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KENTUCKY--Twin couples celebrate 50 years of family ties.
ILLINOIS--Church's 'missions garden' produces crops & ministry.
ALABAMA--Pastor's help -- & prayer -- save driver from burning car.
ECUADOR--He lost the presidency, then gained a brother.
OREGON--New Yorker-in-Oregon's ministry: 'love people' to 'preach Jesus.'
OREGON--Catholic's salvation yielded new marriage, Baptist leader.
KENTUCKY--He says cancer can't alter who he really is in Christ.

**Twin couples celebrate
50 years of family ties**

By Joyce Sweeney Martin

**Baptist Press
8/8/96**

SHELBY COUNTY, Ky. (BP)--When the children of Kenneth and Anna Mae Ashby and Bobby and Barbara Ashby planned their parents' golden wedding anniversaries in June, they knew the four would want to celebrate together.

After all, "together" best describes how they have lived these past 50 years.

The story begins in 1946 when the Ashby twins of Shelbyville, Ky., began to get serious about the Edington sisters, and an aunt of the twins suggested a double wedding.

So, together, the identical twins bought identical wedding rings. Together, they furnished twin apartments in their parents' country home. And on June 8, 1946, together, they cleaned up their 1945 farm jeep, decorated it with roses, drove 40 miles from Shelbyville to Louisville with their "intendeds" and were married in their pastor's seminary apartment.

The next morning, together, they worshiped in a Louisville church.

"Together" defined the next 14 years as the two tenant farmers and their growing families moved three times, always choosing to live in the same house and work the same farm.

They owned appliances jointly. They shared a dining room, living room and parlor. They kept joint farm, automobile and gasoline accounts. The mail came marked simply, "The Ashbys."

They attended Buffalo Lick Baptist Church together.

And together, they were featured in a February 1956 Home Life magazine article titled, "Two Can Live as Happily as One."

During those years, "everything was together," according to Lowell Ashby, son of Kenneth and Anna Mae Ashby and business division director for the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

And as children came along, each couple disciplined the other's offspring, Lowell Ashby said. "It was one big extended family," which meant "we couldn't get away with anything. All of us children had two daddies and two mommies."

In fact, the families blended so completely schoolteachers often thought the six cousins were brothers and sisters, he said. Cousins Wayne Ashby and Mark Ashby, born three months apart in 1960, were often taken to be twins.

And the fact that "everybody in Shelby County knew the Ashby twins" served to keep the reins on the children as they grew up, Lowell Ashby recalled. "We didn't want to spoil the reputation of our family."

Amazingly, the families never did have any squabbles, Kenneth Ashby said in a June 1996 interview with the Shelbyville Sentinel-News.

"There was always a lot of laughter and a lot of love," Lowell Ashby said. While they all worked hard and shared equally in the farm chores, the two families always found time to go to a ballgame or to visit an invalid grandmother on Sunday afternoon, he said.

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And, most importantly, the parents laid the foundation for solid Christian faith and tight family values, he said. They taught their children there was work for them to do in the church.

It wasn't until 1960, when each couple had three children, that the two families moved into separate houses.

But that move didn't diminish the family ties, Lowell Ashby said. Today, five of the six children live in Shelby County between Bagdad and Simpsonville, and the sixth lives in Bowling Green.

And until three years ago, when the number of family members topped 30, the two families spent Christmas Eve together.

"It didn't seem like Christmas when we weren't together, so we may have to find a place big enough so we can be together on Christmas Eve again," Lowell Ashby said.

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Church's 'missions garden' produces crops & ministry

By Ferrell Foster

Baptist Press
8/8/96

EFFINGHAM, Ill. (BP)--Children, teenagers and adults are reaping a harvest -- beans, peppers, onions, zucchini and at least 10 other crops in their "missions garden" in Effingham, Ill.

Gaylen Altman, a member of Calvary Baptist Church, came up with the idea. Pastor Mike Anthony took it to the church council. The church's youth missions organizations endorsed it. This past spring the children and teenagers went to work planting and caring for the garden. Now the adults are helping with the harvest.

Produce and flowers from the 80-by-80-foot garden are being given to the church's food pantry, along with a local senior center and Catholic Charities.

Altman, a former children's Sunday school teacher, said the Lord "laid it on my heart" after he noticed how little the children knew about gardens. "Most kids didn't know what things were," Altman said.

Later, in a public relations class at college, he had to write a paper about "something you could do for the public that could benefit as many people as possible." He used his idea of a missions garden.

Pastor Anthony said the project has been well received in the church and community. He noted three benefits: the children have gotten experience in a garden; they are now enjoying the fruit of hard labor; and giving the produce has provided a ministry to people in need.

The project fit well with church's Girls in Action, Royal Ambassadors and Mission Friends organizations, Anthony said. It has taught the kids about "being missionaries, as well as learning about missionaries."

