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**Ark. anti-gambling effort
to seek 250,000 new voters**

By Russell N. Dilday

**Baptist Press
8/23/96**

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--Following a successful petition drive for a proposed amendment to outlaw all gambling in Arkansas, gambling opponents are setting their sights on registering 250,000 new voters to prepare for the November election.

Anti-gambling advocates also plan to hold 15 town hall meetings throughout the state to debate the gambling issue. Larry Page, executive director of the Christian Civic Action Committee, said he was notified Aug. 2 by the Arkansas secretary of state's office that the CCAC's petition had qualified for the Nov. 5 ballot.

The proposed amendment calls for all legalized gambling to be outlawed in the state, including existing gambling on thoroughbred racing at Oaklawn Park in Hot Springs and greyhound racing at Southland Park in West Memphis. The CCAC amendment also seeks to counter up to four proposed amendments aimed at legalizing casinos and state lotteries.

"Unlike the pro-gambling amendments, we qualified our amendment with only one submission of petitions," Page noted. "We turned in nearly 87,000 signatures and qualified almost 77,000 of those. That's a phenomenal rate of 90 percent.

"All the sponsors of the pro-gambling amendments fell short of the necessary number of valid signatures on their initial submissions and have had to submit additional signatures," Page continued. "They suffered disqualification of their signatures at rates up to 42 percent. And this, despite the fact that they paid canvassers handsomely to gather signatures -- up to \$5 for each signature."

Page said the "battle for ballot approval ... was a big battle," and that "God deserves all the glory for that win." He said gambling opponents "have reason to be encouraged" in other areas, too. "Recently, Gov. (Mike) Huckabee indicated that he would vote 'yes' on our amendment.

"Also, numerous newspapers have stated editorially that passage of our amendment was the wisest course of action in dealing with the numerous and confusing amendments to expand gambling," Page said.

Looking to the future of the battle over gambling, Page warned, "... we haven't won the war yet and we ... can't let up and lose the advantage of momentum that qualifying our amendment has gained us."

During an Aug. 15 news conference in the rotunda of the Arkansas State Capitol, Page highlighted "the next step" in the campaign. "The challenge before us now is to register our people to vote. If they aren't registered, there is no way they can participate.

"We are seeking to register 250,000 new voters in the state," he stated. "Many say that this can't be done. Those same people said in April and May and June that we wouldn't get more than 10,000 or 12,000 signatures on our petitions. They quit saying that in July.

"Voter registration has been made so simple by changes enacted by the legislature in 1995," he added. "A simple form is available free from the secretary of state. The form takes a minute or two to fill out and is designed to be mailed in. It can be sent to the secretary of state's office or dropped off at your county clerk's office."

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Emphasizing the need for Christians to "participate in the political process," Page said, "What is needed is for Christians to realize that while we are citizens of heaven, we are also citizens of this state and nation.

"We are responsible for the kind of laws that are enacted," he emphasized. "If we think our current laws are contrary to the Bible and run afoul of Judeo-Christian values, then we have every right under the Constitution to mobilize our people to go to the polls and vote in keeping with the values we cherish so highly."

Page urged local churches to participate in the voter registration drive. "If your church has an average attendance of less than 150, we would suggest that you set a goal of registering at least 25 new voters.

"For churches with an average attendance of 150 to 450, the suggested goal should be to register at least 50. For those churches with attendance in excess of 450, we would request that you seek to register at least 75 individuals."

He said Arkansans may call the secretary of state's office toll-free at 1-800-482-1127 or locally in Little Rock at 682-5070 "and request the number of forms you anticipate needing."

Page, along with CCAC gambling campaign coordinator Barry King, also unveiled during the news conference plans for a series of 15 town hall meetings and debates to be held across the state from Sept. 3 through Oct. 29.

"The purpose of the meetings," Page told reporters, "is to provide public forums in which those sponsoring the various proposed constitutional amendments involving gambling can have an opportunity to discuss the merits of their respective initiatives."

He added "precautions have been taken to preclude a 'home field' advantage for anyone. The meetings will be held at neutral sites and sponsored by nonsectarian groups. The meetings will include brief presentations followed by questions from members of the press and audience and limited debate."

Page indicated he had invited at least four prominent gambling promoters or their representatives to speak at the meetings. "We will not let them escape the scrutiny that their proposals deserve," he declared. "They must hold their promises and claims up to the light of truth."

