

WESTERN RECORDER

PRACTICAL RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING

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FOR THE RECORD

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Notice
The Western Recorder will not publish a paper next week.

Smithwick: Outcry after lesbian's firing a wake-up call

By David Winfrey
News Director

The controversy from Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children's firing of a homosexual staff member is a wake-up call for Christians to be ready to respond when their beliefs clash with culture, KBHC President Bill Smithwick said last week.

"If we continue to hold our basic Judeo-Christian values, we're going to find ourselves more and more at divergent views with our secular society," Smithwick told members of the Kentucky Baptist Convention Executive Board Dec. 14. "We all better wake up to these issues."

In Smithwick's report to the board, he addressed both the recent firing of a lesbian employee as well as questions he said have been raised about the agency's use of state tax dollars. Tax dollars are a significant source of money to the agency, he said, but they are expendable if they ever interfere with KBHC's Christian mission.

This fall, Alicia Pedreira told Louisville media she was fired from Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children as an art therapist and supervisor because she is a lesbian. Pedreira also said she told the person who hired her that she is a lesbian. That person, who has since resigned, told her it would be OK as long as she didn't talk about her lifestyle at work, according to a story in the *See Smithwick: Outcry ..., page 3*

Teaching kids Christmas? Be concrete

By Marv Knox
Texas Baptist Standard

DALLAS (ABP)—Direct, hands-on activities can help children celebrate the true meaning of Christmas, say several experts in ministry to children.

Parents, grandparents and friends can help children comprehend Christmas by allowing them to participate in celebrations, they said. And children learn best from simple celebrations, they added.

While adults revel in the rich symbolism of Christmas, children need concrete images and involvement, said Tommy Sanders, manager of preschool biblical studies for LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"The key thing is to make Christmas something children can understand and relate to," Sanders said.

"Sometimes symbols are good for adults, but children don't make the transition," he said. "You've got to bring those strong Christmas traditions down to children's level."

Another way children learn about Christmas is by watching adults, especially parents, celebrate Jesus' birth, added Diane Lane, minister of childhood education at First Baptist Church of Oak Cliff in Dallas.

"The parents' focus is going to come out in everything they do at Christmastime," Lane said. "Hopefully, that focus is on Jesus Christ and making sure the children know Christ is the center of their celebration."

Churches, naturally, support fami-

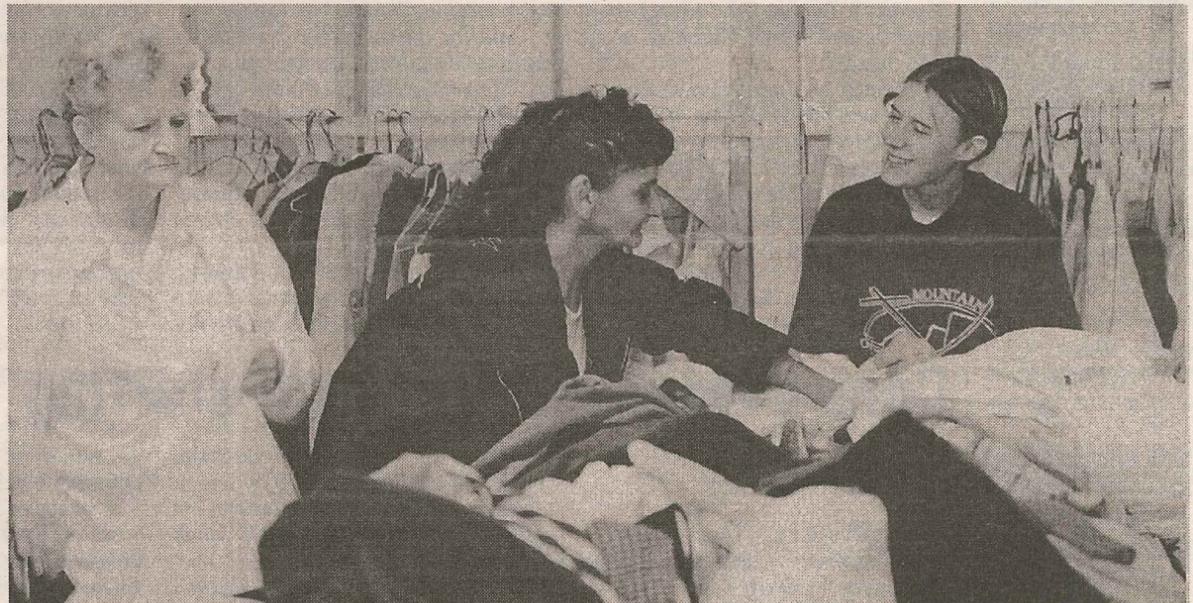
ly traditions by celebrating Advent, the four-week period of preparation leading up to Christmas day, said Hazel Morris, associate professor of childhood education at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Churches and families should be partners in making Christmas meaningful for children, she said.

The ministers suggested a variety of traditions and activities to make Christmas meaningful for children. They include:

■ **Using an Advent wreath or Advent calendar.** Children enjoy the soft glow of candles on an Advent wreath, as well as praying and singing during family worship time, Morris said.

While many Christians light *See Hands-on activities ..., page 7*



MOUNTAIN OUTREACH Cumberland College student Julie Hoover, right, talks with Sarah Dychus during the annual Christmas giveaway event of the school's Mountain Outreach program. More than 450 families received toys, medical supplies, household items and clothing Dec. 5 in Williamsburg. That was a 10 percent increase from last year. "The giveaway was a tremendous success, and there were lots of people who needed extra help and we were able to deliver, just in time for Christmas," said William Jones, director of Mountain Outreach. (Cumberland College photo by Rebecca Webster)

Kentuckian let dream of being a musician go; God gave it back

By Rich Copley
Lexington Herald-Leader

RIVERTON, Wyo.—On paper, it looks as if Lexington native Layton Howerton was destined for a career in contemporary Christian music.

At an early age, he acquired an unwavering faith in God from his parents, who traveled to start Southern Baptist churches. At 11, when his father bought him a pawnshop guitar, Howerton also found he had a gift for writing songs.

What's more, he was miraculously cured of leukemia.

Shortly after he was born at Central Baptist Hospital in Lexington in May 1957, his parents moved to West Virginia. At 11 months old, he was diagnosed with leukemia, setting off a daily prayer vigil. When Howerton returned for further tests, the doctors were amazed to find he was fine.

That sounds like a reason to sing praises. Howerton, however, wasn't interested in Christian music early in

his career.

"I could have made a choice to do that," he said. "But my gift was toward mainstream music. I grew up loving great songwriters like Tom T. Hall, Tom Waits, James Taylor and John Hiatt. I loved that music and I wanted to emulate it."

After graduating from high school in Louisville in 1975, he hit the road, first going to California with a bluegrass rock band and eventually making forays into the Nashville scene.

Several times, it looked as if things were coming together. A record company or publisher would be very interested in Howerton's work, but before any papers were signed, something would fall through.

Someone, it seemed, had other plans for Howerton.

After several years of moving between Louisville and Nashville, Howerton took up residence in Music City one last time and became heavily involved with a church. Slowly, the music seemed to matter less and less.

"My love for teaching the word began to refocus my life," Howerton said.

He and his wife decided God was calling them to follow in Howerton's parents' footsteps and become church planters — people who travel, starting churches. So, they packed up their five children and moved to Wyoming, where they hooked up with an established but struggling church.

Searching for a better way to communicate God's word, Howerton picked up an old Martin guitar and started playing in the empty Hillcrest Baptist Church sanctuary in Riverton, Wyo. The songs he wrote became the basis for Sunday morning sermons.

Word got back to Nashville that Howerton was writing again.

BMG Publishing contacted him and signed him to a publishing deal. Then, Sparrow Records signed him to a recording contract. There were no last-minute hitches either time.

All this happened with the blessing of the now revived Hillcrest Bap-

tist congregation, which has grown from 35 to more than 250 under Howerton's leadership. The church now considers him a missionary.

Howerton has been taking to the field to support his debut album, "Boxing God." The title refers to something Howerton said he did for most of his life.

"I came to a point where I had to say, 'God is not going to let me achieve what I want because that's not in harmony with what he intends me to do,'" he said. "But through all those years in mainstream music, he was developing me to do his work."

He still lives in Riverton and has no plans to move. But he loves to get back to the Bluegrass and often wears a reminder of his old Kentucky home.

"People are always telling me, 'You need to get rid of that University of Kentucky cap and get a Wyoming hat,'" Howerton said. "It'll never happen."

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Moving? See page 4 (1222)

BAPTIST BITS

■ New Orleans Baptist

Theological Seminary recently elected Ken Weathersby to be associate professor of church planting. He is the first African-American to be appointed to the school's full-time faculty.

■ Jennifer Davis Rash

recently was named news editor of the Alabama Baptist newspaper by Editor Bob Terry.

■ Two Southern Baptist

agencies, the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board, signed an agreement expanding the World Changers mission program. The agreement gives IMB responsibilities for conducting International World Changers projects in association with NAMB. World Changers is a pre-packaged mission trip opportunity provided by NAMB for churches in which volunteers rehabilitate substandard housing.

■ New Orleans Baptist

Theological Seminary has expanded its missionary-in-residence program to offer discounted tuition in addition to free housing for furloughing missionaries of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board.

Writer: Women led early church, Baptists

By Bob Allen
Associated Baptist Press

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP)—Women were leaders in the early church but later were "excised" to make institutional Christianity credible in a male-dominated culture, says a female Baptist seminary professor in a recent article.

Linda McKinnish Bridges, professor of New Testament and Greek at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, describes a "Lydia phase" in the New Testament era, named after the woman who according to the book of Acts was the first convert in Europe and a leader of the house-church movement in Philippi.

The trend has repeated itself in church history, including among Baptists in the United States, Bridges contends in the lead article for the recently released summer 1998 issue of *Review and Expositor*, a scholarly theological journal supported by a consortium of moderate Baptist schools.

Bridges cites the case of Martha Stearns, a Baptist who preached in Virginia and North Carolina in the 18th century.

Stearns worked alongside her brother and others to form in 1755 the Sandy Creek church in what is now Randolph County, N.C. The church "formed the center of Baptist life in North Carolina and later the entire Southern Baptist Convention," Bridges says.

The Southern Baptist Convention carried on the revivalism, uninhibited

worship style and emotional conversions associated with what historians alternately call the "Separate Baptist" or "Sandy Creek" tradition, Bridges says. But by 1845, when the convention was established, its founders were "determined to organize a convention without the presence and influence of women."

"The church intentionally excised women's leadership from religious life in order to be culturally relevant; now the church must welcome her daughters home in order to be spiritually effective," Bridges writes.

