haul to try and reach these kids."

He usually spends five nights a week at the church visiting with the skaters. "This is a part-time job for me," he joked.

But it's also much more than that. Other church members come out to the parking lot every once in a while to witness to the kids, and to invite them in for supper on Wednesday nights and to various church services.

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## Evangelical co-author with Mormon still has misgivings

By Bob Allen  
Associated Baptist Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP)—Despite his ground-breaking dialogue concerning Mormonism, evangelical scholar Craig Blomberg said he harbors “remaining misgivings” about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Blomberg, with Mormon theologian Stephen Robinson, co-authored the book “How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation” to chronicle their attempts to seek common ground.

While evangelicals and Mormons hold much in common, Blomberg, a New Testament professor at Denver Seminary, said there are differences he is unable to reconcile.

“Christians should recognize that Mormonism is something that is quite distinct and is not something that merits the title of orthodox or historic Christianity,” Blomberg said in a March 17-19 convocation on “understanding Mormonism” at Samford University, a Baptist school in Birmingham, Ala.

Latter-day Saints differ from orthodox Christians in their view on Scripture, Blomberg said, as well as their understanding of the nature of God and Christ and the meaning of salvation.

“The Mormons have a larger canon than we do,” he said. In addition to the Old and New Testaments, Latter-day Saints regard the Book of Mormon and shorter works attributed to

Mormon founder Joseph Smith as authoritative.

Blomberg critiqued Mormon writings by observing they “make very good sense as 19th-century documents” but “make very little sense” in the ancient settings from which they purport to originate.

The Book of Mormon is “written in beautiful King-James English,” Blomberg said. The similarity is understandable because the King James Version was the only Bible known to Joseph Smith, Blomberg said, but it differs from more accurate translations of ancient biblical texts found in modern readings.

The Book of Mormon also deals with issues that would have been current when Smith purportedly translated the Book of Mormon from inscribed golden plates in 1830, such as the eternal destiny of people who lived in North America before Christians arrived. “That was a pressing theological question in the 1830s, and the Book of Mormon answers it,” he said.

The Mormon view that God once was a mortal and still has a physical body runs contrary to historic Christianity, Blomberg said. “God is spirit,” Blomberg said. The Mormon view that “as man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may be” can lead to polytheism, Blomberg said, argu-

ments notwithstanding by Mormon theologians that humans in their exalted state remain “subordinate” to God.

Mormons reject the Trinity, observing the term is not in the Bible, and arguing the concept reflects corruption by Greek philosophy. Blomberg responded, however, that “at least the impetus” for the trinitarian teaching can be found in the New Testament.

With Mormons’ rejection of the Incarnation, he said, “it’s not clear we can have an adequate substitutionary atonement—God doing for humans in his own person what we could never do for ourselves.”

Mormons say they agree with evangelicals that salvation comes by grace, but their view of what happens after death is based heavily on works, Blomberg said. Mormons believe Blomberg has three stages, with the highest level reserved for those who convert to Mormonism and live good lives.

“For all their talk about grace, our perception is that the Mormon religion very easily turns into legalism,” Blomberg said.

He said Mormon critics believe evangelicals are against good works, evangelicals “believe that a life transformed by the indwelling spirit of God will by necessity produce good works.”

Noting that Mormons believe lower levels of salvation are available to non-Mormons and that people have an opportunity to respond to the gospel after they die, Blomberg suggested that Latter-day Saints consider the “wager” argument of French philosopher Blaise Pascal: “What’s at stake if I’m right and they’re wrong?”

“If the Mormon is right ... I will at least make it to heaven. I don’t have much to lose if he’s right and I’m wrong,” Blomberg said. “What’s at stake if I’m right and he’s wrong and it’s only heaven or hell? He doesn’t make it to heaven.”

Interfaith-witness expert Gary Leazer proposed a “historical-development” approach to understanding Mormonism, “because with all religions, we’re often influenced by the culture in which we find ourselves as much as by Scripture.”

Leazer said the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints recently has responded to harsh criticism of its teachings by emphasizing family values and good public relations.

“I predict the Mormon Church will continue to present itself in a positive high road while accusing its critics of negative mudslinging,” Leazer said. “Critics will continue to highlight the uniqueness of Mormon teachings and contrast them with historical Christian doctrine.”

Such criticism may help Mormons to “take a look” at their own church’s teaching, Leazer predicted.

### 30 new temples being planned

SALT LAKE CITY (RNS)—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has announced the construction of 30 new temples around the world.

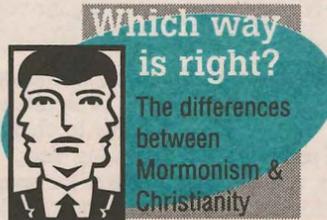
Speaking April 5 on the closing day of the church’s annual world conference held in Salt Lake City, President Gordon Hinckley said the construction plans were designed to bring temples geographically closer to members of the fast-growing church.

Currently, the Mormon church has 51 temples around the world. The construction of 17 additional temples was previously announced.

Hinckley said the new temples will be much smaller than existing temples, which are imposing structures. Mormons use temples exclusively for marriages, baptism and other “sacred ordinances” of the church.

The new temples will be built in Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia, Fiji, Canada, Mexico, Central and South America and the United States. No specific sites were announced.

The Mormon Church has about 10 million members.



## Utah town woke up when Baptists took on Latter-day Saints

By James Dotson  
SBC North American Mission Board

SALT LAKE CITY (BP)—Vernal was like many small towns in Utah in the early 1980s.

About 85 percent of the population claimed membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, while First Baptist Church of Vernal had a Sunday morning attendance of only about 70.

But beginning in 1984, something happened in that town of about 12,000 people unlike anything Southern Baptists in the region have seen before or since. Herb Stoneman came to town with a new vision as the pastor of First Baptist Church. Then a prominent couple left the Mormon church and began telling others about Christ.

Stoneman said it became routine and expected for members to build on friendships with Mormon neighbors and share Christ.

Within five years, 450 Mormons had left the Mormon church and acknowledged the Christ of Scripture through the ministry of First Baptist Church, Stoneman said. Other Christian churches in the community also shared in the harvest.

“To be honest, I don’t think we were going on,” said Stoneman, who is now evangelism director for the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention. “God was just moving, and we were simply letting him move

through us.

“It was a situation where every Sunday someone new was coming to know Christ. ... I think some Sundays I could have said, ‘Olly Olly Oxen Free,’ and people would have come down the aisles. The word of ministry was going in the homes, and we were simply the gathering ground in the church.”

Stoneman came to the church in January 1984. It was in February that former Mormons Dennis and Rauni Higley—former leaders in the local Baptist church—joined First Baptist and began teaching a course on witnessing to Mormons.

Meanwhile, Stoneman placed a bold challenge before the congregation. In order to better reach into the community, he asked members to invite as many friends and neighbors as possible for an event called “Roundup Sunday.”