"We'll be there. We've nothing to hide. We are anxious to present our case. ... We are quite comfortable with the truth," Page insisted. "Not so the other side. Don't be surprised if they find it convenient to duck these meetings."

He told reporters gambling opponents "look forward with great anticipation to these town hall meetings. We are anxious to engage the gambling promoters in debate. We know, beyond any doubt, that the exaggerated claims of the gambling promoters always end up as broken promises and empty dreams."

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**Threats over voter materials
called political intimidation**

By Dwayne Hastings

**Baptist Press
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WASHINGTON (BP)--Warnings to churches to avoid voter education materials are nothing more than election year posturing, according to some religious liberty advocates.

The suit filed by the Federal Election Commission alleging the Christian Coalition's violation of federal election statutes has begun to spill over to the local church as several organizations caution churches to stay clear of the Coalition's voter guides.

"We are writing to alert you of the serious threat to churches' tax-exempt charitable status that can be posed by ... distribution of such materials," stated a memo released by People for the American Way.

The memo alleged distribution of the Christian Coalition voter guides is an engagement in "political campaign activity" forbidden for tax-exempt organizations that receive tax-deductible contributions.

"Unless the Christian Coalition dramatically changes its established pattern ... it would be both legally improper and morally wrong for churches and other religious institutions to distribute its voter guides this fall," emphasized the Aug. 1 memo.

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Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State echoed Walker's warning: "Any church in America which distributes the Christian Coalition's tainted voters' guides risks losing its tax exemption."

"This is pure political intimidation by certain liberal organizations," said Will Dodson, general counsel for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission in Washington, noting the threats against the distribution of the voter guides are coming as the guides are being prepared.

"There should be no problem at all with churches distributing voter guides which do not endorse candidates but simply state the position of candidates on issues of importance to followers of Christ," Dodson said.

"Church leaders need to look at any kind of material they distribute to make sure it doesn't cross the line into partisan political activity," Dodson noted. Yet he insisted Christians should not back off their crusade for moral reform because of "threats from liberal organizations who represent another point of view."

The impression has been created that all this has to do with voter guides, Dodson said. Yet the primary focus of the FEC lawsuit is alleged donations in kind by the Christian Coalition during 1992 political campaigns, he said.

"No church has been threatened with legal action," Dodson noted. "The government hasn't said anything about going after churches that have in the past handed out Christian Coalition material or those who plan to do so in the future.

"It is very important for the church to do what is right regardless of the consequences," Dodson continued.

Religious institutions should not look to the government for instructions to carry out their mission, Dodson said. "Churches simply need to do what is right."

Citing IRS interpretations, the People for the American Way memo drew a distinction between "political campaign-related activity," an inappropriate level of involvement, and voter education activity, which is permitted.

The memo said "previous Christian Coalition voters guides are improper and cannot be distributed by churches," citing a recent study which alleged the guides contained "numerous examples of clear violations of IRS guidelines."

"Even if the Christian Coalition voter guides pass muster under the FECA, they still could run afoul of the ban on politicking in the tax laws," suggested Brent Walker, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee. Walker said if churches "embrace" voter guides, "they will put their tax exemption in jeopardy."

It is difficult to not be suspicious of this FEC action as well as this well-orchestrated attack on voter guides, said Richard Land, president of the Christian Life Commission, noting the lawsuit targets the Christian Coalition and totally ignores "far more questionable behavior" by the AFL-CIO and the National Education Association.

"It should be remembered that the FEC has never won a major case of this type," Land said. "This is clearly an attempt to have a chilling effect on the distribution of voter guides in conservative and religious circles in this election cycle.

"I suspect that what the Christian Coalition is guilty of is being highly effective in informing voters, thus invoking the outrage of the various liberal elites," Land continued.

Churches and religious organizations have just as much right as anyone else to distribute issue-oriented voter guides which inform people about the voting records of candidates, Land said.

Many pastors have "an irrational fear of losing their church's tax-exempt status," writes Michael Whitehead in the CLC pamphlet, "Tax Exemption and Political Candidate Campaigns."

"They are afraid to evaluate laws, public officials or political candidates, even from a biblical-moral perspective," concludes Whitehead, an attorney who formerly was CLC general counsel in Washington and currently serves as vice president for business affairs at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo.

The constitutional notion of church-state separation does not prohibit people of faith from bringing their religious convictions into the polling place or statehouse, Whitehead explained.

"No church has ever lost its tax exemption because of biblical criticism of policies or politicians. Still, many Christians shrink in terror from 'politics' in order to protect their 'tax exemption,'" he wrote.