Martha Stearns was "one of many active women leaders" of colonial Baptist life, Bridges says. Like some other Baptist forebears, Stearns was jailed in Virginia for refusing to stop preaching the gospel, though she was three months pregnant at the time.

Despite such early influence, Bridges says, no women were present at the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention. Women were not allowed to vote at the annual meeting until 1918. They were relegated largely to working behind the scenes.

But for once, culture is changing in favor of women, Bridges says.

"The church of the future will be much like the early church of the past," she writes. "Just as women contributed much to this environment in the first century, women, likewise, will be the future leaders of the church in the next century."

Bridges states the future church will need leaders who know how to encourage participation, who are not

afraid to share power and information and know how to enhance the self-worth of others and energize people.

Another article in the issue of the journal studies experiences of women who were involved in doctoral studies at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary between 1982 and 1992.

The article, by Oregon State University professor Susan Shaw and Montreat College professor Tisa Lewis, describes the decade as a "Camelot" era when the seminary became more open to women than ever before.

But despite those intentions, women recall a "chilly" campus climate in which they were made to feel out of place in a male-dominated structure and because of controversy over women's roles in the Southern Baptist Convention.

While describing overall positive feelings about the seminary, women in the study reported sexual harassment, differential treatment in the classroom because of gender, an "old boy" culture, a lack of women in curriculum or on faculty and ignorance of women's issues on the part of professors while they were at Southern.

While participants in the study lamented that the seminary they attended "does not exist anymore" after a new conservative president reversed the trend toward encouraging women in ministry, they also criticized new moderate ventures, including the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which, they said, are still largely directed by white males.

Controversy splits church-starting 'Friends'

By Bob Allen
Associated Baptist Press

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (ABP)—Church splits have long been a fact of life among Southern Baptists.

During the past four years, moderate Baptists who have formed new congregations rather than stay unhappy in fundamentalist-dominated churches have found support and encouragement from an organization called Friends of New Churches.

Now, leaders of the Knoxville, Tenn.-based network have had their own parting of ways over differences concerning leadership of the organization's executive director, Will Carter. At a called meeting Dec. 3, Friends

of New Churches' board of directors voted 6-5 against a motion by its executive committee to fire Carter, first executive director of the group which formed in January 1995.

In response, five of the 14 board members, including most of the officers, indicated they will resign, along with staff member Susan Burgess Parish, who quit her job as resource coordinator effective Dec. 10.

The five minority members of the board issued a statement after the meeting reporting they had supported a motion calling for "a change in the present leadership" of Friends of New Churches.

Five other past board members and the organization's former attorney added their signatures to the statement, which charges Carter with "ineffective execution" of the duties of his office and "a pattern of failure to respond to directives of the board."

Sources interviewed for background said several board members have almost from the start believed the organization was spending too much money on administration and travel and not enough on helping churches.

Carter told Associated Baptist Press he viewed the dispute as a "difference of philosophy and procedure."

"I regret that it happened," he said.

Carter denied he ignored board directives. "I responded to those that I was responsible to—the chairperson or the executive committee," he said. "Sometimes we delayed things. I never did delay or not do something with-

out either the chair or the executive committee being aware of that."

Friends of New Churches is a network of about 100 "free and faithful" congregations, most of which are affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. It was started in 1995 to "birth" new Fellowship-friendly churches but in practice has become a resource to network support and encourage existing new churches rather than starting them from scratch.

The organization offers retreats for training and fellowship and limited financial assistance to new churches, along with serving as a clearinghouse for other resources, such as sharing used furniture.

According to its October 1998 newsletter, Friends of New Churches currently has \$86,000 budgeted for direct grants ranging from \$2,400 to \$4,800 to help new churches with rent, salary or medical insurance.

Board Chairman Ray Graves, who came on the board three years ago, said "there were some real differences and divisions right from the start."

While the minority members advocated spending more money on grants for new churches, the majority believed it is time to move to "a second stage" of adding field resource persons in areas where new churches are being born, he said.

Carter said he was aware of differences of opinion on the board, but he had not read it as "extreme opposition" to his leadership. "I never felt it was of this caliber," he said.

Air strikes test SBC chaplains & missionaries

WASHINGTON (BP)—At the outset of military strikes against Iraq on Dec. 16, Southern Baptist Convention chaplains were alongside U.S. troops while Southern Baptist missionaries in the Middle East were in prayer and taking precautions.

The military action against Iraq is being led by the United States with British assistance. It began with more than 200 Tomahawk missiles fired from U.S. Navy ships in the Persian Gulf.

Robert Vickers, director of chaplaincy for the SBC North American Mission Board, said a number of Southern Baptist military chaplains are in the Persian Gulf. Others are being deployed with the units they serve or waiting to learn if their units will be sent to the gulf.

"Wherever the soldiers go, the chaplains go," Vickers said. Southern Baptists account for 1,000 military chaplains, 400 of whom are on active duty, he said.

Vickers encouraged prayer for the safety, courage and strength of the chaplains and the soldiers they serve in the midst of a combat situation.

Missionaries in the Middle East, meanwhile, are asking Southern Baptists to pray for a quick end to the conflict so God's work will not be hindered, said Gerry Volkart, associate director for the SBC International Mission Board's work in the region.

"We'd ask people to pray things would be settled quickly so missionaries can get on with the work they are there to do," she said. "We'd ask people to pray that innocent lives would be protected."

"Missionaries also realize that the time before Ramadan is a crucial time when Muslims seek God and missionaries have opportunities to share the gospel," she added. "It would be very positive if the conflict would be settled so people can participate in Ramadan."

Volkart noted that Southern Baptists who work in the Middle East, like missionaries in many parts of the world, have a plan for evacuating in case of emergency. So far, however, none have felt the need to implement those plans.

The only immediate consequence for ministries from the missile attacks on Iraq was that a language school in the region was closed because most of the students are internationals, many of them from the West.

Southern Baptist workers in Israel, like the rest of that country's population, broke out gas masks they keep on hand for a crisis that might include missile attacks. Southern Baptists have no workers on the ground in Iraq, Volkart said.



Executive Board fills posts, distributes year-end money

By David Winfrey
News Director

The Kentucky Baptist Convention's Executive Board filled five staff positions during its December meeting, including roles involving leadership development, college ministries and evangelism.

The board's business and finance committee also approved distributing more than \$1.8 million in year-end surplus funds during the board's meeting Dec. 14-15 in Louisville.

The hirings fill nearly all vacant spots of the restructured staff positions approved during the Executive Board's meeting in November.

Those hired were:

■ Richard Adams to fill a newly-created position as director of leadership development.

Adams, a former pastor of First Baptist Church of Whitesburg and Park City Baptist Church, was director of the pastoral ministries department of the South Carolina Baptist Convention's leadership development team from 1994 to 1997. He recently has been pastor at a church in Hopkins, S.C.

The new position is designed to help Kentucky Baptist Church leaders in such areas as strengthening marriages, promoting spiritual growth and teaching the changing dynamics of leadership.

Adams' duties will include conducting seminars and planning conferences such as the "Shepherding the Shepherd" meeting in Lexington next month for pastors and their spouses.

Adams has a master's degree of divinity from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, a bachelor of arts degree in religion from Cumberland College and biblical certificate of achievement from Clear Creek Baptist College in Pineville.

■ Carl Babb as director of the family ministry department. He has worked in the same role at the South Carolina Baptist Convention since 1995.

Before that, he was a family enrichment specialist at the Southern Baptist Convention's Sunday School Board and a missionary to the Philip-

pin. He also has been minister of single adults at Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville and pastor at Poplar Grove Baptist Church in Owen-

Babb has a doctor of ministry degree and a master of divinity degree from Southern Seminary, a master's degree in higher education from the University of Florida and a bachelor's degree from Florida State University.

■ Dan Garland, pastor of Zion Baptist Church in Henderson, to be leader of the KBC evangelism growth team.

Garland, a native of Somerset, was a civil engineer with the Kentucky Department of Transportation before entering the pastorate.

Since becoming pastor of Zion, the church has averaged 40 baptisms and more than 80 additions per year. Garland also has been a consultant for the KBC, training deacons in ministry and leadership skills and organization. He previously was a pastor in Ohio, a chaplain in Louisville and a single adults minister in Louisville.

Garland has a doctor of ministry and master of divinity degrees from Southern Seminary and a bachelor of science degree from the University of Kentucky.

■ Keith Inman as campus ministry director in the evangelism growth team.

Inman has been campus minister at Murray State University since 1987. While there, he organized a statewide collegiate Experiencing God Bible study weekend and directed a Kentucky Baptist Student Union summer missions "Son Team."

Inman, who is president-elect of the Association of Southern Baptist Campus Ministers, also has served as associate director of a Baptist student union in Arkansas, a minister of youth and recreation in Tennessee and worship leader and director for Centrifuge Baptist youth camps.



Adams



Babb



Garland



Inman



Smoot

Inman has a bachelor of science in business degree from Murray State University and a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

■ Tom Smoot, associate state director for KBC campus ministry since 1988, to fill the new position of youth department director for the evangelism growth team.

Smoot said he hopes to work with Inman and Kentucky youth ministers to provide a stronger transition between church youth ministries and Baptist student unions.

Smoot is a former campus minister at the University of Louisville and for six schools in West Kentucky. He also has been a youth and education minister at Eastwood Baptist Church in Bowling Green and a Frankfort high school teacher.

Smoot has directed the Sonshare Baptist Student Union drama team, and he also has been an adjunct drama professor at Southern Seminary since 1990.

A graduate of Georgetown College, Smoot has a master's of religious education degree from Southern Seminary and has done post-graduate studies at the University of Louisville's theater department.

The business and finance committee distributed \$1 million in unused Executive Board funds, investment income and state mission reserve money for the following:

■ \$90,000 for Celebrate Jesus 2000.

■ \$215,000 for Kentucky Baptist partnership work with Baptists in Tanzania and Poland.

■ \$75,000 for continued expenses

from the former Mission Kentucky II project.

■ \$22,000 for the New Vision fund to support new work and church starts.

■ \$140,000 for initial program expenses for the new leadership development and youth departments, expanding conferences and new KBC staff objectives.

■ \$115,000 for special projects.

■ \$200,000 for Baptist Student Union buildings' repairs and renovations.

■ \$61,000 for repairs and renovations to KBC Baptist buildings.

■ \$41,000 for KBC equipment replacement.

The committee also approved distributing \$803,589 in Cooperative Program and "Kentucky-only" donations above the 1997-98 budget.

According to a formula, 35 percent of the extra CP funds (\$236,416) is earmarked for the Southern Baptist Convention. Other distributions were as follows:

■ \$270,206 for the New Vision Fund.

■ \$234,930 distributed between Kentucky Baptist colleges, institutions and agencies, except for Baptist Healthcare Systems.