“We set an absolutely unreachable goal of 250 people for worship ... but on that Sunday morning we had 278. We blew the doors off the place, and suddenly the body of believers gained a vision that the work at Vernal could really impact the community.”

At one point when there had not been a baptism for just two weeks, Stoneman heard concerns about whether something was wrong in the church.

“We became so certain of God’s hand on people’s lives. It seems almost arrogant now, but we would al-

most anticipate that they were going to be saved,” he said.

Some Baptists paid dearly for their church activities.

The Higleys, who Stoneman said were a catalyst for the revival, were forced to leave town after two years because their business was boycotted. Several men were divorced by their wives at the urging of the Mormon church, Stoneman said. Mormon doctrine teaches that the wife’s eternal destiny is dependent on her husband, he said. That encourages Mormon women to divorce a husband who leaves the church and to remarry.

But Stoneman said those affected counted the prize of a genuine relationship with God to be worth the cost. As a result they became some of the most faithful Christians, he added.

The revival even changed the way people withdrew from the Mormon church in the area. In the beginning, the only way of leaving was to go before a “bishop’s court” of top church leaders and be excommunicated, Stoneman said.

But new Christians began using this as an opportunity for sharing their testimony, and church leaders eventually changed the process to eliminate the need for a hearing.

About two years into the revival, the Vernal church organized a bold campaign to give every family a paperback book presenting the case for the historic Christian gospel.

“We prayed about whether it was

too confrontive, but we already had a reputation in the community. ... After you’ve been labeled as the Whore of Babylon, how much worse can you get?” Stoneman said.

Within 24 hours after the 6,000 books were distributed, Mormon leaders issued an order for the books to be burned. But many were read, and people responded. Stoneman said some Mormon residents asked for extra copies.

What did Stoneman learn from the experience? It wasn’t a sure-fire evangelistic method for Mormons, as many have sought from him, he said.

Instead, he learned a principle of evangelism that applies to Mormons or anyone else that needs the gospel, he said.

“The first characteristic is one of being totally in love with the lost. You have to love lost people enough to expose yourself as far as your own weaknesses.”

He uses Jesus Christ’s approach with the woman at the well as a model; Jesus first established a point of contact, then he took the opportunity to share the good news.

“I had an opportunity to win a lot of men to Christ while at the gymnasium playing basketball,” he said.

While casual confrontation is essential, he said, it should be done in a spirit of love. “I find a lot of people try to encounter cultists with angry words, and I haven’t seen many of them being successful in leading people to Christ.”

## Discoveries led Mormon couple to leave the temple

Continued from page 1

those and other elements of temple ceremonies bear great similarities with those of Freemasonry.

After her mission, Mrs. Higley moved to Salt Lake City, where she began working as a translator for the Mormon church, a position she held more than 14 years. Higley returned from his mission in Finland, and the two eventually were married in the Salt Lake City temple.

One of Mrs. Higley's assignments was to translate the temple ceremony into Finnish, which she believed would help her understand it better.

But the in-depth study revealed further confusion and contradictions, she said.

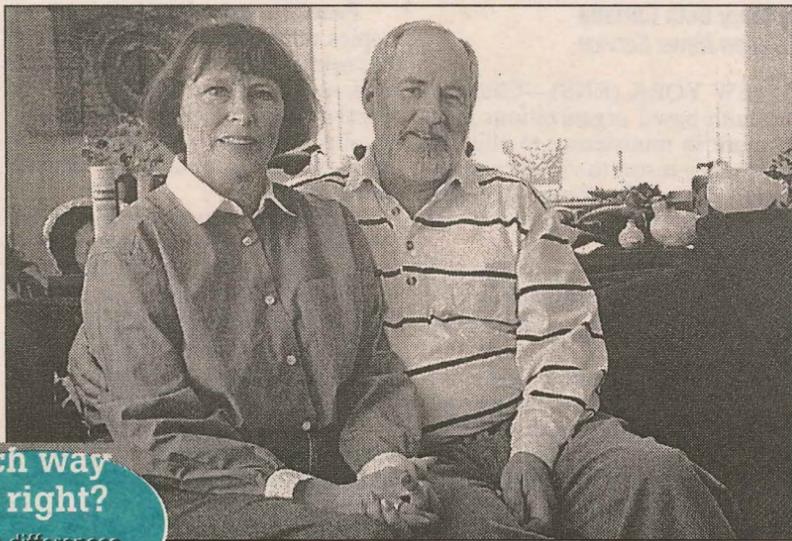
Later, other concerns arose when researching the context of historical references in order

to ensure accuracy in translation. "It opened my eyes to see that Mormonism has evolved and has been very different in the past. That started me reading more and more materials that were not readily available to the average members," she said.

In 1982 she finally told Higley, by now a regional Mormon leader, that she could no longer be a part of the church. Higley was furious at first, taking only a cursory look at her claims.

"I said, 'We don't know enough about that yet,' or gave it some other excuse," Higley said. "I just kept putting everything on the back burner, but she persisted in showing me these contradictions and differences, to the point that we were not talking anymore."

Higley finally took the time to gather the materials and check out the information for himself. After he be-



Which way is right?



The differences between Mormonism & Christianity

**FORMER MORMONS** Dennis and Rauni Higley say they often get sympathy for the price they've paid for switching to Christianity. "I say we may have paid a price in the eyes of the world, but we got the prize through Jesus Christ." (BP photo by James Dotson)

came convinced the LDS church was gravely in error, his initial response was anger.

"I didn't want anything to do with organized religion again," he said. "I felt like I had been the subject of a horrendous practical joke, that somewhere someone was really laughing at me for the 40 years I had lived as a faithful, active Mormon."

But he also was determined to seek the truth. Through their own study and a series of Bible study tapes given to them by a friend, he and Mrs. Higley both accepted the Christ of the Bible and historic Christianity.

In May 1983, nearly a year after Higley began his own research, they sent a letter to the Mormon church requesting removal of their names from church records. But when their names were read in a priesthood meeting as having been excommunicated, with no reason given, rumors began to cir-

culate about possible grievous sins they had committed. The Higleys decided the best approach was to write an extended letter to their relatives and friends explaining why they were leaving. In the letter they implied that if they were mistaken in any of their findings that they would welcome correction. There was no response.

The letter and their departure so upset local church leaders, however, that the Higleys' retail businesses were boycotted. They were forced by financial collapse to relocate to suburban Salt Lake City—but not before helping spark a revival at the Southern Baptist church in Vernal.

Higley said Christians often have sympathized about the tremendous price they have paid for their faith. He would much rather they join in celebration. "I say we may have paid a price in the eyes of the world, but we got the prize through Jesus Christ."

### What they've learned

Rauni Higley said that when she began studying the teachings of Mormonism she found several disturbing items, including:

- Contradictions regarding pivotal events in the life of Joseph Smith before he founded the church in 1830.
- Historical and archeological facts that called into question the veracity of the Book of Mormon.
- Unfulfilled prophecies by Smith.
- Contradictions between current church teachings, earlier church writings and Mormon scriptures themselves.