Internal Revenue Code has two rules which regulate political activity by churches and exempt organizations, Whitehead points out in the CLC brochure.

The first rule permits some lobbying, or "influencing legislation" by a church body, so long as it is "not a substantial part of the activities" of the entity. The second rule prohibits a church or tax-exempt organization from "participat(ing) in or interven(ing) in (including the publishing and distributing of statements) any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office," Whitehead writes.

"The IRS has never gone to court to enforce revocation of the tax-exempt status of a church because a pastor went too far in praising or rebuking a political candidate or in stirring up public pressure about some legislation," he insisted.

"I have a feeling if the FEC has any success in this (case), they're going to have to come up with more than that they distributed voter guides," said Stephen Kao, education counsel with The Rutherford Institute, a religious liberty organization based in Charlottesville, Va.

"We've been very, very careful in this area," Kao said, when asked of his advice to churches considering handing out voter education material. "I guess what I am trying to say is that this is a gray area right now.

"We have a situation now where churches and religious organization may have to be so careful they are going to avoid speaking out on moral issues and that will be dangerous," Kao continued, suggesting the day may come when churches willingly give up their tax-exempt status so they can freely speak on social issues instead of running the "risk of becoming culturally irrelevant."

Lynn Buzzard, director of the Church-State Resource Center at Norman A. Wiggins School of Law at Campbell University, Buies Creek, N.C., offered the following as guidelines for churches to avoid "campaigning problems:"

During an election campaign, favored candidates should not have exclusive access to church meetings, mailing lists, facilities, etc.

The religious organization should not provide any funding, direct or indirect, to a particular candidate or encourage others to do so.

Facilities or resources such as mailing lists should not be made available even for a fee, unless they are made available to all candidates. (Probably the safest approach is to not make them available to any candidate.)

Campaign workers, paid or volunteer, even as members of the church, should not use church resources of any kind to promote a candidate or recruit volunteers to work for a candidate.

Voter registration, if not done on a partisan basis, is permitted on church property.

Voter education materials should be distributed in the church only after careful review based on IRS guidelines.

"Nothing in these policies should be construed to discourage appropriate discussion of the issues and the position of candidates in Sunday school classes or other groups where the focus is not on campaigning, but on sharing, discussion or considering the spiritual dimensions of contemporary events," explained Buzzard, also a professor of constitutional law at Campbell.

Noting there is nothing in IRS regulations to preclude churches and religious organizations from making their views known on public issues and policies, he added, "An organization's legal posture is strengthened if it addresses these issues persistently, and not just when they become matters of specific legislative debate."

Buzzard stressed any government restrictions applicable to tax-exempt organizations do not apply to individuals.

"There is no prohibition on individuals, no matter how intensely involved in exempt organizations, even as leaders or pastors, engaging in personal political activity including campaigning and lobbying," he explained, while recommending politically active church members never use church property or assets in their political campaigning.

**Prayer, involvement advocated
to curb violence in society**

By Teresa Dickens

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Violence has not only created an atmosphere of fear in the American society, but also a process whereby violence reaps violence.

But there is hope, declared two conference leaders during the Aug. 3-9 Woman's Missionary Union Week at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

Christians can make a difference if they are willing to spend time in prayer for their communities, states and the nation and if they are willing to give their time to working with and ministering to children, the leaders said.

Violence and its effect on children were the topics of conferences led by Diana Garland, director of the Family Ministry Research Project at the Louisville (Ky.) Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and Lora Smith, church and community ministries director for Greater Cleveland (Ohio) Baptist Association.

Garland led a conference on Project HELP: Child Advocacy, WMU's social issue for 1996-97. Along with authoring the emphasis book for the project, "Precious in His Sight," Garland has dedicated much of her time studying issues related to children and how the church can minister to children.

Referencing Isaiah 2:5-6 and 7-9, Garland compared the United States to the situation Israel found itself in when the people put their trust in material goods and neglected their relationship with God.

"As the prophet points out, the problem is spiritual," Garland said. "Soul-killing materialism, individualism and a collapse of moral values have created a culture of violence. People worship what they have made and accumulated. Our wanting, focus on stuff, is killing our souls and making us scared of our neighbors."

This fear, she continued, is depriving the nation's children of "the freedom to explore the world, to talk to strangers, to roam the neighborhood, because their parents are afraid. And their parents have good reason to be afraid."

Recalling her childhood when enemies were "over there," Garland said, "Violence now conjures up images of drive-by shootings, guns in children's school backpacks, or family members harming family members.