■ \$43,000 for the KBC church annuity program.

■ \$19,037 for a one-time grant to assist the Western Recorder with publishing Real Life magazine.

Also during the meeting, the Executive Board:

■ Approved a statement of affirmation for Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children.

■ Approved spending \$175,000 on a new Baptist student center at Kentucky State University in Frankfort.

Chairmen named

KBC President Charles Barnes recently named the following people to serve as chairmen for Executive Board and convention committees:

■ Executive Board Business and Finance Committee, Bob Long, Louisville.

■ Executive Board Agencies and Institutions Committee, Ed Erwin, Shelbyville.

■ Executive Board Church Growth and Administration Committee, Paul Badgett, Catlettsburg.

■ Executive Board Minister Church Support Committee, Bob Swift, Mayfield.

■ Executive Board Missions and Evangelism Committee, Bill Patterson, Henderson.

■ KBC Committee on Arrangements, Charles Midkiff, Greenville.

■ KBC Committee on Committees, Al Hardy, Campbellsville.

■ KBC Committee on Constitution and Bylaws, Eddie Brown, Florence.

■ KBC Committee on Credentials, T. A. Prickett, Owensboro.

■ KBC Committee on Nominations, Michael Watts, Hopkinsville.

■ KBC Committee on Order of Business, Glenn Noe, Sassafras.

■ KBC Committee on Public Affairs, Duane Bolin, Murray.

■ KBC Committee on Resolutions, Bob Kuschwitz, Georgetown.

Smithwick: Outcry after lesbian's firing a wake-up call for Baptists

Continued from page 1
Louisville Courier-Journal.

Smithwick said the issue is private and confidential because it is a personnel matter. "We could still find ourselves in court, and so our counsel has advised that we be very guarded about what we say."

While never mentioning anyone by name, Smithwick said the agency fired an employee "solely on the basis of her homosexual lifestyle."

The resulting publicity was frustrating, he added, because confidentiality rules regarding personnel limited the agency's response.

KBHC has tried to both communicate the all-inclusive nature of the gospel while retaining certain standards and values, Smithwick said.

"It's really hard to do that and love at the same time. We feel we've done that, and I wish I could tell you how we've done that," he said. "It saddens

me that our agency and we as Kentucky Baptists are viewed like that. And I don't know exactly how we're ever going to get around it except certainly be as empathetic and sympathetic and compassionate as we can—as we should be—but at the same time hold our standards high."

Smithwick said a major question that arose from the incident was whether the fired employee was hired with his consent. "I can't answer that, but I'll say this at my counsel's advice: There never has been a homosexual hired at our agency with my knowledge since I've been here, OK?"

The agency's use of tax dollars has raised questions from both opponents of the firing and Baptist supporters of the agency, Smithwick said.

Opponents suggest an agency that takes state dollars shouldn't be able to discriminate, and Baptists are con-

cerned that accepting state money could jeopardize KBHC's Christian outreach.

This year's budget for all KBHC activities will be almost \$19 million, Smithwick said, and about \$13 million of that will come from the state.

"If we were to say 'We're not going to take any more state dollars'—and we may get to that point one day—the numbers of children and families we serve will be reduced dramatically, overnight," Smithwick said.

KBHC began taking state money in the late 1970s—with the Kentucky Baptist Convention's blessing—in order to expand its ability to respond to needs across the commonwealth, Smithwick said.

Smithwick said he raised the issue of state money with the committee that interviewed him for the job as KBHC president. "They made it very clear, we will take that money until it

ever causes us to put our mission in jeopardy. When it ever causes us to put our mission in jeopardy, it's gone."

Currently, state money comes with no strings attached, Smithwick said. The agency distributes Bibles and shares the Christian faith to children in its care, he said. The agency saw 140 professions of faith and 40 other Christian decisions in the last fiscal year, he added.

While government agencies could someday exclude agencies like KBHC from its contracts for not hiring homosexuals, Smithwick said he doesn't think that's likely.

"Even with the Fairness Ordinance, that's been suggested in Louisville, religious institutions have been exempt," he said. "Any legislation that has been suggested ... on the federal level, religious institutions have been exempt."

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

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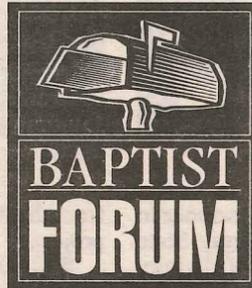
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Miracles over magic

I enjoyed reading David Garrard's advice about what to tell children about Santa and how to emphasize the real meaning of Christmas (Dec. 8, page 5). Most of what any of us absorb about anything is "caught" rather than "taught." The most important way for children to learn to value the birth of our Savior over the acquisition of presents is to see in their parents' lives greater joy in Jesus than in the commercial, material and secular aspects of the season.

The story of Santa as it has developed over the years is make-believe fantasy. The story of Jesus is a true and awe-inspiring miracle. Miracles are always better than magic because miracles are real.

We should make certain we never lie to children about Santa or anything else if we want them to trust us when we tell them about things that are true, like how to find salvation in Christ. We don't have to tell them outright there is no magic sleigh, but we certainly should emphasize the very real miracles in the real story of Christmas.



And we can tell them about the real St. Nicholas, a man who loved Jesus and gave needed gifts to others because of the Savior's love.

David Garrard's suggestions on putting Christ at the center of Christmas are excellent—as long as they are carried out with the genuine joy that comes from a personal relationship with a powerful, loving and awe-inspiring God, rather than carried out with a sense of religious duty. If the real story of Jesus gives us more joy than the fairy tale that the story of Santa has become, our children will sense this. And if we refuse to lie to them ever about anything, they will trust us more when we speak truth to them about their souls.

*Susan Breeding
Elizabethtown*

Advent confusion

Recently many Baptist churches have begun celebrating Advent. It is probably an attempt to counter the materialism that now surrounds Christmas with a more religious observance.

While I don't doubt the sincerity

of those who are behind this effort, I wonder if we should suddenly embrace a practice that has not been in our tradition, whose symbolism of lighting candles the four Sundays preceding Christmas might be confused by those outside our denomination with the practices of other religions.

Many religions light candles for various reasons, including Jewish, Catholic, even pagan and New Age religions. Rather than relying on such heavy symbolism, which may be unclear to some, to promote the true meaning of Christmas, churches might consider a more direct and unequivocal expression. One suggestion might be the placing of a manger scene, piece-by-piece, on each of these Sundays. The significance of each part of the story could be told and emphasized this way.

At a time when manger displays are being thrown off of public property, perhaps churches should be bringing back this essential component of the Christmas story. People can, of course, celebrate in the manner they choose, but we need to make sure that nonbelievers understand clearly what it is we are really celebrating.

*Jonathan Shelton
Lexington*

False impression

Chickens come home to roost. What I do is my own business as long as I do my job; one man's actions gave the world a false impression of the beliefs of 14 million people. It should never have happened. Millions of Baptists voted against two honorable men who risked their lives for the freedom of our country. God gave us a second chance. Still influenced by the hope of a dollar.

There have been a lot of disasters in our country this year. I hear there is worse to come. Some say don't mix politics and religion. If your politics and religion won't mix, something is wrong with one or the other.

*Leonard Whitis
Eubank*

'O Little Town of Bethlehem'

In 1865 a young minister from Philadelphia visited Palestine. On the day before Christmas he rode horseback the several miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.

After riding through the streets of Bethlehem, he went out to the nearby fields, the traditional site where the birth of Jesus was announced to the shepherds.

Phillips Brooks was this young minister who was enjoying a year's travel away from his pulpit of Philadelphia's Holy Trinity Church. After he returned from his trip abroad, and long before he became

nationally famous, he wrote the stanzas of this hymn for the children of his Sunday school to sing in a Christmas program.

Brooks later moved to Trinity Church in Boston and was recognized as one of American's outstanding preachers. His published sermons are found in theological libraries today, but his simple Christmas hymn appears in hymnals everywhere.

Bill Reynolds is distinguished professor of church music emeritus at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas

PARTNERS IN THE MISSION

Christmas and family

The Christmas story is filled with connecting words. The Gospel of Matthew opens and closes with connecting words: "Immanuel, ... God with us" and "I am with you always." The Gospel of Luke reminds us that we experience saving faith through Jesus: "For unto you is born ... a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

Christmas is also an experience of connecting with Jesus Christ, who is the focus of Christmas. The first Christmas was filled with the music of a heavenly choir, a prophetic proclamation and the giving of gifts and awesome wonder and praise. I am grateful for the wonderful music by church choirs, meaningful sermons, the opportunities for missions giving and the awesome wonder of it all that moves sensitive hearts to praise God.

Christmas is also a time of connect-

ing with family. Our two daughters have planned a Christmas Eve family worship time since their early school days. It is a simple but meaningful family time of music, testimony, Christmas story and prayer.

The family has grown to include a son-in-law, Bartley Wooten, who is an associate pastor in Greenville, S.C., and off-campus seminary student. His wife, Beth, teaches school. Our oldest daughter, Anonda, is a buyer for a retail company in Spartanburg, S.C.

Christmas Day involves travel to my parents' home in Lancaster County, S.C. My father, Bob Mackey, is 83 years old and walks one hour daily. His prayers are so personal that I think he must see God. He is driven to pay his debts, keep his word, do things right and give his tithe. Due to hearing loss, he did not know that I had entered the house one morning. I heard him praying for

each family member by name, his pastor and church family and for our missionaries. It was a memorable moment that I wish I could have captured for the rest of the family.

My mother, Evelyn, 79, always has been a person of ministry and faith with the gift of hospitality. Recent health problems have limited her activities. As a young mother, she was broken in grief due to the loss of her first son by crib death. She promised God that if he would give her another child she would dedicate that child to him. She waited two years after I surrendered to a full-time career in ministry before she shared that promise with me. It has become a very precious treasure in my life over the years.

Christmas is a time of connecting with faith and family. Thank you, Kentucky Baptists, for inviting Kay and me to be a part of your family. We love you and are grateful for the opportunity to serve.

Bill Mackey is executive secretary-treasurer of the Kentucky Baptist Convention

CHURCH

December finds lots of people with lots of reasons to give

By Doug Strader



The end of the calendar year is usually a very busy time for our Kentucky Baptist churches as

we celebrate the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Christmas spirit usually causes people to be more generous with their financial resources. Several factors are responsible for this.

The coming of Jesus reminds us of the greatest gift ever given. That leads us to have a desire and a willingness to give at this time of the year. Our churches afford us many avenues to express our gratitude. They include making food baskets and buying gifts for the children of those who are in need or buying "angel tree" gifts for children of those incarcerated in prisons and jails.

December is also the month we collect the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions. We are challenged to give sacrificially to help our missionaries proclaim the good news about Jesus.