In their seminars with Christians, Mrs. Higley and her husband, Dennis, give an overview of Mormon beliefs, highlighting the different meanings Mormons assign to the familiar terms in Christianity.

"We give them a basic background in what Mormons believe: that they have a different God, a different Jesus, a different Holy Spirit and a different plan of salvation," Higley said. "Those are the foundational topics that Christians need to know."

"Often," Mrs. Higley added, "people witness to Mormons, but they don't clarify the differences. If you go to a Mormon and talk about Jesus Christ, they say, 'I believe in Jesus Christ. I am a Christian too.'"

"The Jesus of Mormonism is one of the billions of spirit sons of God, not God Almighty in human flesh," she continued. "You don't have a Jesus who has always existed as God, but he is a created being who has evolved into godhood."

When talking with Mormons, Dennis Higley said one approach is to simply ask them to explain in detail their concepts of God and Jesus. Then, he said, the differences can be shown from the Bible, and the Mormon must decide whether to believe the Mormon church or the Bible.

The road out of Mormonism is particularly difficult, Higley said, because there are so many stages that must be overcome. With individuals like himself who never have known anything but Mormonism, it is particularly difficult.

"When you are indoctrinated from the time you are a toddler to believe this is the only true church on the face of the earth, and you believe these are the requirements God has put on us, you don't even question it," he said. "It just does not enter your mind that it could be wrong."

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**SEEKING:** Pastor for Madison Avenue Baptist Church, Covington. Please send resumé to: Eula Weissmann, 29 East 13th St., Covington, KY 41011.

**SEEKING:** Applicants for the part-time staff position of minister of education. Submit resumé to: Personnel Committee, Lyndon Baptist Church, 8025 New LaGrange Road, Louisville, KY 40222. No phone calls please.

**SEEKING:** Dependable person to sit with two children for summer private pool. (502) 429-8678 or 425-0007.

**SEEKING:** Task-oriented assistant to support interfaith community executive. Computer proficiency, office management required. Knowledge of the religious community helpful. 30 hours/week. Send resumé to: KIC, 1113 S. 4th St., Louisville, KY 40203-3188.

**SEEKING:** Part-time minister of youth. Please send resumé to: Personnel Committee, First Baptist Church of Dent, 6384 Harrison Ave., Cincinnati, OH 45247.

**SEEKING:** Full-time minister of youth and children, and full-time minister of music and education. Interested persons should send resumé to: Latonia Baptist Church, P.O. Box 15103, Covington, KY 41015, Attn: Search Committee.

**NEEDED:** 1st trumpet and 1st trombone, grades 9-12, for Kentucky Baptist All-State Youth Orchestra, June 21-28. For audition information, call church music department at (888) 254-5707.

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**SEEKING:** Part-time minister of music. Eastern Gate Baptist Church. Please send resumé to: Personnel Committee, P.O. Box 6686, Shepherdsville, KY 40165.

**WANTED:** Part-time music director. Contact: Personnel Committee, First Baptist Church, 548 West Short St., Lexington, KY 40507. Phone: (606) 252-4808.

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**SEEKING:** Liberty Baptist Church, Auburn, Ky., is seeking a minister of music. If interested, please send resumé and tape (if possible) to: Music Committee, c/o Nicholas S. Stamps, 86 Howlett Drive, Auburn, KY 42206.

**RETREAT:** Myrtle Beach Ocean View Retreat. Youth, seniors and musical groups (groups of up to 50). 307 1st Ave., Myrtle Beach, SC 29577. Leave message: (803) 626-7069.

**SEEKING:** Full-time secretary. Send resumé: Personnel Committee, Farmdale Baptist Church, 1238 Durrett Lane, Louisville, KY 40213-2080.

**SEEKING:** Crestwood Baptist Church in Crestwood, Ky., invites applications for the position of associate pastor. This full-time position will have primary responsibility for immediate followup with first-time visitors, invite and support small-group leaders, assimilate new members/attendees into small groups and provide preaching support for the senior pastor. Crestwood Baptist Church is a rapidly growing congregation with 760 in average weekly worship. Qualified applicants shall be an ordained Baptist minister, hold a seminary degree and have at least five years experience in ministry as a pastor or associate pastor. Submit resumé to: Associate Pastor Search Committee, Crestwood Baptist Church, P.O. Box 70, Crestwood, KY 40014.

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**RETREAT:** Glorieta Conference Center. Stay with family spring, summer, fall or winter. Call (800) 797-4222 to make reservations or for information.

## NATIONAL NOTES

■ **American Airlines grounds gay marketing plan.** After a year-long campaign to dissuade American Airlines from its aggressive support of homosexual organizations and activities, pro-family leaders announced March 23 the airline would back off its pro-homosexual marketing strategy. Groups charged the air carrier with traveling "a family unfriendly path," citing American's sponsorship of homosexual "pride" events, its financial support of homosexual advocacy groups and its "aggressive pursuit of the gay travel market."

■ **Christianity Today enters partnership.** Christianity Today Inc. has assumed operations of Virtue and Christian Parenting Today magazines from Cook Communications Ministries in an agreement reached by the two companies. Cook Communications is assuming licensing rights to some CTI magazine trademarks for development of book clubs that will be operated and owned by Cook. It also will now have access to CTI subscriber lists. Virtue, a Christian women's magazine, began 20 years ago. Christian Parenting Today started 10 years ago as a Christian publication for young families.

■ **Senate endorses Ten Commandments.** The U.S. Senate has passed a non-binding resolution backing the display of the Ten Commandments at public buildings. "The Ten Commandments are a declaration of fundamental principles that are the cornerstones of a fair and just society and the public display, including display in the Supreme Court, the Capitol building, the White House, and other government offices and courthouses across the nation, of the Ten Commandments should be permitted," the resolution reads in part.

■ **Groups seek school ban reversal.** Thirteen religious groups have asked the U.S. Supreme Court to reverse lower court rulings that have allowed a New York City school board to ban the use of school facilities for after-hours religious instruction and worship. The policy of the New York City Board of Education allows outside groups to use school buildings for various purposes, including the discussion of religious material. But it disallows "religious services or religious instruction on school premises."

■ **Pastors denounce education vouchers.** Terming public education America's "common denominator," a group of African-American pastors pledged last month to organize their communities to oppose vouchers for private schools. Members of People For the American Way's African-American Ministers Leadership Council held a press conference opposing a congressional proposal to create a voucher program in the District of Columbia.

■ **Red Sox ban beer for Good Friday opener.** Citing the desire for a "family atmosphere," the Boston Red Sox baseball team instituted a one-time "beer ban" because Opening Day game fell on Good Friday and the first night of Passover, April 10. The policy required heightened security, the Boston Herald reported, because police feared baseball fans would get intoxicated at nearby pubs and then try to enter Fenway Park for the game.