"Violence happens not in 'us' versus 'them' relationships; it happens inside our own tribe," she said, noting statistics that 54 percent of children die at the hands of a family member and 6 percent at the hands of strangers. Further, a gun in a home is 43 times more likely to be used to commit homicide, suicide or an accidental killing of a family member than to kill an intruder in self-defense.

The prevalence of violence in the home and on television has not only made children the victims of crime, but the performer of crime as well, she said. While children ages 12 to 15 are more often the victims of crimes of violence than any other age group, the number of teens under 18 arrested for murder also has risen 158.3 percent in the last 10 years. In addition, 63 percent of male teenagers in prison for murder killed the men who were abusing their mothers.

"We are killing some, and we are warping the minds of the rest, teaching them that violence is a viable solution to life's problems," Garland said.

Violence also is the double-edged sword that has propelled the number of youths involved in gangs, suggested Smith, coauthor of the Gang Ministry Manual produced by the Home Mission Board. Smith led a conference on gang awareness during the WMU training event.

While youth gangs have been a part of the American culture since the late 1700s, there has been a dramatic increase in their influence on society during the last 30 years. Smith said the lack of parental responsibility for their children and the influx of crack cocaine has contributed to the sharp increase of gang presence.

Smith said many youths are driven to join gangs because there is "strength in numbers," but soon discover they must perform violent acts in order to find status within the gang.

"I believe that 70 percent of the children in gangs are reachable," Smith said. "All they need is a place where they can find acceptance and love. Christians should be able to offer that to these children."

Garland outlined several ways Christians, individually and corporately, can rescue children from the grip of violence and other evils that plague them. Among her suggestions:

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-- Pray. "Whenever we talk about being advocates for children, we must begin with prayer," Garland insisted. "I am convinced that the very best government programs, the most challenging of church projects, will not do it alone. Only when we remember that God is bigger than evil and that it is God working through us and not our own efforts that make a difference -- that (is when) we can reach out and take children by the hand and stand them on their feet."

-- Make children a priority at church. Garland acknowledged many churches offer programs for children. While these are good, churches must learn to focus on experiences with children by incorporating them into every aspect of church life. It is only when adults interact with children that they truly become advocates for children, she said.

-- Become an advocate of children in the community and larger society. Garland suggested this will happen naturally when children take priority within the church. Child advocacy efforts are most effective when they involve the entire church family, are based on biblical truths and are service-oriented. "People will sustain their effort longer if they see what it is they are responding to," she said.

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**To reach the nation's cities,
prayer described as pivotal**

By Teresa Dickens

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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Christians readily recognize and voice opinions about the problems in their communities, but are they willing to spend time praying about these problems?

This question was explored during the conference, "How to Pray for Your Community," during Woman's Missionary Union Week at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center Aug. 3-9.

The conference was led by Ann Lawrence, associational consultant for WMU, which involves working with Mega Focus Cities, Southern Baptists' inter-agency effort to help associations in the nation's largest cities reach those cities for Christ.

Referencing several Scripture passages related to praying for cities, Lawrence said reaching any city for Christ must begin with prayer. She outlined four areas in which Christians can pray for their communities.

-- Pray for unity of the churches, including prayer for pastors in the community as well as prayer for members of the churches.

"Pray that the Christians in your community will have a spirit of unity and a willingness to work together," she said. "Too often, churches are in competition with each other. There are too many individuals in our communities who do not have a relationship with Christ for Christians to argue with each other.

"The only way Christians can be united is through prayer," she said.

-- Pray for the personal and collective holiness of the people of God in the community. Christians who live a lifestyle opposite of the gospel message cannot expect others to accept the message, she said. "We must hold each other accountable."

-- Pray for all people everywhere in the community. Referencing 1 Timothy 2:2, Lawrence said this dimension of prayer should begin with the leaders of the community and move to all individuals who influence the community. Such leaders might include the mayor, chief of police, school board, city commissioners, teachers, lawyers, prosecutors and judges.

Prayer for these individuals should be specific, she added. Lawrence recounted a story about leaders of a church in San Francisco who visited the leaders in their city and asked them what prayer concerns they had. The leaders promised the officials they would pray that God would supply those needs. While many of the city's officials were not Christians, they were appreciative the church leaders cared enough to ask what their concerns were.

-- Pray that all will be saved and that none perish. Christians should not only pray that every person in their community will have an opportunity to hear the gospel message, but also pray for themselves, asking that they will be filled with boldness, compassion and mercy to share the gospel.