Some churches have special mission projects they fund during the month of December because people generally are more generous with their financial resources at this time of the year.

There are many other causes to which people are likely to make contributions at the end of a calendar year. However, the above ways are sufficient to remind us our churches should be encouraged to offer several opportunities for our people to give of their financial resources.

Many churches experience an outpouring of grace giving during December because they give their people an opportunity to give. People will give when they know the needs and they are challenged in the Spirit of Jesus the Christ. Give people every opportunity during this season to give to worthy causes.

Some people will give money during the last days of the year because they have not given weekly during the year. Just make sure any money given that is to be credited to the 1998 calendar year is received by the church before midnight Jan. 1, 1999, or if the contribution is mailed to the church, it must be postmarked before midnight Jan. 1, 1999. Otherwise the contribution will be credited to the year 1999.

Doug Strader is director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's stewardship department

How should husband talk to a wife giving 'silent treatment?'

When my wife gets angry she tends to give me the "silent treatment," although she says that she's only being silent because I'm not listening anyway. Will you tell her that I can't listen if she doesn't talk?

You're right; you can't listen if she doesn't talk. But it's also possible she doesn't talk because in the past you haven't listened. In fact, both might well be true.

In any relationship, what one person does influences, at least to some extent, what the other person does and vice versa. You two might have created a cycle in which your not listening decreases the chances she will talk to you, while her not talking makes you less likely to care what she has to say. This cycle will not likely correct itself; one or both of you must change your behavior to break the cycle.

If you were to begin listening to your wife, even on small issues that don't involve anger, it might communicate to her that you are making an effort at listening. Ideally, she will notice this and be more likely to risk talking to you the next time she is angry. However, you might want to be more direct. You could specifically tell her that you realize you might be contributing to her silence and that you are now making a conscious effort to listen more. Of course, she might be skeptical until she sees proof of your effort, so you must make a sincere, consistent effort to listen and to communicate that you are listening.

Change often comes slowly, so don't get discouraged and give up if things don't change quickly. Practice listening, make a sincere effort and be patient.—Susan Howell

How do I talk to my child about angels?

Younger children are able to understand that angels are God's messengers or "helpers." Most of their ideas will come from the Christmas story. Broaden their understanding by telling them other stories. When you talk about angels, be careful to choose stories about angels that will build a child's developing ability and need to trust, instead of feeding their fears.

Don't ever be afraid to say, "I don't know." As the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia points out, many of our best efforts to understand angels are merely "conjectures that touch on a great mystery."

Movies like "Angels in the Outfield" and television shows like "Touched by an Angel" might not be good theology, but they can be great ways to start a conversation with your kids. Older children will be able to compare media representations and popular ideas with what the Bible teaches.

Christians believe in angels, but what we believe varies greatly. An official "theology of angels" does not exist, so don't worry that you are going to permanently harm your child's spiritual development if you give them a "wrong" answer about angels. Keep the focus on God, and ask God to guide you as you guide your children.

Stories of angels in the Bible include:

- **Genesis 28.** Jacob sees angels.
- **Judges 6.** God is with us, too, as we face difficult challenges each day.
- **Daniel 6.** An angel saves Daniel from the lions.
- **Luke 1.** An angel announces the births of John the Baptist and Jesus.
- **Matthew 28.** An angel rolls the stone away from the tomb.
- **Acts 12.** An angel helps Peter escape from prison.

—David Garrard

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; Susan Howell, assistant professor of psychology at Campbellsville University; 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.



Churches face critical time for giving

By A.B. Colvin

The time for an annual experience is here. Our churches are comparing their gifts-to-date with this year's budget.

For relatively few, gifts exceed the budget. Many are suffering from the recognition of a deficit. The preponderant number of churches will feel little or no pain because they just about made it.

It seems significant that this exercise comes between the Thanksgiving Day spirit and Christmas Day, with its overwhelming emphasis on giving. We stand between expressing gratitude and coming face to face with the greatest love story ever lived, the greatest sacrificial gift ever made.

What can we learn from these situations? A church that surpassed its budget goal might have been simply too conservative in setting its target. A church that failed to reach its budget requirements might have failed to challenge its members to approach sacrificial giving. It must be evident that most of the churches that came out just about even could have done better.

What about the budget and its preparation? It is possible that too many budget committee members build a budget while looking back over their shoulders. They might hope to determine at what points they could suggest a lower figure, thus reducing the goal of the preceding year.

Many times committees present the budget goal as a number of dollars rather than a challenge to underwrite desired and necessary ministries of the church.

The budget always should be prepared and presented with soul-searching prayer for God's will.

This is the time at which members are encouraged to catch up on their giving or to make a special offering.

While it is admirable to attempt to meet the budget by year-end spurts, this might become a bill-paying activity. Paying bills is honorable, but it can never replace day-by-day loving care and ministry. It cannot bring the joy of consistent, worthy giving to our Lord.

A careful look might cause us to realize there is little consistent encouragement or challenge for church

members to present a minimum of a tithe to the Lord. A prevailing idea is that people who are spiritually healthy will follow the proper route to faithful stewardship habits. Our record gives little credence to such an idea. At least we should search for a doctor.

It is apparent that healthy stewardship practices have been on the decline, generally, for some time. Many fine younger church members testify that seldom have they been taught or shown it is more blessed to give than to receive.

A careful study indicates an average of 12 percent to 16 percent of the members of our churches yield 80 percent of the church's income. A slightly higher portion give the other 20 percent. This means well over half of the members bring nothing into the storehouse.

The same source reveals most church income comes from people over 55 years of age. It is probable that most of the 80 percent comes from people over 55.

Obviously, people above age 55 did not begin giving faithfully only when they reached 55. They were taught and trained earlier. Most of them have been following God's plan joyously through the years.

A heavy responsibility for training our young people lies upon older Christians. Twenty years from now, the people who are now 55 or older will be out of the picture. Then our churches will be dependent upon those members who are now young people. What does that probability say to us today?

When Saul of Tarsus was in the midst of persecuting the church, he met the Lord on the road to Damascus. When Saul asked for the identity of the person speaking to him, he was told it was Jesus whom he was persecuting.

This experience made an indelible impression on Paul. He realized his action was interpreted as unto Jesus.

When Jesus told the scribes, Pharisees and hypocrites they should have tithed, he spoke to us today.

Let's change our attitude and actions in this critical time.

A.B. Colvin is assistant to the president of Oneida Baptist Institute

O Lord, will you hold yourself back?

By Rich Lloyd

After all this, O Lord, will you hold yourself back? Will you keep silent and punish us beyond measure? (Isaiah 64:12)

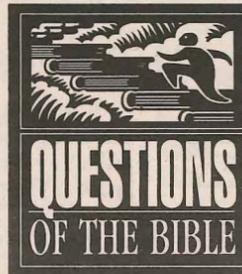
How long, how long? That cry has come from our children eagerly waiting Christmas morning. "How long, how long, Daddy, until Christmas gets here?"

That silent cry has come from thousands of workers who daily fight morning rush hour. "How long, how long until retirement can come?"

That cry has come from Chicago Cubs fans for decades now. "How long, how long until the Cubs win the Series?" We yearned to hear Harry Carry cry out "Cubs win! Cubs win!" If you are a Cubs fan, the wait has been forever. How long! How long!

Advent is the season of anticipating, yearning and waiting. We anticipate the holiday season of food and gifts. We yearn for that moment in our

frantic-paced lives to be together as family and friends. We wait again for the moment that Christ Child—who came so long ago to bring grace, hope and forgiveness—will come again as the resurrection Lord and Savior of the world. Anticipating. Yearning. Waiting.



The prophet of Isaiah 64 is pleading and extolling the Lord God to bring forgiveness and healing to the children of God. The entire passage is a recital of the acts of God and response of God's people despite God's action. God has "done awesome things

that we did not expect," and he has "come to the help of those who gladly do right." Yet "no one calls on your name" and the people have become unclean. As a result, the sacred cities have become a desert and a wasteland. The "holy and glorious temple" has been destroyed. Isaiah pleads with God to "come down to make your name known to the enemy" because when he had come down before, the "mountains trembled" before God.

Isaiah prays to the Lord God, as you have come before, "What is holding you back now?"

Advent demands that we not just remember the first coming of the Christ Child and give a recitation of what God has done. Advent also demands that we anticipate that Christ is coming again with such longing and hope that it seems that a little of heaven is almost here. With such evil around us, such sinfulness engulfing us and such despair encircling us, we too, like Isaiah, call out to God with the longing to go home, "How much longer will you hold yourself back until you come again?"

Thus until that day comes when God can no longer "hold himself back" may we live with the hope that only Jesus Christ can bring. May we live in anticipation of our heavenly homecoming so that we can live with that quiet confidence of the trustworthiness of our Savior, the contentment of life beyond the strains and demands of life and the joy that only comes from the One who will bring us home.

Rich Lloyd is pastor of First Baptist Church of Shepherdsville

Holiday season brings gifts & givers to children's homes

"I wish everyone who sponsors a child could be there on Christmas morning when the gifts are opened."

Brenda Gray, Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children vice president for development and communications

By Dannah Prather
Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children

LOUISVILLE—Picture a Toys 'R Us store after an earthquake and you have an idea of what the offices of Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children look like before Christmas.

Getting gifts and Christmas stockings for approximately 350 children in residential and foster care is a task that could intimidate even Santa, but every year KBHC staff throughout the commonwealth put out the call and people respond.

This year the job of coordinating Christmas sponsorships belongs to Nicole Jolly, also known as "Jolly Saint Nic." Much of her time is spent on the phone, matching donors to children. "Some of our programs have donors who traditionally sponsor those kids every year," she said. "But as our agency grows, every year we need more people to help give the kids a merry Christmas."

The agency's goal is for every child to receive at least some of the items on their wish lists. "It's really interesting to see some of the things the kids ask for," Jolly said. "Some of them put things like 'a new family' or 'a new home.' One boy who hadn't been sponsored yet had toy soldiers on his wish list, and out of the blue someone brings in a load of gifts and there on the top is a box of toy soldiers. That's neat."

Volunteers never know what kind of gifts will come through the door, Jolly said. This year 3,000 GigaPets

arrived courtesy of KFC. An inordinate amount of boys' underwear was donated last year—evidence of the difficulty of shopping for adolescent boys.

Another year, a pickup truck pulling a livestock trailer packed with boxes of clothes arrived at the central office. That same year, a challenge arrived when several frozen turkeys were left after food boxes were assembled for foster homes. Knowing the birds could be used at a shelter on the other side of the state, staff scrambled to locate couriers to transport the meat before it thawed.

"The holidays are never boring around here," said Brenda Gray, vice president for development and communications. "And because KBHC has programs that serve infants, toddlers, adolescents, teens and families, we can use just about anything people donate. We can also use it at times other than Christmas."