■ **Methodist clergy, laity ask out.** In the first sign of schism in the United Methodist Church over the issue of homosexuality, a group of 18 clergy and 25 laypeople who oppose gay rights in the church have asked to be allowed to separate from their regional body, the California-Nevada Annual Conference. "We are divided beyond reconciliation," the group said in an April 2 statement. They added that separation would allow both sides to pursue their interests without the "distraction and injury of an ongoing war of ideas."

■ **Movieguide winners: "Amistad," "Walker."** The CBS TV series "Walker, Texas Ranger" and DreamWorks Pictures' "Amistad" were the top winners of the Sixth Annual Movieguide Awards. The annual awards presentation of the Christian Film and Television Commission, held March 18, honors feature films and TV shows for their social and spiritual values. Both "Walker, Texas Ranger" and "Amistad" each won a \$25,000 Epiphany Prize.

## Churches 'critical' to stem child violence

By Mary Beth Christie  
Religion News Service

NEW YORK (RNS)—Churches and faith-based organizations must do more in ministering to children before they resort to violence or become victims of violence, speakers told a recent conference on at-risk youth.

"Much of what we're seeing is a result of spiritual disintegration in this country," Linda Lantieri of Resolving Conflict Creatively told more than 200 religious and community leaders, experts and journalists at a Columbia University conference, "Damaged Kids, Delinquent Reporting? Covering Children and Violence."

"Churches, synagogues and mosques have a critical role to play in creating a safety net of protection that kids need," said Lantieri, whose organization has taught 150,000 young people nationwide to non-violently mediate their differences.

The early April conference, although planned far in advance, occurred just two weeks after the slaying of four girls and a teacher in an Arkansas school yard. Two young boys, ages 13 and 11, are being held as suspects in the case. The incident hung heavy over the conference.

The goal of the Columbia event was to arm journalists with information on children's issues to stimulate more in-depth media coverage on young people, violence and the programs that might aid them.

Panelists examined an array of topics related to children including the role of brain development, home and neighborhood influences, the legal system, a critique of current media coverage and the state of faith-based outreach to at-risk youngsters.

James Garbarino, director of the Family Life Development Center and professor of human development and family studies at Cornell University, told the session that children are spiritual beings whose "core of caring must be nurtured as a real antidote to violence."

He said it is vital that faith-based organizations address issues of the human spirit in seeking to prevent violence.

But how many children and young people are being reached by churches, synagogues and other faith-based organizations is still uncertain.

John DiIulio Jr., director of the Jeremiah Project and professor of politics and public affairs at Princeton University, his Philadelphia-based organization soon will begin surveying programs in a number of cities to find answers to that question. Nevertheless, he said, even though religious organizations might reach only a small number of young people, they do minister to the hardest hit.

"It's these institutions, more than social service agencies, who are reaching probated juveniles, sons and daughters of persons who have been incarcerated, kids kicked out of

school, or those who don't have a single adult in their lives able to take care of them," said DiIulio.

Michael Eric Dyson, visiting professor of African-American Studies at Columbia University and author of books on Malcolm X, "gangsta rap" and race, cited poverty and economic inequality as the core factors contributing to violence in both America's inner cities and its rural, working class communities like Jonesboro.

"Events like those in Arkansas are not episodic," said Dyson, who is also a Baptist minister. "They are the result of a long-term environment of economic and social terror that eventually results in violence."

As part of his impassioned presentation at the conference, Dyson implored listeners to pay attention to the "violent narratives" of young rap singers, who are "searching for meaning."

Behind the words of the hip-hop sound, Dyson said, "is a plea for religious, faith-based salvation" and a "hunger for justice."

Joseph Edwards of Brooklyn, 20, one of several young people attending the conference, expressed support for faith-based outreach but questioned how religious groups can more effectively connect with today's youth.

"These organizations need to reach out to kids on a broad scale," said Edwards. "They need to advertise and broadcast what they're doing, so kids get that these (religious) ideas are cool. It's OK to be smart. It's OK to help others."

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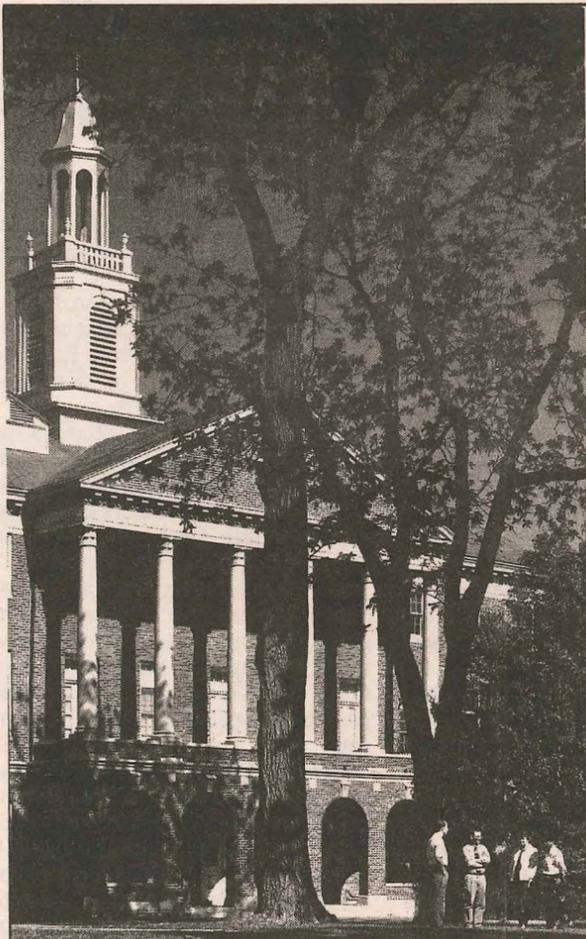
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### **Dobson continues drive for 'pro-family' Republican party**

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (RNS)—Religious broadcaster James Dobson, maintaining pressure on Republicans in Congress that he says have failed conservative Christian voters, has reiterated his threat to campaign against the GOP if it does not work harder to pass "a pro-moral and pro-family agenda."

Dobson's latest broadside against Republicans came in a letter mailed to about 2,300 people he said contacted him after his earlier criticisms of the GOP.

The Focus on the Family leader maintains conservative Christian voters have given Republicans their congressional majority, but that once in office the lawmakers all but abandoned such issues as abortion, school vouchers and middle-class tax relief that they campaigned on.

In recent weeks, Dobson has gone public with his criticism of Republican lawmakers and held several well-publicized meetings with GOP leaders in an effort to pressure them into supporting his issues.

In his letter, dated April 3, Dobson said it is time for the Republicans to "fish or cut bait."

Republicans "have to understand that we will abandon them if they continue to ignore the most important issues," Dobson said. "The threat must be real for us to have integrity, and I am determined to deliver on the promises to campaign against them if nothing changes."