"God is waiting for his people to pray," Lawrence declared. "He desires that we know his heartbeat -- and that is that all should be saved and none perish."

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**Belarussian children receive
respite from Chernobyl effects**

By Sarah Simmons

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (BP)--Since 1993, nearly 750 Belarussian children have come to the United States for a six-week stay in the lap of luxury.

Of course, luxury to these children includes the ability to drink water, consume food and breathe air not contaminated with radioactive ash.

It has been 11 years since the control rods at Chernobyl Reactor Number Four in the Ukraine were moved slightly out of position, releasing 200 times more radiation into the surrounding area than the bombs that leveled Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The disaster remains fresh in the hearts of the Belarussians as they try to put their lives and their nation, a former Soviet Union republic bordering the Ukraine, back together.

Part of their healing process has been attributed to Sergei Chunihovski, a pediatric oncologist at the children's hospital in Mogilev, Belarus, who has been treating the children since eight days after the accident.

Early in 1993, he heard about the American Belarussian Relief Organization (ABRO), a small nonprofit organization. Founded by Ura Chekhovski, a Mogilev Baptist layman, and Allison Culpepper, then a Southern Baptist missionary in Connecticut, ABRO seeks to help children whose lives have been destroyed by the Chernobyl radiation.

ABRO is the sole reason these "Chernobyl children," as they have come to be known, ranging in age from 7 to 14, and some of their parents, all victims of radioactive fallout, have been able to come to the United States for the past three years.

For the past two years, Chunihovski has also come to North Carolina to study with American doctors.

Because of these trips and the goodness he saw in people like Chekhovski and Culpepper, Chunihovski became a Christian. At his suggestion, ABRO became the American Belarussian Christian Relief Organization (ABCRO) so the organization itself could be a witness.

This year Chunihovski returned to North Carolina to keep a watchful eye on a group of 330 Belarussian children, all victims of various illnesses, many associated with radioactivity. Chunihovski was assisted by the N.C. Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem with protocols for new medications for leukemia patients.

During their stay, the children received free medical evaluations and tests from area physicians, dentists and other health-care professionals. Charles McMillan, former Raleigh Baptist Association director of missions who currently serves Nashville (N.C.) Baptist Church as interim pastor, estimated area doctors donated at least \$40,000 in medicine last year. He expected the amount to be even greater this year.

The children gained other advantages besides medical treatment during their stay. Radiation can pass through clothing, directly contaminating the body, even while inside buildings. Being in a geographical location free from radiation pollution strengthens the children's immune systems. Eating nutritious meals with their ABCRO-recruited host parents also strengthens their bodies. Playing outside, a "luxury" not possible in their homeland, strengthens the children's hearts.

With all these things in mind, Fuquay-Varina Baptist Church provided fun, fellowship and food for the visiting Belarussians and their host families on one Saturday of their stay. Approximately 250 children and adults enjoyed volleyball and soccer games, football toss competitions and refreshments.

This year the 330 children were housed in Dan Valley, Johnston, Little River, Metrolina, Pilot Mountain, Raleigh and Theron Rankin associations and in the city of Concord.

"When we love these children, we show them Christ's love," said Judy Edwards, Wake County ABCRO coordinator. "To a country that was communist and atheist, this is a great ministry."

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**True Love Waits goes Hollywood;
organizers are less than pleased**

By Terri Lackey

**Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--It was only a matter of time before the popularity of the Baptist Sunday School Board's "True Love Waits" chastity movement hit the big screen.

In the opening scene of Paramount Picture's popular movie, "Escape from L.A.," actress A.J. Langer brandishes a large lapel button that reads, "True Love Waits."

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The problem is, the movie's treatment of the Southern Baptist campaign is hardly pleasing, organizers said. It seems "Utopia," the character wearing the button, is a rebellious young person and not quite the typical Christian teen attracted to the chastity movement, according to Richard Ross, a youth consultant for the Southern Baptist agency and True Love Waits spokesperson.

Rated R, the movie is set in the year 2013. Los Angeles is no longer a part of the United States, having been leveled by a massive earthquake and cut off from the mainland by a flooded San Fernando Valley. The "island" of Los Angeles serves as a prison camp for the nation's undesirables. At the time, the United States is ruled by a president who has moved the capital city to Lynchburg, Va. It is his daughter who runs off to L.A. with a black box full of secret codes. She is the same one wearing the True Love Waits button, Ross said.