Amid the chaos are touching examples of Christian generosity. One couple sponsored a child at the request of their daughter who didn't want gifts for herself. Jeff Ginn of Cincinnati donated infant clothes and blankets in his son's name because "my wish and goal is that Davis grow up knowing how fortunate he is and how God has blessed him."

Ginn said he grew up without parents. "I have some connection to these children and want to help them as best I can."

"I love this time of year," Gray said. "It truly does bring out the best



STOCKING STUFFERS Volunteers filling stockings for children in the care of Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children are, from left, Anita Downs, Doris Barriger, Carolyn Fox and Nancye LeCompte. (Photo by Dannah Prather)

in people. I wish everyone who sponsors a child could be there on Christmas morning when the gifts are

opened. The love demonstrated in such giving is a wonderful birthday gift to our Savior."



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Our attack on busyness

I don't have to remind anyone that by the time you read this it's almost Christmas. It's a glorious season of celebration for those of us who know Christ. It's a season of marvelous and wonderful sights and sounds and parties and worship services and music and gifts, including the gift of Jesus Christ.

It's also the season in which many of us hit high speed. The shopping we must get done, the places we must go, the parties we must attend. Christmas has become, for many, the fastest-paced season of the year.

Part of our goal at Cedar more and Jonathan Creek is to provide a relaxed setting that encourages our guests to slow down a little bit, not to be in such a hurry.

From my perspective, this hurriedness, this busyness that so guides us, is one of the great barriers to fully experiencing God in the way he desires for each of us. And it appears that at no time of the year is this a greater challenge than Christmas. This is a season that should be filled with great expectations and anticipation. However, for many of us, the wheels are close to coming off, and when Christmas is over we're virtually fried from the pace.

John Ortborg is a pastor at Wil-

low Creek Community Church outside Chicago. He suggests that hurry and busyness are great joy killers. The pace of life for many of us is such that there just doesn't seem to be time to ponder what God urges us to ponder. We are a busy people.

Ortborg had just moved to Chicago and was describing his pace of life to a wise friend. In describing the present condition of his heart, he asked his friend what he needed to do to be spiritually healthy. The friend paused for a moment and said, "You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life."

Ortborg asked, "What else?"

A long pause. "There is nothing else. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life."

What do you think? How's your hurry index this Christmas? Are you pegging the needle? If it applies to you, slow down. Christmas is here. Don't miss it, OK? May your Christmas be full of the joy and blessings of Christ, from all of us at the places that encourage you to slow down, Kentucky Baptist Assemblies.

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

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Rusty Ellison

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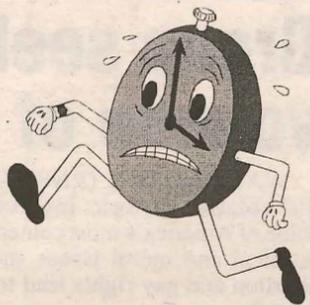


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Hands-on activities help teach kids about Christmas

Continued from page 1

weekly Advent candles symbolizing hope, peace, joy and love, Sanders recommended talking about Christmas characters while lighting the candles. "Children can hang the story on individuals, rather than abstract words they don't understand," he explained.

■ **Giving gifts to others.** "Keeping materialism out of Christmas is impossible; children want things," Lane conceded. "But if parents try to give and give and give, children's wants won't be satisfied. Helping them learn to give strengthens their understanding of Christmas."

That can be as simple as taking candy and cookies to neighbors and friends, Lane and Morris said. Or delivering homemade cards, Sanders added.

David Butts, children's minister at First Baptist Church in Lewisville, Texas, asks children after Christmas what they gave as well as what they received. Often, their answers about giving are more animated than their reports of gifts received, he said.

■ **Using a Nativity set.** "You ought to have a nativity set kids can play with," Wiley said. "And not a fragile set, made of porcelain, up on the shelf."

His children have played with a set their family made out of barn wood.

"Children can talk about Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus and the animals" as they play with the Nativity pieces, Lane explained. "It's real. They make it a part of their Christmas."

■ **Reading about Christmas.** "One of my own most vivid memories of childhood is that my mother never would allow us to open our

presents until we had read the Christmas story from the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke," Wiley recalled. "Now, my oldest kids get to be the readers."

■ **Decorating the Christmas tree.** "There are different ways to make it meaningful," Morris said. "We can talk about eternal life with the evergreen, about Jesus being the Light of the World when we hang the lights, and the ornaments help us think about the fruits of the Spirit."

Older children enjoy making Chrismons, ornaments that symbolize facets and themes of Christmas, Sanders said.

Wiley's children have their own ornament and collectibles boxes, where they keep Christmas items they make or have been given. They use those to decorate both the tree and their own rooms, he said.

■ **Singing Christmas carols.** "Carols help children express the true meaning of Christmas. We sing as often as we can," Butts said of celebrating the season with his young children.

Singing also is a way children can lead in family worship, Morris added. "Let them take part in leadership," she urged, noting that it strengthens their sense of participation.

■ **Keeping Santa in his place.** "We never had 'real' Santa; we always talked about 'pretend' Santa," Lane said, "so they would know the real focus was on Jesus."

■ **Developing unique family traditions.** Wiley's entire family sleeps under the Christmas tree one night each season. "It's just a warm time to be together and talk and snuggle," he said.

Love

By Amy Browning

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (1 John 4:7).

Are you a good trader? Do you enjoy the negotiating that accompanies trading? Do you usually end up with a treasure or trinket?

Girls usually trade clothes with their friends. They get tired of wearing the same thing and trade with someone who also wants a different selection in the closet.

Most of us trade something else but are not aware of it. We trade love. We give our love to people we like and get their love in return. This makes us feel secure and happy, so it is good to trade love with people around us.

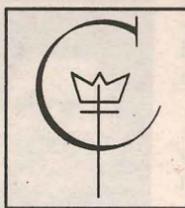
In 1 John 3:23, John told his readers they were to love others as Jesus commanded. That meant they were to trade love with each other, but it also meant a lot more. It meant they were to give their love to those who mistreated them, acted ugly toward them or loved differently from them.

I have found it is easy to love people who love me. It's not so

easy to love people who don't like me, though. It is much easier to ignore them or hurt them, but this is wrong. It certainly doesn't fulfill the command of Jesus to love all people.

This Christmas, let me encourage you to give your love away, not merely trade it with others like you. Think of someone today who has mistreated you and give them your love. If you do, you will receive a beautiful treasure from our grateful Lord.

CUMBERLAND
COLLEGE



Amy Browning, the daughter of Robert and Jackie Browning of Somerset, is a junior with a major in biology and a minor in public health. She is active in Beta Beta

Beta (the biology club) and works in the religion and philosophy department through the Cumberland College Workstudy Program.—Robert Dunston

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

Gaps and laps

I have a photo on my desk that was taken about six years ago. It includes one of my daughters and three kids from Spring Meadows Children's Home. There is also a jolly ol' fellow known as Santa Claus. It was snapped at a local mall after I overheard one of the girls say she always had wanted to have her picture taken with Santa, but had never had the opportunity.

I thought of how many times my daughters had sat on Santa's lap for a picture. It was hard to believe something so simple was missing from Charlene's life. I was compelled to make her wish come true that night, even though she was 15 years old.

Luke's Gospel has a detailed account of Jesus' birth, and were it not for Dr. Luke, we'd know very little about Jesus' early days. Luke is the only Gospel writer who mentions Jesus as a young boy. Luke closes his comments by noting that Jesus continued to grow physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Any physician will tell you that kids must go through certain stages in their lives in order to develop into mature adults. Unfortu-

nately, most of the kids Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children serves have significant gaps in their lives. There are important milestones they have missed. They haven't had the freedom to fail. They haven't had positive reinforcement. In short, they haven't been loved. At KBHC, we try to fill in those gaps.

The gap with Santa is small compared to the other missing pieces. Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus remind our kids of the family life they don't have. Our ministry attempts to provide that Christ-like family in a variety of ways. It might be with staff at Spring Meadows, or with a foster home in Bowling Green, or with their own family in London.

Please pray for those we serve at this time of year. As one little thing is accomplished, the gaps in their lives get smaller.

By the way, if you look at the photo on my desk, you can tell who Charlene is. She is the one with the biggest smile.

Mike Dixon is vice president for religious life at Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children, 10801 Shelbyville Road, Middletown, Ky. 40243. Call (800) 456-1386. KBHC's Internet address is: <http://www.iglou.com/kbhc/>

HOMES FOR
CHILDREN



Mike Dixon

NATIONAL NOTES

■ **Teacher suspended for Bibles.** A Bronx elementary school teacher has been suspended on charges he distributed religious books and promoted Christianity in his classroom. Simpson Gray, a fifth-grade teacher, was suspended after a school board investigation of a parent's complaint that he provided students and the school library with copies of the Bible and religious books that he had written. Gray acknowledged bringing the books into school but said he was only trying to broaden the selection of reading materials.

■ **Agencies to get outside evaluation.** An umbrella organization for 162 agencies that seek sponsors to send money for poor children says it will hire outside evaluators to ensure the money raised is used as pledged. Officials at InterAction, a Washington-based group, say evaluators will check financial accounts and make periodic visits to the nonprofit groups' international field operations. The agencies raise more than \$400 million a year from U.S. residents.

■ **One-third of Americans give more.** One-third of Americans give more money to charity during the December holidays and the vast majority are not motivated by tax incentives, a survey commissioned by the Lutheran Brotherhood has found. Thirty-four percent of U.S. residents surveyed in a poll by Yankelovich Partners said they give more during the holiday season. Only 4 percent said they made their donations in a last-minute attempt to increase their tax deductions.

■ **APA opposes gay 'reparative' efforts.** The American Psychiatric Association's board of

trustees recently adopted a position statement opposing "conversion" or "reparative" therapy to "cure" homosexuals. In 1973, the APA removed homosexuality as a mental disorder from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders after reviewing evidence that it did not fit the criterion to be in the mental illness category.

■ **Judges find error in protest ruling.** A federal judge was wrong when he said "conscience-driven religious belief" entitled abortion protesters to acquittal on contempt charges, a New York appeals court has ruled. But the U.S. 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals, voting 2-1, allowed the acquittal to stand so the defendants would not face double jeopardy. Last year, Judge John Sprizzo ruled that Roman Catholic Bishop George Lynch, 80, and Brother Christopher Moscinski, 28, had not committed a crime when they blocked access to the Women's Medical Pavilion in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., in 1995 by lying down in its driveway.