Donations helped make the project work. Church members gave hoes, shovels and rakes. Local retailers provided most of the seeds. And the city of Effingham allowed the church to use the property, which is across the street from the church's building.

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Pastor's help -- & prayer -- save driver from burning car

By Jennifer Davis

Baptist Press
8/8/96

GARDENDALE, Ala. (BP)--If the "Rescue 911" television crew had been on Interstate 59 east of Birmingham, Ala., on July 14, they would have captured another stirring rescue for their viewers. This time, however, Jesus Christ would have been credited.

Just after sunset on that Sunday evening, with the rains from Hurricane Bertha coming down hard, Steve Gaines, pastor of First Baptist Church, Gardendale, Ala., and his family were returning home from a two-week vacation when they found themselves in a thick cloud of smoke as they approached Birmingham. An automobile had slid into a guard rail on the left side of the road and had exploded. The driver had been knocked unconscious and was slumped over the steering wheel, Gaines said.

One attempted rescue had already taken place. A man had opened the driver's door and cut the seat belt, but the driver's foot was lodged between the brake and gas pedals.

With their anxious wives looking on, Gaines and another man made a second rescue attempt. "All we could see was a man about to be burned to death, and we had to at least try to save him."

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Pulling relentlessly without a budge from the unconscious driver, Gaines and the other man had to drop the victim and run from the car when the driver and his clothes began to burn.

A passing truck driver tossed his fire extinguisher to a bystander. Gaines tried again.

"We ran to the car knowing we had about one minute to get him out of the car," he said. "There would be no more chances."

Gaines prayed, "Dear Jesus, get this man out of this car! Lord, I ask you in Jesus' name to free his foot!"

Just seconds before the windshield blew out, sending fragments of glass everywhere, the driver's foot popped out from under the pedals, sending the two rescuers on their backs in the mud with the smoldering driver in their hands.

The driver was out of the car, but everyone thought he was dead. "I could not believe God had pulled him out of that car for him to die in the pouring-down rain," Gaines said. He laid his hands on the man's charred body and prayed, "Father, I ask you in the name of Jesus to let this man live and to make him breathe right now in Jesus' name!"

Immediately, the man's body jumped and he began to breathe, Gaines said. At just that moment, a nurse pulled up to help. A doctor showed up on the scene next and helped also. Paramedics took the man named David to the University of Alabama-Birmingham medical facility in Birmingham.

When Gaines and his wife, Donna, visited David in the hospital still in critical condition, they were able to share with David's family how Jesus had pulled him from the fire and had literally given him breath.

"As I stood by his hospital bed, and looked at his swollen face, I thanked the Lord for saving David and for letting me see it happen," Gaines recounted.

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He lost the presidency, then gained a brother

**Baptist Press
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AMBATO, Ecuador (BP)--He was nominated and elected. But then he testified himself out of the post. Still, for Angel, a prestigious banker in Ambato, Ecuador, a city of 150,000, the ultimate result was joyous.

A member of Ambato's Ficoa Baptist Church, Angel was swiftly elected by acclamation after being nominated for president of one of the city's community service groups.

Before accepting the post, however, Angel asked to address the group to state what kind of president he would be.

He gave his Christian testimony and said that under his leadership there would be no more liquor served at the community service group's parties and no dancing.

Immediately, two other men were nominated for president and one of them was elected. Angel received only two votes.

After the meeting was over, Angel was approached by another member of the group, who said he was intrigued by what Angel had said. The man confessed his life was a mess and he wanted the relationship with God that Angel had talked about. Angel then led the man in professing faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, gaining a brother in Christ.

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Based on a report in the August 1996 issue of The Commission, magazine of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, by Cathy Zwink, an International Service Corps worker in Cuenca, Ecuador.

New Yorker-in-Oregon's ministry: 'love people' to 'preach Jesus'

By Karen L. Willoughby

**Baptist Press
8/8/96**

GRANTS PASS, Ore. (BP)--Perhaps only a person from New York City would understand Oregon pastor Charles Didato's instinctive urge to network, to make deals, to share his space.

"It's not such a great talent that I have, but I just love people and let the Lord use me," said the Brooklyn-born Didato, pastor at College Heights Baptist Church, Grants Pass, in southwest Oregon.

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Head Start uses College Heights' educational space during the week. Seventh-day Adventists use the worship center and some educational space on Saturdays. And the church brings in people from the downtown Pentecostal rescue mission to worship on Sundays.

"I'm the only pastor in Kiwanis, with all the city leaders," Didato said. "That's my only vice. I'm there every week."

College Heights was averaging 35 people in Sunday morning worship when Didato, with his wife Cookie, came to Grants Pass in 1986. The church was \$67,000 in debt.

Attendance averages 175 today and, despite adding on a sizeable second education wing, College Heights is debt-free.