Dobson also said he has no personal political ambitions and, contrary to some reports, will not leave Focus on the Family to start a third party.

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## Panel says legal neutrality hurts religious practice

WASHINGTON (ABP)—Religiously neutral laws, such as those dealing with zoning and bankruptcy, often interfere with religious practice, religious experts told a congressional committee March 26.

The legal specialists asked the House Subcommittee on the Constitution to create a new law giving special protections for religious practices in the face of general laws enforced by state and local governments.

"There is a trend in the interpretation of the religion clauses to treat religion like everything else," said Mark Chopko, general counsel of the United States Catholic Conference.

The subcommittee hearing was part of congressional efforts to bolster protections for religious practice after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the Religious Freedom Restoration Act unconstitutional.

Congress enacted the law in 1993. Under RFRA, governments could pass laws that restrict religious practice only if they could demonstrate a "compelling" reason to do so. That was the standard used in Supreme Court rulings until 1990, when the high court's decision in *Employment Division vs. Smith* made it easier for government to enact laws and policies that happen to burden religion.

Last summer's ruling by the high court that Congress lacked the authority to impose RFRA's protections for religion on state and local governments sent federal lawmakers back to the drawing board.

Members of the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion, a diverse collection of religious and civil-liberties groups formed originally to help

enact RFRA, want Congress to restore protections provided by the 1993 law. Such legislation could be enforced by Congress under its power to regulate commerce between states or the distribution of federal funds.

The seven members of the legal panel detailed examples of government actions that interfere with religion:

- Bankruptcy laws can force churches to turn over tithes that are contributed by members who later declare bankruptcy.

- Public school policies against the wearing of hats can prevent a Jewish boy from wearing a yarmulke.

- Zoning restrictions can prevent religious groups from meeting in certain neighborhoods.

- Prison officials and prosecutors can tape ritual "confessions" and other communications inmates might have with their priest or pastor.

Marc Stern, co-director of the American Jewish Congress, said Congress should put in place a mechanism that requires government officials to take a "second look" before enforcing general laws on religious practices.

"What is needed is a mechanism to force negotiations, to compel public officials to move beyond a mentality of 'this is the way we do things—we don't make exceptions,' and to force a recognition ... that not everything government regulates or undertakes is equally weighty or that there is only one way to do things," Stern said.

Panel members also said the Religious Freedom Amendment would not help religious groups, especially those from minority faiths, win exemptions from generally applied laws that restrict religious practice.

## Promise Keepers recalls previously laid-off staff

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (RNS)—Promise Keepers, the evangelical Christian men's ministry that has been plagued with financial problems, said last week it is recalling the furloughed national staff it laid off March 31.

"Promise Keepers can recall its staff around the United States because the body of Christ is responding," Promise Keepers founder and CEO Bill McCartney announced in a statement. "With large and small gifts, pledges and prayers, people who love Jesus have told us they want us to continue. ... We are deeply grateful."

More than 300 employees will be invited to return April 16, when the ministry will hold a special chapel service celebrating the event.

"I think that will be an ecstatic time," said Roger Chapman, a Promise Keepers spokesman. "The mood's pretty light."

Chapman said most of the 345 national staff members who learned of the layoffs Feb. 18 had not found new jobs. Nearly one-third of the staff had offered to work for the ministry as volunteers.

"We only had 19 people resign," Chapman said. "People were planning on staying ... as long as they could."

The economic crunch came after the ministry decided to no longer charge the usual \$60 fee to attend stadium conferences—thus, the ministry no longer received advanced registra-

tion money that would have provided a financial cushion. Promise Keepers officials hoped the strategy would attract more men—Christian and non-Christian—to events.

The lack of registration fees—which amounted to 72 percent of its income in 1996—forced Promise Keepers to rely solely on donations and prompted the layoffs.

McCartney said that although the immediate crisis appears to be over, ministry officials will continue to consult with Christian leaders on how to make Promise Keepers "financially secure."

"It's still too early to say the financial transition of this ministry is complete," McCartney said. "The current influx of donations has been enough to pay the bills, reinstate staff and prepare for the upcoming conference season."

About 100,000 men have registered for the 19 Promise Keepers conferences scheduled from May to October. In 1997, 630,000 attended 18 stadium events compared to a total of 1.1 million men at 22 events in 1996.

The quick turnaround is a sign of interest in the movement among certain segments of Christianity, said Mark Muesse, professor of religious studies at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tenn. "It seems to suggest that there's some significant support for the Promise Keepers among evangelicals."

## Summer inspiration

By Robert Dunston

Cumberland College will host its seventh annual pastor/staff and family conference, July 20-22. Each summer this program has proven to be a time of wonderful fellowship, inspiration and relaxation.

Steve Hussung, pastor of Rich Pond Baptist Church in Bowling Green, will be our keynote speaker. Hussung has preached and led Bible studies in churches across Kentucky and beyond. He has developed a reputation as a speaker who through humor and insight helps people understand the challenge and promise of the gospel in deeper ways.

I have been asked to lead the Bible study for the conference. The Book of Joshua, which is the mid-Winter Bible study book for 1999, will be the focus of our study. I look forward to offering ideas for applying this ancient book to today's church and world.

Bill Clark, minister of youth and children at Dry Ridge Baptist Church, will lead the music at this summer's conference. Clark will be assisted by his wife, Sherry. Both are Cumberland graduates, and you will be inspired by their

vocal and instrumental talents.

Steve Hadden, pastor of Crestwood Baptist Church, and his wife, Joy, will lead marriage enrichment seminars. Their expertise in this area combined with their commitment to Christ will certainly bless all who attend.

Available recreational activities include the use of Cumberland's indoor swimming pool, bowling alley, tennis courts and game room. Golf is available for an additional \$25 at a local course. Be sure to bring your clubs.

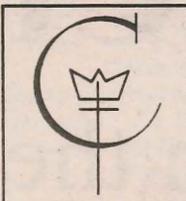
A full program is offered for the children while their parents attend the conference. Cumberland students who enjoy working with children will make their Cumberland stay a great one.

All this for only \$30 for one person or \$50 for a family. For additional information contact Wes Roy at (606) 539-4154 or by mail at Cumberland College, 7934 College Station Drive, Williamsburg, Ky. 40769.

We would love to have you here to worship, learn and fellowship with us.

Robert Dunston is chairman of the religion department at Cumberland College, 6000 College Station Dr., Williamsburg, Ky. 40769

CUMBERLAND COLLEGE



## Labels of Love

The Women's Auxiliary of Spring Meadows Children's Home in Louisville and the KBHC Women's Advisory Board need your help in collecting labels from Campbell's products to be redeemed for a much-needed van!

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## Hugs minister to family when words fail

PADUCAH(BP)—Shortly after the shootings at Heath High School last year, Pastor Tim Percy was at the hospital trying to comfort the parents of slain Kayce Steger.

The shooting by a fellow student into a student prayer group killed three people and injured five others Dec. 1, 1997.