■ **Colorado clergy upset at rulings.** An ecumenical group of Colorado's religious leaders has filed a friend-of-the-court brief arguing the state's courts are trampling on religious freedom by holding churches responsible for the misconduct of clergy. Colorado, according to lawyers who represent religious groups in misconduct cases, has a reputation for repeated rulings that churches have a fiduciary responsibility to protect church members. "Colorado has basically said the state can regulate churches," said Douglas Laycock, a constitutional law professor at the University of Texas.

Group seeks to lower volume of moral debate

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Does the volatile rhetoric involved in some of America's most contentious political and moral issues such as abortion and gay rights lead to violence?

Can the decibel level of public discourse be brought down without abandoning deeply held ethical principles?

Leaders from more than two dozen groups often at loggerheads in bitter religious disagreements over such social issues met last week to explore a platform for civil coexistence.

It wasn't easy. But they tried. "Even the most entrenched opponents are seeking an alternative to rancor and distrust," said moderator Martin Marty, renowned historian, Lutheran pastor and a scholar-in-residence at Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith and Ethics, the Chicago-based think tank that sponsored the session.

Both using and discussing principles recently developed by the Park Ridge Center to promote civil discourse between opponents, representatives from such groups as the Family Research Council, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, the National Association of Evangelicals and Catholics for a Free Choice gathered attempting to give civility a trial run.

Much of the rapid-fire three-hour

roundtable, while touching on family planning and abortion, centered around homosexuality, an issue both of contention between religious and secular groups as well as within faith communities.

Throughout the often passionate debate, participants acknowledged a need for better discourse and praised the work of the Park Ridge Center.

In the coming months, Park Ridge will distribute at least 2,000 copies of the document to people in positions of religious leadership.

The benefits of constructive dialogue are great, said David Guinn, a Park Ridge scholar who with Marty and Larry Greenfield wrote the civil discourse document.

"The benefits are a way of structuring civil discourse so discourse does not just get locked up on a single issue, like abortion, but recognizes a myriad of common elements," said Guinn.

The set of principles, "To Speak and Be Heard: Principles of Religious Civil Discourse," is divided into five main sections ranging from the nature of civil discourse in the public square to the future hopes of civil discourse.

Also included is a report providing guidelines for structuring public policy discourse among diverse people of faith and a separate document clarifying how to put the principles to work.

The faculty, staff and students of Oneida Baptist Institute wish all of our many friends a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

We are grateful for those who support us financially, for all who lift us up in prayer, and for the many volunteers who help us each year.

The Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. — Luke 1:35b



Experiencing God in Russia

When our academic dean asked Dean of Students Fred Cummings to teach in the Novgorod, Russia, Pastor/Church Planter School, he immediately agreed.

"Some things we don't need to pray about, it's just part of God's work and will," Cummings observed. In November, he taught Baptist history and spiritual formation. He found the students eager to learn. The spiritual formation class used the "Experiencing God" book after missionary Joe DeLeon located 20 Russian-language copies.

The concept of equality in the church body was new, since Russian Baptists endow the pastor with almost absolute authority.

One of the conditions for student attendance is to work on the new church building. Americans call the facility the "gold church," because of the color of the brick. Pastor Anatoli prefers "The Temple of Christ." Orthodox temples usually bear the name of a patron saint. "People here view Baptists as a cult, and our Temple of Christ will help legitimize the work of Baptists," Anatoli said.

Cummings experienced God in the dynamic worship services. "The people stood during all the music

and prayers. The service included three messages and eight to 10 selections of music. I recognized 'How Great Thou Art.' Without an adult Sunday school time, the worship lasted two hours. It was authentic praise and celebration, vibrant with faith and fellowship."

An electrical line severed by construction left the church very cold one Sunday. "It was 10 degrees outside, and I realized that most American churches would have dismissed, but the experience strengthened these Russian Christians," Cummings stated.

In this season of international mission emphasis, Cummings cites three prayer requests for Russia—the economy, political unrest and the witness of Russian Baptists.

Since August, Russian money has lost two-thirds of its value. Costs are high, and many workers go unpaid. Politically, the country remains pulled between democracy and a resurgent communism. Widespread corruption feeds the unrest. There is great opportunity for the gospel. Many people eagerly listen and respond to Christ.

CLEAR CREEK CHRONICLE



Bill Whittaker

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

RESOURCES

Destiny and Deliverance: Spiritual Insights from the Life of Moses. Philip Yancey, et al. Thomas Nelson Publishers & DreamWorks, 1998. 207 pages. \$19.95 ♦♦♦ (out of five)

The Exodus: Moses' Story from the Bible. Compiled by Bruce Bickel & Stan Jantz, with notes by Charles R. Swindoll. Tommy Nelson & DreamWorks, 1998. 95 pages. \$12.99. ♦♦♦

Moses Crosses the Red Sea: A Story of Faith and Courage. Mary Manz Simon. Tommy Nelson & DreamWorks, 1998. 32 pages. \$8.99. ♦♦♦

The Prince of Egypt A to Z. Eric Metaxas. Tommy Nelson & DreamWorks, 1998. 32 pages. \$9.99. ♦♦♦

Anyone familiar with the Bible knows that Moses stands as one of the central characters. His walk with God has fascinated people for millennia.

Hollywood mogul Stephen Spielberg, drawing on that fascination, recently released "The Prince of Egypt," an animated film account of the life of Moses. Capitalizing on the anticipated success of the film, Thomas Nelson Publishers, in cooperation with Spielberg's DreamWorks studio, published a series of books designed to draw people more deeply into the faith story.

"Destiny and Deliverance" is a compilation of reflections on the life of Moses. Contributors include Max Lucado, Joni Eareckson Tada, Kenneth Boa and John Maxwell. Each writer was invited to preview the film and write about a spiritual insight they discovered. Most writers picked up on

the themes of courage and God's ability to work through imperfect vessels. Only Philip Yancey offers a truly fresh and unique insight.

"The Exodus" is aimed at the older-children, younger-youth market. Fourteen chapters tell the story of Moses' life through the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. At the end of each chapter, Charles Swindoll offers a brief interpretation of the events described. Sidebars throughout each chapter highlight key concepts and unfamiliar words. Scenes from the film thoroughly illustrate the narrative.

"Moses Crosses the Red Sea" is a children's picture book. A key feature throughout is the bold and colorful illustrations from the movie. The text is a severely truncated and often sanitized narrative. For example, the text dealing with the "tenth punishment" describes the weeping in Egypt, but not the reason. A disjointed feature of the book was the "To Talk About" questions at the end. They seemed a bit above the book's audience.

"The Prince of Egypt A to Z" is cute. The concept is familiar—use the alphabet to highlight aspects of the Moses story. A preschooler will love this book. The illustrations are large and colorful, and the text is simple and at times humorous.

While all four of these books cover a familiar story, familiarity with or access to the film would be helpful if not essential.

These books are attractive and professionally produced, but would one expect anything less from Spielberg?

They would be suitable gifts for people of all ages, but none of them contributes anything new to the world of literature about Moses. *Jim Holladay*

Bruce & Stan's Guide to the Bible: A User-Friendly Approach. Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz. Harvest House Publishers, 1998. 410 pages. \$10.99 ♦♦

The intention of this book is good—provide a straightforward, easy-to-understand guide to the Bible. In order to accomplish this, the authors propose an approach which is mostly too cute (the prophets are "grumpy old men") and too simple.

The authors list various categories of people for whom the book is written. As I read through the list, I could not help but think that such a book would need to be voluminous and not what the authors mean by user-friendly. If I were to recommend this book to anyone it would be to those who are very conversant with Scripture so that the holes in the summaries would be apparent. It is not that what the authors say is all bad, it is just that it is so incomplete. The danger is that at the end of the book the reader will think he or she really knows the Bible. Even though the authors encourage further study, it is unlikely the light approach of this book will inspire a novice to deeper study.

The book does include accurate historical background for many of the books. At times it even offers some interesting side notes. The coverage, however, is very uneven, providing nearly as many pages for Acts as for

all of the prophets. The best part of the book is the opening chapters which deal with the relevance of the Bible. If meaningful Bible study is your goal, turn to others than Bruce and Stan. *Wayne Hager*

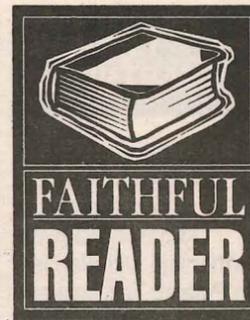
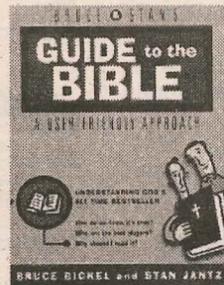
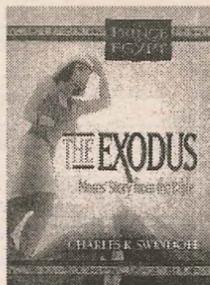
Caught in a Higher Love: Inspiring Stories of Women in the Bible. Carolyn Nabors Baker. Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998. 176 pages. \$9.99 ♦♦

The purpose of this book is to highlight the stories of women in the Bible that teach some of the same virtues that stories of better-known men characters teach.

The book commends women as playing a crucial part in fulfilling God's plan. Baker weaves known facts with her own best creative effort to fill out the story. For the most part, this works and does not do violence to the scriptural story. She, however, is on shakier ground by including the prodigal's "mother" in the book since the entire essay is conjecture.

Because her purpose is to highlight women on the level of men, it is odd that she does not include an essay on Phoebe, seen by many as evidence of women deacons in the early church.

Baker's book joins a long line of studies of women and men biblical characters. At the end of each chapter, Baker seeks to engage her reader by offering a model prayer and questions for further reflection. All in all, there is little new insight, and the book fades back into the crowd of others with a similar purpose. *Wayne Hager*



By Wayne Hager, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Mt. Airy, N.C., and Jim Holladay, pastor of Clifton Baptist Church in Louisville. Holladay and Hager welcome feedback or suggestions for book reviews. Contact them via e-mail at: docholladay@juno.com or jwhager@surry.net

Study: People who attend church live longer

AUSTIN, Texas (RNS)—Live longer. Go to church.

A major study of church attendance and mortality reveals people who attend church weekly live an average of seven years longer than people who never attend services.

That seven-year gap is similar to the difference in life expectancies between men and women and between blacks and whites. Among black people studied, the gulf was even wider, with the life expectancy at age 20 for those who regularly attend church being 60.1 more years (that is, living to age 80), compared with 46.4 more years (age 66) for those who never attend church.

"Something's going on here," said Robert Hummer of the Population Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. The findings by Hummer and three other sociologists were presented at the joint meeting of the Religious Research Association

and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.

Several previous studies have uncovered a positive link between religion and physical and mental health. Previously, however little research existed on the national level comparing religious activity with mortality.