"We did this ourselves," Didato said, referring to the 24,000-square-foot, two-story building connected by a covered walkway to other educational space. "The only thing done by outside people was the plumbing and electricity," he said, then rethinking, "That's not true. The electrician joined the church."

College Heights baptized 68 people the first year Didato was pastor. It has been listed among the top 10 churches in the Northwest Baptist Convention nine of the last 10 years.

"We have a witnessing team who go out and visit," Didato said. "We'll pick an area and they'll saturate it, give a Good News Bible and a survey card, various things like that."

"I do it like a new car dealer," the pastor continued. "The team reports back that they have four solid leads out of 20 visits. I like to make sure I'm the one who does the closing. I'm very guarded about who comes into our church."

The government-sponsored Head Start program for disadvantaged 4- and 5-year-olds got in after satisfying Didato that he could have final approval over anything they put on the walls or used in their curriculum. That was six years ago, and only one book -- on evolution -- didn't pass muster.

"Our church in a sense has adopted them," Didato said. "Ninety percent of the children are from single-parent homes. We provide a pantry and they know, whatever you need, go take it."

Often there will be loaves of bread for parents waiting when they pick up their children. At Christmas, there will be toys and, during the Christmas party, the pastor tells the Christmas story.

"Nothing we have is offensive to them," Didato said. "They've been here six years and want a 10-year lease."

Head Start holds its regional meetings in the church's brick-walled worship center on which Christian banners hang. In addition to its tax-free lease payment, Head Start also pays 65 percent of the church's utilities. Every room Head Start uses is attractively decorated and has child-size tables and chairs provided by the program. Every other year they paint the entire interior they use, even hallways and rest rooms. They supply all the soap and toilet paper at College Heights. Head Start even installed a commercial kitchen and maintains it to health department standards.

"We've had absolutely no problems," Didato said, then added, "It's amazing to watch the children in here. I think this is the best program the government has done."

Seventh-day Adventists have been using College Heights' facilities more than three years. At first they talked about buying their own property, but by this time the arrangement has become comfortable for both congregations, Didato said.

"The only disadvantage is that I can't do Saturday morning weddings but they're out of here by 1," Didato said. He has preached for them many times and has led 48 of them (and 120 from College Heights) through the popular "Experiencing God" discipleship course.

"We've got good material and we've got to share it," said Didato, who has studied Adventist beliefs to better relate to them. "I can deal with it when I know what they believe."

What he believes differs some from what Pentecostals believe, but that didn't stop him from making friends with the director of that group's rescue mission near downtown Grants Pass.

Now, he leads three Bible studies and two worship services each week at the mission, and some mission residents have joined College Heights church.

"You need to reach out," Didato said. "You can't stay in your little shell. I'm not a Baptist who believes we are the only ones exclusively going to heaven."

"My feeling is that denominations are side streets leading to the highway to heaven," Didato said. "We need to be respectful of the side streets other than Baptists'."

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The mission is College Heights' source for food in its own outreach, Didato said as he stood in a well-stocked pantry of staples. Last Christmas he was given 20 turkeys and 200 pounds of potatoes that went into food baskets distributed by the church.

Christmas Day brings the four entities together. People from the mission conduct the service that is attended by Head Start children and their parents, mission residents, Seventh-day Adventists and College Heights members.

"It's just people who love the Lord, coming together," Didato said with a grin. "I love what I'm doing. I preach Jesus, and that's the end of it."

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**Catholic's salvation yielded
new marriage, Baptist leader**

By Karen L. Willoughby

**Baptist Press
8/8/96**

GRANTS PASS, Ore. (BP)--Where did Charles Didato come from, besides Brooklyn?

He was administrator of records in 1973 at the Hanford Nuclear Power Plant in Kennewick, south-central Washington.

A self-confessed workaholic, his marriage was faltering.

"I was a Catholic, but I didn't want to go to a priest," Didato said. "What would they know about marital problems?"

He looked in the telephone directory for a Baptist church, and six weeks later, Didato accepted the Lord. Within a year, he was called to preach and quit his \$40,000-a-year job for a \$37.50 per week Baptist pastorate that he supplemented with a Presbyterian pastorate.

"Coming to know the Lord brought our marriage a new life and a new meaning," Didato said. "My wife (Cookie) and I were baptized together at Kennewick Baptist Church. During my years in the pastorate, she has been a tremendous help. She has taught every grade and age of class and has been supportive no matter what area of the ministry I have endeavored to go into.

"Even with our four children, she worked every day, helping put me through seminary," Didato added. "Today she teaches a mixed adult Sunday school class and together we have eight grandchildren.

Three years after he started pastoring, "A man from Alabama said 'You're a good preacher but you need more tools,'" Didato said. "Kennewick Baptist took up an offering to get us to New Orleans" Baptist Theological Seminary in 1976.