As pastor of 12th Street Baptist Church, Percy was forced to minister in a setting in which his gift for words had no power.

"Nothing but tears and hugs. No words, not a single word," Percy said recently.

And those hugs and tears were exactly what were needed, said Sabrina Steger, Kayce's mother.

"Seeing Brother Tim on his knees, crying ... knowing that he was so emotionally involved, that he cared so much was comforting," she said.

On the way to the hospital, Percy thought of what the family must be feeling. He thought of his children and his wife and how it would feel to lose them. Deep inside, he knew he had never experienced what the families were going through and had no words to offer them.

But a time for words came a few days later at a joint funeral for the three girls before 2,200 people at Bi-

ble Baptist Church in Paducah and an international television audience. But words still were difficult to find.

"I had no idea what I was going to say," Percy recalled. "I felt unworthy to open my mouth to speak of the great witness of the girls."



Percy

At first the pastors and parents considered banning cameras from the service.

The prospect of a worldwide witness for Christ convinced the group to allow cameras at the service, including a live feed on CNN.

But that prospect continued Percy's struggle for the appropriate words. He said he didn't want the media to make Christians

look like fools, and he didn't want to waste this opportunity to address such a large audience. He turned to a trusted friend, Paul Washer.

"Paul told me '(At this time) God doesn't care about anybody watching TV or in the audience like he cares about the parents. He called you to speak to them. Bring them comfort,'" Percy said.

At the funeral the words came. Words of remembrance: "What she (Kayce) wanted for Christmas was a lighted cross on their front lawn ... because she understood 1 Corinthians 1:18, 'For the message of the cross is

foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God."

Words of comfort: "If we are to find comfort during this time we must go to the true source of comfort."

Words of encouragement and hope: "I can say with all confidence that nothing, nothing can separate your Kayce from the love of God."

Words of honor: "They are in the very throne room of God. The word of God does not say this about any other group of believers except those whose lives were lost because of their faith in Jesus Christ."

After the other pastors had spoken on behalf of the two other slain students, Jessica James and Nicole Hadley, an invitation to receive Christ was given and about 50 people responded.

Percy says letters and calls still come in from people who were affected by the girls' testimony.

The prayer group that had been targeted has grown from about 30 to more than 100 at a school of about 300, Mrs Kayce said.

"We have to keep it going," she said. "We can't let it stop."

The Stegers wrote an open letter to the community to help make some sense of their daughter's death. The letter, which was used in a news broadcast on local television, concluded by saying, "Kayce, Jessica and Nicole died with love in their hearts and prayers on their lips. The least we can do is live with love in our hearts and prayers on our lips."

## Percy's own tragedy prepared him to minister after shooting

Continued from page 1

joyous reunion someday, but only if you give your life to Christ."

People draw a connection between Percy's experience and the Paducah tragedy, in which three students were killed and five wounded.

Percy was one of three pastors to preach the funeral for the slain teens.

"Because Tim was shot, he understands some of the emotions better," said Sabrina Steger, mother of Kayce Steger, one of the slain girls. "It's one thing to talk about it. It's another thing to go through it."

At first, Percy downplayed any connection. "I didn't go through anything compared to the Stegers," Percy said. "I didn't lose a child."

But when pressed further, he did acknowledge one cross-application. "A week after I was shot, I was saying all the right words of forgiveness," Percy recalls. "Two and a half years later, I realized I didn't have a clue what forgiveness was."

As the media focused on the forgiving attitude of the families involved, Percy communicated to the Stegers the lesson God had taught him just a year earlier.

"I told her (Mrs. Steger) that it sounds good to say 'Praise the Lord,' but it's not that easy. There will be days when you can forgive and days when you can't. People talking about forgiveness didn't spend Christmas at the cemetery."

Said Mrs. Steger: "He helped me understand that it's OK not to forgive after a day or two ... not to feel forgiveness immediately."

When pressed even further, Percy did admit that his experience helped him in other ways.

"I was given undue favor. People thought, 'You've been through this.' I really hadn't but I was given a hearing," he said. "The experience also made me more compassionate. It was very humbling and made me think lower of people—including myself—and higher of God."



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Pastor/Contact: Dr. Kevin Ezell, (502) 239-7711

Date/Time: Thursday, April 23, 1998, 1:00 p.m.

For additional locations, times, and information on FAITH, please call the Pastor/Staff Leadership Department of The Sunday School Board: 615-251-2055

## The power of teamwork

Recently, Cedarmore was alive with eight groups and about 200 guests, including about 60 people there as part of work groups. What a blessing we experienced.

The weather turned out warm and very windy, but the warm temperatures were perfect for outdoor work and activities.

Work groups from Sandy Springs Church and Shelbyville First got lots of work done that we couldn't have accomplished with our staff. There were youth and adults working everywhere you looked.

Over the weekend our conference buildings began to get a much-needed and long-overdue coat of stain. The planters around the buildings were all cleaned out and prepared for new plants.

Three huge fallen trees became logs for our fireplaces and campfires. Every old bench on the grounds got a new coat of fresh, green paint. And yes, many leaves were raked, with the wind of course.

I was reminded once again that much can be accomplished with teamwork. I want to extend a word of thanks to Sandy Springs and Shelbyville First for their willingness to give of their time to make Cedarmore a better place.

When our last group of guests left Sunday afternoon, I was elated with the progress made.

As always, I must remind myself and all who come that we are only beginning to make progress, and there are years of hard work ahead as we seek to become the premier camp, conference and retreat centers in this part of the United States.

I am overwhelmed most every week as I experience God at work among us. Your prayers and support are such a source of encouragement as we labor in Christ.

If you need information on how you can come stay, play or work with us, call. The excitement about Cedarmore and Jonathan Creek is spreading everywhere I

go. Kentucky Baptists, let's press on together in this partnership with God as our conference centers move into the next millennium.

A week ago we broke ground on a new facility at Jonathan Creek, and now you know what's going on at Cedarmore. But don't take my word for it, come see for yourself.

### KENTUCKY BAPTIST ASSEMBLIES



Rusty Ellison

Rusty Ellison is president of Kentucky Baptist Assemblies, Box 37, Bagdad, Ky. 40003. Call (502) 747-8911.

## PRAYER PARTNERS

Pray for these specific needs related to Kentucky Baptist partnerships with Russia and New England:

■ A Kentucky construction, evangelism and medical partnership team preparing to go to Dmitrov Baptist Church in Russia in May.

■ The hundreds of Russians who will hear the gospel as a result of Kentuckians on partnership missions in the coming months.

■ Larry and Joy Lindsey, who returned to Moscow from furlough in the States in mid-March to their assignment as partnership coordinators.

■ The directors of missions in the seven associations of the Baptist Convention of New England.

## Mountains to the Mississippi

Compiled by Ann Tatum

■ **ALEXANDRIA**—Main Street Church called **Troy Dobbs** as pastor. He began his new ministry March 29.