In the new study, researchers began with a sample of 22,080 people interviewed in their homes in 1987 as part of a cancer risk factor survey conducted by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The study data are based on 2,016 people from the federal survey who were identified as having died from 1987 to 1995 by matching respondents with the National Death Index.

Researchers found the life expectancy of people who had reported they never attended church was 55.3 years beyond age 20, compared with 61.9 years for people who attended services once a week and 62.9 for people

who attended more than once a week.

"Our life expectancy estimates ... indicate that religious attendance differences in mortality are similar in magnitude to those of sex and race," researchers said.

Some of the gap might be explained by churches' tendency to discourage unhealthy behaviors such as drinking or smoking, researchers said. Also, the social ties promoted by church attendance contribute to a network of people that help monitor members' health.

One suggestion for further study is to see whether worship attendance decreases stress and helps church members cope with illness.

Kenneth Pargament, a sociologist at Bowling Green (Ohio) State University who studies the relation between religion and health, praised the report. "This kind of data underscores the power of religion, not only for their psychological well-being, but their physical well-being."

Census Bureau finds single fatherhood on the increase

WASHINGTON (RNS)—The number of single fathers has grown 25 percent in the past three years, the U.S. Census Bureau reported.

Experts said the trend could be attributed to an increasing tendency of men to seek and get custody and a greater willingness by adoption agencies to consider single people as parents.

"It's quite amazing," said Lynne

Casper, a demographer and co-writer of the new report.

In 1998, fathers account for one in six single parents, the Washington Post reported. In the last three years, the total of single-parent families headed by fathers has grown from 1.7 million to 2.1 million. Currently, there are 9.8 million single mothers.

Single-parent families increased in the past three years, accounting now

for 27 percent of all families with children, the report states.

Researchers say children raised by single parents—male or female—have a greater risk of suffering emotional problems, dropping out of school or getting into legal trouble. But statistics indicate single fathers might have some significant advantages over single mothers, such as higher incomes.

Number of abortion providers decreasing, according to study

NEW YORK (RNS)—The number of facilities offering abortions dropped 14 percent between 1992 and 1996. The number of abortion providers is close to a third fewer than at their peak level in 1982, an Alan Guttmacher Institute study has found.

The research provides definitive evidence that the drop in the total of hospitals, doctors' offices and clinics where abortions are performed is accelerating, the Washington Post reported. As of 1996, that number stood at 2,042.

Reasons cited for the drop include picketing and violence by abortion opponents, which has led to the deaths of clinic staffers and doctors in a few cases.

In addition, changes in health care, including the decrease in the number of doctors being trained to perform abortions, the move of providers out of rural areas and the referrals of patients to specialized clinics, have contributed to the decline. Ninety-one percent of abortions are performed in such clinics.

"If you live in a rural area of Mississippi, you have very few choices of providers; the distances become larger," said Jeannie Rosoff, president of the New York-based Guttmacher Institute, which conducts research on reproductive issues.

Across the country, there has been a sharp decrease in the total number of hospitals where abortions are available, attributed in part to the merger of Roman Catholic and secular institutions.

The U.S. abortion rate has been decreasing as the abortion facilities close. Abortion opponents, such as Laura Echevarria of the National Right to Life Committee, said minds are being changed. "People have become much more educated about abortion," said Echevarria, the Washington-based group's media relations director. "They are rejecting it."

PEOPLE

PRAYER PARTNERS

Please pray for these people and projects which are part of Kentucky Baptists' partnership with Baptists in Poland, Tanzania and New England:

■ Praise God for the growth of the church in Dodoma, Tanzania, started by missionary Lynn Burrows about five years ago. Today, the church averages 100 people.

■ Missionary children Aaron and Annika Sacco who will travel from the States to spend the holidays with their parents Mack and Linda Sacco in Poland.

■ Holiday outreach activities hosted by missionaries Mark and Susie Edworthy in Warsaw, Poland. Edworthy will speak at several neighborhood Christmas parties; Mrs. Edworthy will host a women's tea and craft day for the community.

■ Doug and Marcy Shaw, church planters in Rzeszow, Poland, as they work toward starting five churches in 1999.

■ Students at Arusha Seminary in Tanzania as they study to become strong church leaders in East Africa.

■ Patrick and Cynthia Brunson in language school in Tanzania.

Mountains to the Mississippi

Compiled by Shirley Wooton

■ **BEREA**—Berea Church will host a Christmas Eve service at 11 p.m. Special music begins at 10:30 p.m.

■ **BETHLEHEM**—The churches of the Bethlehem community in Henry County will present their annual living nativity scene near state Highway 22, Dec. 22-25, 6:30 p.m.

■ **CAMPBELLSVILLE**—Campbellsville Church will have a candle lighting service with scriptures and carols Dec. 23 at 7 p.m.

■ **ELIZABETHTOWN**—Severns Valley Church will host a Christmas Eve candlelight service of music, and the Lord's Supper at 6 p.m.

■ **ELKTON**—Elkton Church will host a Christmas Eve candlelight communion service at 5 p.m.

■ **HARLAN**—Harlan Church will host a Christmas Eve service at 10 p.m.

■ **LAWRENCEBURG**—Alton

Missionary dies

SWITZER—William Claxon, an emeritus Southern Baptist missionary to Ghana, Nigeria and Benin, died Dec. 7. He was 83.

A native of Switzer, Claxon and his wife, Emma, were appointed missionaries to Ghana in 1948. After serving a year in general evangelism, they transferred to Nigeria, where he served as an evangelist and pastor and, from 1962 to 1965, as acting missions and evangelism secretary for the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

In 1970 they became the first Southern Baptist missionaries to serve in Benin. They retired in 1981. Claxon was a graduate of Georgetown College and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He is survived by his wife; daughter Carol Ann Polsgrove of Bloomington, Ind.; son William Neville Claxon Jr. of Aiken, S.C.; and three grandchildren.

Church will host Christmas Eve services at 5:30 p.m. and 11 p.m.

■ **LOUISVILLE**—Broadway Church recently honored Associate Pastor **Lloyd Storment** for 10 years of ministry at Broadway.

Buechel Park Church will host a Christmas Eve Lord's Supper service at 6 p.m. **Bruce Hardy** is pastor.

Crescent Hill Church will host a candlelight Christmas Eve service of lessons and carols, featuring harpist **Carol McClure** at 5:30 p.m. For information, call (502) 896-4425.

Fern Creek Church will present a Christmas Candlelight Drama Dec. 27 at 6:30 p.m. A watch night service will be Dec. 31 at 9 p.m.

Hurstbourne Church's Family Christmas Service will be Dec. 23, 6 p.m., and a candlelight Christmas Eve service of the Lord's Supper and carols will be at 11 p.m.

Jeffersonton Church will host a Christmas Eve Service at 10 p.m.

Lakewood Church called **Tim Merrill** as minister to families. Merrill graduated from Southern Seminary recently. **Lee Warf** is pastor.

Lyndon Church will host a Christmas Eve candlelight communion service at 6 p.m.

Middletown First Church will host

a Christmas Eve candlelight service at 6 p.m.

Ralph Avenue Church will host a Christmas Eve service at 6 p.m.

■ **MAGNOLIA**—Magnolia Church will host a Christmas Eve candlelight Communion service at 5 p.m.

■ **ONEIDA**—Oneida Church will rededicate its remodeled church building Jan. 9. For information, call (606) 847-4718. **Steve Crumpler** is pastor.

■ **OWENSBORO**—Bellevue Church will host a Christmas Eve candlelight Communion service at 5 p.m.

■ **VERSAILLES**—Versailles Church has begun an Hispanic worship service. **Pedro Sayago** is the worship leader. Services are Sundays at 11 a.m. **John Brandon** is pastor.

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CLASSIFIED ADS

WANTED: Experienced music minister for rapidly growing Baptist church (400 average attendance). Traditional music. Experienced in leading choirs and congregational singing. Send resumé to: Mt. Elmira Baptist Church, 3644 Mt. Elmira Road, Shepherdsville, KY 40165, Attn: Pastor.

FOR SALE: Sharp GMC coach. One-owner, air-conditioned, rest-room, automatic, Detroit Diesel. Very well maintained. See to appreciate. Asking \$46,000. Can be seen in Lexington at Northside RV. For information, call (606) 278-7224.

SEEKING: Full-time minister of music for Unity Baptist Church. Send resumé to: 2320 29th St., Ashland, KY 41101.

SEEKING: Audubon Baptist Church is currently seeking a part-time minister to children. The church seeks a mature Christian who is committed to children's ministry; experience preferred. Interested persons should send a resumé to: Audubon Baptist Church, 1046 Hess Lane, Louisville, KY 40217, Attn: Personnel Committee, or call the church office at (502) 635-6750.

SEEKING: Children's ministry director, part-time (20-25 hours weekly). Primary responsibilities include planning and coordination of the children's ministry, birth-grade 6. This person should have a passion for children. Helpful spiritual gifts include administration, leadership and encouragement. Please forward resumé by Jan. 17, 1999, to: Personnel Committee, c/o Erlanger Baptist Church, 116 Commonwealth Ave., Erlanger, KY 41018.

SEEKING: Accepting resumé for full-time minister of music/youth. Parsonage included. Send resumé to: First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 400, Lepanto, Arkansas 72354, Attn: pastor. E-mail inquiries accepted at GWD@eritter.net.

FOR SALE: 1980-model MCI-9 47-passenger coach. Nearly new engine with Allison automatic. Excellent condition. Asking \$44,000. For pictures or information, call (606) 278-7224.

FOR SALE: Minolta copier, AB Dick duplicator. Ideal for church setting. Lyndon Baptist, (502) 425-7150.

FOR SALE: Brass bed, pillow top, queen, new, in original plastic, mattress never used, frame too, has warranty. Sacrifice \$350. Phone: (502) 566-6540.

SEEKING: WMU associate for youth and college. Position requires knowledge of WMU; commitment to missions education; master's degree; experience with youth. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. In order to be given full consideration, applications should be received by Jan. 15. Send resumé with references to: Personnel Committee, Kentucky Woman's Missionary Union, P.O. Box 436569, Louisville, KY 40253.

SEEKING: Rapidly growing church in Paducah area seeks full-time minister of music/youth. Interested applicants should send resumé to: Personnel Committee, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, 9701 Blandville Road, West Paducah, KY 42086.

SEEKING: Full-time pastor, Frenchburg Baptist Church, Frenchburg, Ky. Please send resumé to: James Ligon, HCR 66, Box 90, Wellington, KY 40387.

SEEKING: High Point Baptist Church of Mayfield, Ky., is accepting resumé for a part-time minister of youth. Interested applicants should send resumé to: Minister of Youth Search Committee, High Point Baptist Church, 220 West Farthing St., Mayfield, KY 42066.