While there, he was the first chaplain at the New Orleans racetrack and pastor of a Mississippi church.

After graduation in 1979, he was called to a pastorate in Prosser, Wash., and then in 1986, to College Heights Baptist Church, Grants Pass, Ore.

"We're going to rely on the Word of God to take care of our church," Didato said, noting the church's constitution is the Bible. "There are no generals here. We're all privates. We all work."

Church programs include ministry at seven of the city's eight nursing homes each week. Paul Reid, 80, meanwhile, is deacon to the church's shut-ins.

The Vacation Bible School director starts work in November for a summer session that draws about 150 youngsters from the area, many of whom are unchurched.

And there are Bible study, ministry and missions programs for all age levels.

Among the pastor's skills is an ability to generate income.

"I've learned to raise money a spoon at a time," Didato said. "For example, everybody has a piece of the (new) building. It was 25 cents for a nail and \$1 for a brick. I think the New Yorker in me came out."

He preaches "strictly expository," Didato said. He's working through the Sermon on the Mount during the morning services and Romans at night.

"America's problems are in its pulpits," Didato said. "Preachers preaching sermonettes to christianettes. The gospel is like a claw hammer. It'll drive you from it or draw you to it.

"I enjoy myself in the pulpit," he continued. "I love what I'm doing. I love my people. If a pastor doesn't love his people, he ought to get out."

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**He says cancer can't alter
who he really is in Christ**

By Jon Walker

CADIZ, Ky. (BP)--Dan Stone would not want to be remembered for his circumstances. Forget that he has cancer. Forget that just a few years ago his wife died of cancer. Stone would have you remember, instead, the God who lifts him above his temporal circumstances to his true life in Christ.

"When we try to construct a life, even one that is Christlike, we are meant to fail because it can't be done in our own power," said Stone, who has undergone chemotherapy for a year. "But we actually succeed by failing, by realizing we're inadequate. That's when God can move in and live life through us."

This sense of connectedness allowed Stone to see God at work in his life, even as his wife was dying of cancer. Stone was an itinerant Bible teacher, traveling the country in faith. One day he sensed God telling him to radically alter the focus of his ministry.

"It was as if God were saying, 'You can still have your Bible teaching ministry, if you want it, but I'm no longer in it,'" Stone said. "The conclusion I came to was, 'God, if you're not in it, then I'm not in it.'"

So, confused but obedient, Stone accepted a position as assistant to Tom Corts, president of Samford University, Birmingham, Ala. Just a few days before starting at Samford, Stone's wife, Barbara, was diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

"Here we were confronted with something completely and totally unexpected," Stone said. "Yet we saw God working, and I thought, 'Oh, Lord, I see why you changed my whole direction!' I realized God was not surprised by the news of Barbara's cancer."

By being obedient to God, Stone was now in a position to stay by Barbara's side, rather than traveling the country.

There were more provisions from God: On his first day at work, Stone was told his health insurance would cover all pre-existing conditions, including Barbara's cancer. Also, the University of Alabama-Birmingham, as part of an experimental program on ovarian cancer, accepted Barbara into their program. She had access to treatment offered to only 500 women nationwide.

"I am grateful to God and to Samford," said Stone. "Oswald Chambers says, 'God engineers all your circumstances.' Not just the good; you can manage the good. He's in the difficult. That's where he gets your attention. That's where you do business with him."

Stone retired from Samford in 1992, and spent the next seven months giving full attention to Barbara's needs. After she died, Stone, who now lives in Cadiz, Ky., sensed God giving him a green light to travel as a Bible teacher again. But just as he was returning to a full calendar, he was diagnosed with colon cancer.

"So I asked, 'What's this all about, God?'" Stone recounted. "'I'm free to travel. I'm finally given a green light. What is this?'" After a few hours of anxiousness, Stone sensed God saying: "Nothing's changed. I have loved you. I am loving you. I will continue to love you."

"But how does this fit in the plan you've given me for my life?" Stone asked, and he sensed God telling him, "You'll get everything done that I have for you to do."

"I'll need to be reminded from time to time, knowing that this cancer will affect my body -- but it cannot affect who I really am: whole and complete in Christ," Stone said.

Trouble is the most valuable thing you can experience next to God himself, provided it turns you to him, Stone said.

A friend recently approached Stone, telling him she was praying for his healing. He pondered her prayer and went back to tell her: "Thank you for your loving concern, but I don't want to miss anything God has planned for me and others through this experience. So pray that the Lord's will be done in my life."

Since receiving treatment, Stone's cancer has gone into full remission. He is healthy and back on the road teaching.

"When we ask for meaning, we sometimes wonder if we're outside God's will somehow," Stone said. "And we hear God's reply, 'No child, you're not outside of my will, but you gave me your life to do as I pleased.'"

"So I did," Stone said. "So be it."

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