■ **BENTON**—**Roy Gibson** resigned as interim pastor at First Missionary Church, due to health reasons.

■ **CADIZ**—Cadiz Church ordained **Bradley Cornelius** to the gospel ministry April 5.

■ **CRESTWOOD**—Harrods Creek Church recently called **Harold Barnes** as interim pastor.

**Tommy Purvis** celebrated his one-year anniversary as pastor at Ballardsville Church April 1.

■ **HENDERSON**—Immanuel Temple called **Glenn Riggs** of Evansville, Ind., as minister to students. He began his new ministry April 12.

■ **LEXINGTON**—Ashland Avenue Church called **Russell Howard** as

pastor. Howard previously was associate pastor of church administration at First Church in Ocala, Fla. He began his new ministry April 12.

■ **LOUISVILLE**—First Church of Jeffersonton will hold a spring revival April 26-30: Sunday, 7:45 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.; Monday-Thursday, 7:20 p.m. Guest evangelist is **William Sheals**, pastor of Hopewell Church in Norcross, Ga. **Thurmond Coleman Sr.** is pastor. For more information, call (502) 267-6131.

■ **MURRAY**—**R.J. Burpoe** recently retired as pastor at Ledbetter Church. Burpoe is available for supply or interim positions. He can be reached at (502) 753-7626.

Salem Church will celebrate its 150th anniversary April 19. For information, call Pastor **John Sheppard** at (502) 435-4573.



**HARD WORK** Lu Moore of Auburn puts the first coat of new paint on the walls of the administration building at Glen Dale Children's Home in Glendale. Volunteers from throughout the state recently converged on Glen Dale and Spring Meadows Home in Louisville, helping Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children save several thousands of dollars in repair work, said Bob Coons, Glen Dale's campus administrator.

## CBS to unleash shock jock Howard Stern on late-night television

NEW YORK (BP)—CBS, the "Welcome Home" network, is about to bring someone into homes that parents might not appreciate.

The network recently announced that shock jock Howard Stern will begin a show this summer to compete with the late-night NBC show "Saturday Night Live."

The April 1 announcement by CBS prompted Morality in Media's president, Robert Peters, to declare the network's embrace of Stern "a slap in the face of the large majority

of Americans who are already fed up with the glut of vulgar sex talk, cursing, profanity and incivility on broadcast TV."

Stern's radio show has been the target of a two-year national campaign led by the American Family Association's Michigan chapter to persuade advertisers to drop Stern's show. A similar campaign is expected to be launched targeting Stern's advertisers on CBS.

Letters of concern have been written to more than 2,400 advertis-

ers on Stern's radio program—with just over 2,000, or 84 percent, responding by canceling their ads, according to Bill Johnson, AFA's Michigan director.

The campaign's success has prompted Stern to lambaste the AFA on more than one occasion. "I will take your money. I will bankrupt you," he said on one broadcast.

"And I will sue not only the organization, I'll sue the individuals who run the organization," he said. "I'll take their homes. And then they won't

be part of the American Family Association, they'll be part of the American homeless association."

CBS said the Saturday night show will add to Stern's "enormously successful radio, publishing, movie, pay-per-view and cable portfolio."

"We'll have sex and nudity and lesbians," Stern, 44, said at his April 1 news conference in New York.

"Standards (on TV) have gone down to an all-time low," Stern said, "and I'm here to represent it. It's a miracle; I prayed to God for this."

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of*  
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Questions? Call 606-847-4111.



## Remembering the vision

It was 75 years ago this spring that L.C. Kelly took a walk down the L&N railroad track to Clear Creek valley. As he paused on a knoll above the valley, the area came to life before him. He saw buildings, heard choirs and congregations singing, and saw preachers being taught the word of God.

He thought, "Surely God has something more in store for this beautiful valley than a corn field." A Scripture flashed into his mind, "A great and effectual door is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" (2 Corinthians 16:9). Kelly pondered his vision overnight and the next day returned for a second walk. This time he went into the valley and walked beside the creek and through the Davis

homestead. God confirmed the vision and Kelly worked to establish an assembly grounds to inspire and motivate believers and a training center for preachers.

On April 4 we remembered Kelly's historic walk with a celebration at First Church, Pineville. Church members, students, staff, faculty and alumni gathered to celebrate and hear an account of Clear Creek's beginning. I portrayed Kelly in a dramatic monologue. My

appreciation for his life and ministry deepened as I researched and wrote the presentation. Afterwards about 50 people retraced Kelly's steps into the valley.

Three days later I visited with Kelly's daughter, Lucile McAtee, in Madison, Ind. She came to Pineville as a child and was baptized and married at First Church in the beautiful gothic sanctuary

which burned in 1957. In her den is a photo of her father in cap and gown when he graduated from Georgetown College. McAtee remembers a summer when the scheduled English teacher didn't come to Clear Creek. At the time, McAtee was a senior English student at Georgetown, and her father let her teach.

Much has changed since 1923, but the need for trained church leaders remains.

God gave a vision to one man. We are heirs of his faithful work. Kelly's last words to the trustees when he retired remain relevant, "May you have ears to hear, eyes to see, hearts to understand and the will to ever be true to this heavenly vision."

Bill Whittaker is president of Clear Creek Baptist Bible College, Pineville, Ky. 40977

### CLEAR CREEK CHRONICLE



Bill Whittaker

## 'Miss Alma' still urging missions support, involvement

By Kay Moore  
Woman's Missionary Union

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)—The line of admirers waiting to hug, touch and retrace history with the animated octogenarian snakes around the giant auditorium.

Alma Hunt responds to each well-wisher as though he or she was the only person she ever knew intimately in her vast career that took her to 93 countries and spanned almost nine decades of teaching, writing and administering.

Affixing a giant kiss on the cheek on most everyone she greets—male or female—Hunt, known affectionately to most as "Miss Alma," turns aside to a photographer and explains, "At this stage of life, I can kiss 'em all!"

The same wit, incessant zest for living and unquenchable interest in people that distinguished Hunt's 26 years at the helm of Southern Baptist's Woman's Missionary Union remain her trademarks in her retirement years—or in her case, the 24 years since she's worked full time.

On March 10, Hunt was honored by the Virginia Missions Offering Committee, when it voted unanimous-

ly to name the annual state offering the "Alma Hunt Offering for Virginia Missions." Hunt is a native of Roanoke, Va., and has spent the last 13 years of her retirement years there.

However, retirement is hardly a word that applies to Hunt, and she shows little inclination of slowing down. In a recent prayer before Southern Baptist International Mission Board retirees at a ceremony where she received honorary emeritus missionary status, Hunt, 88, prayed, "Lord, invigorate us to do what we can at this stage of life."

Afterwards with a childlike twinkle in her eye, she said, "The people I feel sorry for when I wake each morning are those who can't figure out what to do that day. The days are simply not long enough for me."