SEEKING: Victory Baptist Church of Lexington, Ky., is seeking a full-time senior pastor. Please send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, Victory Baptist Church, 2261 Armstrong Mill Road, Lexington, KY 40515.

FOR SALE: Beautiful 21-25 passenger mini-coach. Ford chassis with air suspension, overhead AC, rear luggage compartment, like-new reclining seats, excellent mechanical condition. Asking \$22,500. Call (606) 277-7391 or 278-7155 for photos or information.

FOR SALE: Update your sound system. Two Electrovoice-interface audio mixing consoles, 32-channel modular. List \$16,500 each; asking \$4,900 each. Jim Cottrell, Severns Valley Baptist, (502) 765-7822, 862-9586.

Marked men

Christians bare arms, and other body parts, to declare their faith

By David Briggs
Cleveland Plain Dealer

WICKLIFFE, Ohio (RNS)—Exit the drunken sailor and lovesick adolescent. There is a new gang of marked men and women in tattoo parlor lore: evangelical Christians.

More than a millennium after church authorities condemned tattooing as "a form of devilry" that disfigured the body, a new generation of evangelical youth are permanently altering their bodies with images of crosses, sacred hearts and angels.

From the "modern skin art" of Finest Lines in Wickliffe, Ohio, to joints like Sid's Tattoo Parlor in Santa Ana, Calif., where all four artists are conservative Christians, Generation Xers are transforming a cultural fad into distinctive statements of faith.

Already, religious scholars are taking notice.

"For a small but growing subculture within evangelical Christianity, religious tattooing is becoming an increasingly legitimate expression of individuality, identity and faith," sociologists from the University of Southern California and Biola University said in a paper presented at the recent meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.

At Finest Lines, just down the street from St. Mary Seminary, tattoo artist Joe Mona said he might have done one or two religious tattoos a year a decade ago. In the last six months, he has done 50, he said.

"It's unbelievably popular these days," Mona said. "The religious aspect ... is taking off tremendously."

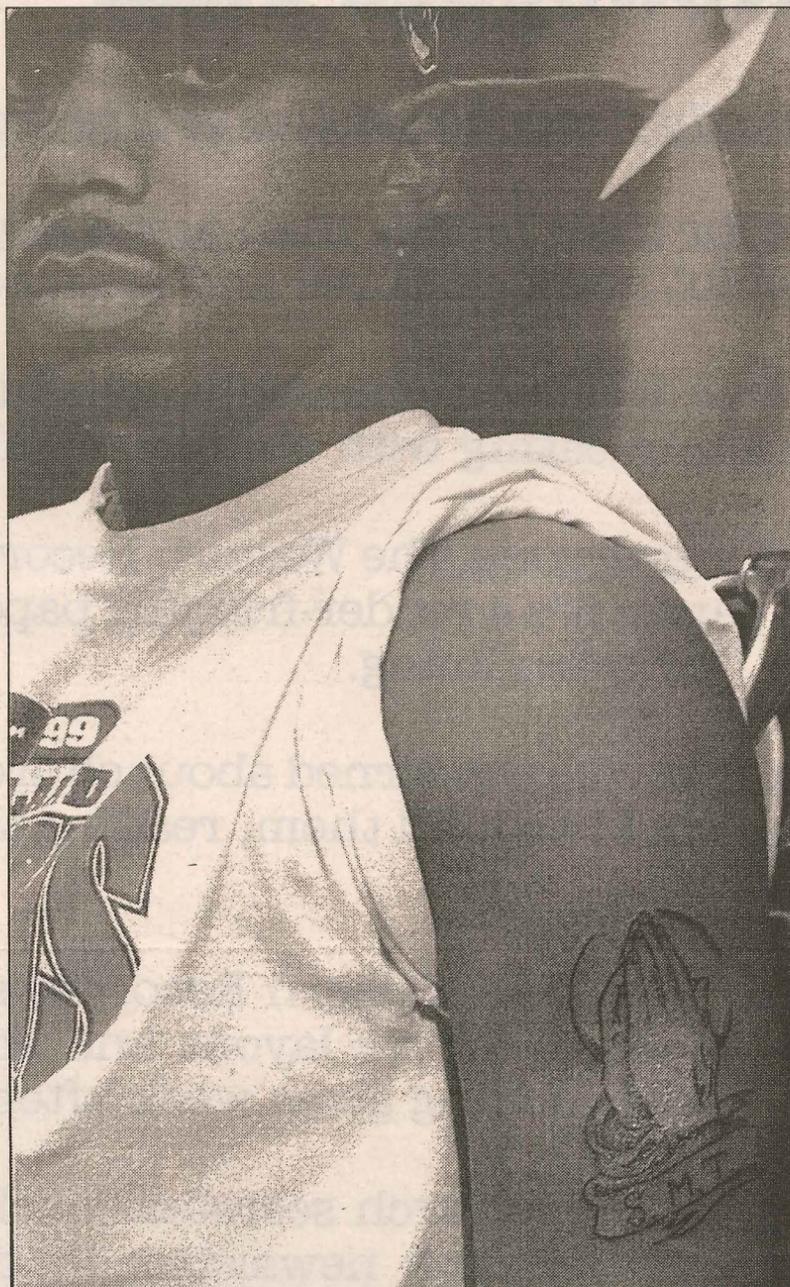
On a recent weekday morning, Brian Berry of Warrensville Heights, Ohio, walked into Finest Lines to get his first tattoo. Instead of a dragon or death skull, the 23-year-old Baptist in a muscle shirt chose a pair of praying hands with the initials "S.M.T."—short for "see me through"—carved below.

"I feel that prayer is a strong need in most people's lives, especially my life," Berry said as he waited for his tattoo. "By having hands on me, I will always have something about prayer on my body."

Operating out of the theological principle that the body is the "temple of the Holy Spirit," conservative Christian churches often set limits on bodily expressions, from "dirty dancing" to hair length to the acceptability of jewelry or makeup.

On the subject of tattooing, the Bible sends mixed messages, researchers Lori Jensen and Donald Miller of Southern California and Richard Flory of Biola noted in their study, "Marked for Jesus: Sacred Tattooing Among a 'New Generation' of Evangelicals."

The 19th chapter of Leviticus gives this divine mandate: "Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks



SHOW OFF Brian Berry sports a recent tattoo designed to show the world his faith. "By having hands on me, I will always have something about prayer on my body." The letters "S.M.T." stand for "see me through." A recent study found tattoos a growing phenomenon among evangelical Christians. (RNS photo)

on yourselves."

Yet in his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul says, "Let no one cause me trouble, because I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." Other biblical passages from Exodus to Revelation describe divine symbols being placed on the bodies of believers.

Since the Emperor Constantine banned the practice in the third century because it "violated God's handiwork," attempts by religious authorities to prohibit the practice have met with limited success. Pilgrims to Jerusalem up until modern times marked themselves with Christian symbols to commemorate their journey, researchers said.

The surge toward tattooing among evangelical youth is seen as part of a larger movement of growing evangelical churches welcoming youth in cultural settings they are comfortable with, from adding rock 'n' roll musical styles to worship to relaxing dress codes.

Instead of looking to religious representations displayed on the stained glass windows of the local church,

members of this new generation of evangelicals find meaning inscribing images on their own "private temple of the Holy Spirit," Jensen, Flory and Miller state.

"As a symbol of identity and individuality, an extreme expression of an extreme faith, religious tattooing among young evangelical Christians embodies—literally—their beliefs in a new and radical way," researchers said.

Jensen said when she would ask evangelical youth why they were getting tattooed, "A lot of them were like, 'I have my faith and this is a very strong expression of my faith, a permanent commitment.'"

A doctoral student at Southern California, Jensen is not only a tattoo researcher but a client.

She got her first tattoo at age 21 at the urging of a boyfriend. Now she has religious tattoos on various parts of her body.

"For me, it is very much a public symbol of my beliefs," said Jensen, 24. "For me, it is a form of expression."

Church's Internet class linking congregation with community

CLEWISTON, Fla. (BP)—First Baptist Church of Clewiston, Fla., is reaching people through the Internet, but not the way you might imagine.

People are coming to church to learn how to reap the benefits—while avoiding the dangers—of the Internet. Many who attend the eight-week "Internet for Families" seminar are unchurched and are introduced to Christianity and the church's ministry.

The seminar offers information about e-mail, browsing, searching, downloading and updating in addition to help protecting one's family from the less wholesome features of the Internet.

Pastor Ken Reaves wrote the materials and teaches the seminar. His associate, Terry Willett, came up with the idea. "Our pastor is known as a computer guru. He has the unique mix of knowing ministry well and knowing computers well. I kept bugging him to teach a class on the Internet during our Discipleship Training time."

Reaves reluctantly agreed, and the church placed a small ad in the local weekly paper. The day after the ad appeared, 22 people called the church office to sign up. Sixty-four showed up for the first session. By week two, enrollment had reached 101, with an average attendance of 76.

The seminar helped open the church's ministry to the community. Unchurched parents brought their children to the church's music and Discipleship Training classes. One couple learned the youth were studying "True Love Waits" materials on teen sexual abstinence at the same time and brought their teenagers the next Wednesday. Some came early and visited the Wednesday night worship service, while others visited on Sunday. Still others have e-mailed Reaves, asking for prayer for themselves or for a friend.

One family asked questions about what it means to become a Christian and join the church. Others expressed interest in Sunday school, the women's ministry, vacation Bible school and the ongoing ministry to youth and children.

More than half the seminar's participants were not members of the church.

"The response far exceeded anything any of us expected," Reaves said, "especially for a town of less than 10,000." Because of its success, the church started a second seminar in April. This fall, they offered an "Internet for Kids" class.

Reaves admitted the success caught him off guard. "We've followed up on those who attended the first two seminars, and this fall we were better prepared to minister to those who attend."

"One of the reasons 'Internet for Families' is for adults is because we spend a whole session talking very candidly about the dangers that the Internet poses to families," Reaves said. "We show them how to protect themselves and their families." Another session is devoted to protecting personal privacy and protecting equipment from viruses.

An explanation of Christianity also is included in the seminar. In the next-to-last session, Reaves demonstrates how to use all the skills learned in the seminar by doing an on-line Bible study. By the end of that hour, everyone in the room has heard what it means to be a Christian in a non-threatening way. "We haven't had a single objection to what we've done."

Others have heard about the seminar and are interested in hosting seminars in their churches. Reaves already has several churches ready to pilot the materials.

The seminar has provided the church with another entry point for the community, Willett said.

"People who wouldn't normally come near a church are coming," Willett said. "Several now see our church as relevant, one which makes a difference in their everyday lives. Not only are Christians learning how to use their computers, but many non-Christians are getting exposed to the church and Christ. It's very exciting."

This story originally appeared in SBC Life, the magazine of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee.

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