Another Hunt maxim she volunteers is: "Any day can be better when I can laugh at myself."

Born to Christian parents in Roanoke, Hunt developed an early passion for learning and teaching, which took her first to the public school classroom, then to obtain a master's degree from Columbia University and to be dean of women at William Jewell College in Missouri.

Her pilgrimage didn't end in academia. Her years of working with Young Woman's Auxiliary weeks at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center and her zeal for supporting missions in 1948 attracted the notice of a committee seeking a new executive secretary for WMU.

Hunt's years at the helm saw WMU grow to more than 1.5 million women and young women, as she used her people skills to get others excited about missions. She began magazines to let members know about missionaries' work and made countless encouragement visits to missions fields around the world.

Hunt's travels were far from over after her retirement from WMU in 1974. The IMB asked her to be a consultant for women's work from 1975-78. She also was an officer with the Baptist World Alliance. The sprightly Hunt recorded 44 international assignments after she reached age 65.

Hunt has speaking engagements booked a year away, although she teases those who sign her for future engagements that they are "true optimists" for scheduling her long-range.

Hunt says she's still blessed with excellent health, with only a touch of

arthritis that she says keeps her from springing rapidly up from her chair. A twice-weekly session with a physical therapist in water aerobics helps keep her agile—and trim.

Hunt, whose name "Alma" appropriately means "soul" in Spanish, says her years since full-time employment "have been a glorious period for me. I attribute the state of my health to the fact that I continue to prepare for speeches and travel. These things give purpose to my life."

Mindful of the many baby boomers nearing retirement, Hunt believes the untapped potential among older women is vast. "Even if you don't have the physical strength, there are ways you can encourage—by phone or by writing notes," she explains. "Retirees who are lonely are largely responsible for their loneliness, because through the church and the Christian family are opportunities for all of us to have a vital part in the ongoing of the kingdom."

Hunt advises that the secret of enjoying advancing age is to be useful: "I know of no purpose as fulfilling as feeling yourself used for what you believe to be the plan God created for you to follow."



**"The people I feel sorry for when I wake each morning are those who can't figure out what to do that day."**

*Alma Hunt, former Woman's Missionary Union executive secretary*

## Play combines Baptist storytelling with cartoonist's humor

By Kathi Wolfe  
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—His church is too small and his flock has the attention span of a fruit fly.

He ministers to a town so backward even the Episcopalians handle snakes, while Veranda, the town's southern belle who's competing in a beauty pageant, wants him to pray that God will smite her enemies' thighs with cellulite.

The beleaguered clergyman is Will B. Dunn, preacher and spiritual counselor to the residents of the fictional southern town of Bypass.

Preacher Dunn, and his endearing and exasperating comic strip congregation, are the creation of cartoonist Doug Marlette. His strip, "Kudzu," appears in about 300 newspapers across the country.

Now, however, audiences can watch the reverend cope with his trials and tribulations on stage in "Kudzu: A Southern Musical," which had its world premiere at Ford's Theatre—one of Washington, D.C.'s, top tourist spots—in March. It is scheduled to run there through June.

Though set in the South, Bypass could be any American small town—it's Garrison Kellior's "Lake Wobegon" smothered in barbecue sauce or Grover's Corner (Thornton Wilder's "Our Town") knee-deep in gospel music.

In addition to preacher Dunn, the town's cast of characters include Big Bubba Tadsworth, the town's greedy mill mogul; Kudzu Dubose, the 18-year-old who wants to leave town and become a writer; Kudzu's Uncle Dub, who runs the hamlet's filling station; Momma, Kudzu's overbearing mother; and Veranda Tadsworth, the teenage beauty queen.

Like most small towns, Bypass has



**KUDZU** With lead character Will B. Dunn (center) "Kudzu: A Southern Musical," recently had its world premiere at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C. It is scheduled to run there through June. (RNS photo)

its conflicts: Big Bubba wants to make big bucks by selling Uncle Dub's filling station—and the land under it—to the Japanese. Uncle Dub doesn't want to sell. In addition, there is Veranda's refusal to return Kudzu's affection while Kudzu, the wannabe writer, is stuck working for his Uncle Dub.

Because he is the preacher, Dunn is a key figure in the life of Bypass.

"Will B. Dunn knows everything about folks in the town," Marlette said. "He's there for them from when they're in diapers to when they get married to when they die."

But like many clergy, Dunn himself is not immune to conflicts.

For example, if he persuades Uncle Dub to sell his land, Big Bubba will build him a big church and arrange for him to be a televangelist. But this requires performing an exorcism on Dub's dog. This is hard for the reverend, said Tim Hodgin, who plays

the preacher. "Will B. Dunn likes both Dub and his dog."

There's an internal struggle going on within Dunn, Hodgin said. "Bubba paints glorious pictures of this great big church and TV ministry. Dunn thinks, 'I'll do anything to get that!' But at the same time, he feels it would be good for the town to grow. Not just for himself but for everybody there."

Hodgin loves the character. "Like every human being, he combines striving for something higher than himself with being greedy," he said. "The things he says and does are so silly; but there's meat to the character."

Marlette, 48, the Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist, said his inspiration for "Kudzu" comes from the small Mississippi towns where he grew up.

Though Marlette grew up as a "military brat" moving from town to town, his family had worked in mill

towns for generations.

"In my genetic memory, I knew what it was like to be under the thumb of the mill owners," he said of the creation of Big Bubba.

"I (also) grew up going to the Baptist church—for Sunday school, for services, for Wednesday night prayer meeting. So I knew what preachers were like," he said.

What proved most helpful to him in creating the strip, Marlette said, was that "the Baptists really knew how to tell stories. Compelling stories. Not just the Jesus Christ event, but the miracle stories, the parables and the Old Testament stories."

This is one reason, he said, readers enjoy the strip, particularly Will B. Dunn. "The preacher keeps your attention by telling stories. Your eyes would glaze over if he talked in rhetoric," he added.

Clergy—from Baptists ministers to Catholic priests to Jewish rabbis—have formed a cult following around "Kudzu." Marlette believes the reason for this is because "Will B. Dunn's funkier than most ministers. Like most clergy, he wants to be perfect. But, as is the case with clergy, he's a human being. He can't be perfect. Clergy identify with that."

What Marlette likes best about Dunn is that he doesn't fit neatly into any theological category. The reverend isn't an ultra-conservative or a politically correct liberal. The preacher wants to be faithful to the gospel, while keeping the Bible relevant.

For example, in the play Dunn asserts, "The holy Scriptures are as relevant today as they were 2,000 years ago. But people have the attention span of a fruit fly! You gotta' hit 'em where they live—dysfunctional families in paradise! Lot salts driveway with wife! That's hot! Get it? Tabloid gospel!"

**"Baptists really knew how to tell stories. Compelling stories. Not just the Jesus Christ event, but the miracle stories, the parables and the Old Testament stories."**

*Cartoonist Doug Marlette*

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