"The movie presents the president's daughter as somewhat mentally confused, suffering from having retreated into a world of virtual reality and cyberspace," said Ross, who recently viewed the movie to verify the actress was wearing the button. "Since (film director) John Carpenter depicted the president's family as emotionally and spiritually twisted, he certainly did not place a True Love Waits button on the daughter as an affirmation of the campaign."

Ross said the character, Utopia, stands in "stark contrast to the very-clear-thinking teenagers who have actually joined the True Love Waits movement." She is nothing like the students who are carrying the True Love Waits message to their high school campuses this fall, Ross said.

Referring to the new True Love Waits Goes Campus campaign, Ross said Christian students attending U.S. secondary schools are organizing a major display of True Love Waits pledge cards for Valentine's Day 1997. The goal, he said, is to gain the participation of students in all 56,000 high schools. Organizers also are attempting to take the Goes Campus campaign to colleges this fall.

"Those students will capture the attention of the nation on Valentine's Day as they create simultaneous displays of pledge cards on all 56,000 secondary school campuses in America," Ross said of the high school campaign. "Such a sweeping campaign about moral purity is bound to make an impact on government policy-makers, educators, parents and sexually active teenagers."

Since the campaign's launch in 1993, more than 350,000 of young people from all 50 states and 76 countries have signed pledge cards vowing to remain sexually abstinent until marriage.

While Ross believes the directors of "Escape from L.A." used the True Love Waits moniker with a tongue-in-cheek approach, he said he believes they unwittingly paid the chastity movement two compliments.

"First, since they placed the movie in the year 2013, they obviously inferred that the campaign will be alive and well into the new millennium. Second, the very fact they included the True Love Waits button reveals they believe that most movie-goers would recognize that phrase. Satire is only effective when viewers understand it."

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**Cerebral palsy didn't stop her
from magna cum laude success**

By K. Michele Trice

**Baptist Press
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PINEVILLE, La. (BP)--When was the last time you sat in a room with a fellow Christian and felt awed and humbled by God's faithfulness and mercy? The next time you travel through north Louisiana, stop in the sleepy little town of Tallulah and spend a few hours with Anne Isbell.

Isbell earned a degree in lower elementary education in May from Louisiana College, Pineville, finishing with a 3.79 grade point average and magna cum laude honors.

Being an honor graduate was especially poignant for Isbell, a cerebral palsy child whose grandparents were told she would never complete the fourth grade.

"The bronze medal I got at LC for being an honor graduate meant more to me than anything," Isbell said. "That's what I'd been working for."

"Her determination to get an education has been an inspiration in this part of the country," said Pat Lofton, director of missions of the Bayou Macon and Madison Baptist associations. "She's the talk of Tallulah. Everyone speaks of her courage."

Lofton also is the pastor who led Isbell to the Lord as a child. Lofton, handicapped from polio, said his own handicap was part of what inspired Isbell to make the decision to accept the Lord.

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"She said if God could help me, then he could help her," Lofton recounted.

Cerebral palsy (CP) is a physical disability affecting the motor and muscular portions of the brain, producing similar reactions as a stroke. Isbell's CP is most noticeable in her sometimes-awkward gait and lower voice tone. Beyond that, it's hard to remember Isbell has a disability.

What friends and acquaintances do remember is her giving spirit, easy laugh, solid determination and devotion to the Lord.

"She is such an inspiration to our church and this community because of her Christian lifestyle, kindness and love for others," said John Rushing, Isbell's pastor at First Baptist Church, Tallulah. "She always lifts up the Lord without asking for any glory for herself. She's a person of humility and a genuine servant of Christ."

Service to the church was instilled in Isbell by her grandparents, Lebert and Virginia Isbell, with whom she has lived for most of her life. Virginia Isbell took her granddaughter to church throughout her young life, even when the young girl said she was angry at the Lord and didn't feel like she fit in at church, or anywhere.

Coming from what Isbell herself describes as a "dysfunctional" family, she went through situations many people would find unimaginable before she was 10 years old. She accepted the Lord and was baptized during that time and assumed, as people often do, once she accepted Jesus everything would be different with her family.

When things didn't change, "I was angry with God and didn't trust him and didn't want him in my life." She went through many years with those feelings and didn't finally feel a change until she was in high school.

"I had a Christian teacher in high school who was very special and devoted," Isbell said. "I saw that, and I knew I wanted the God my grandmother talked about. I wanted to find something to fill the emptiness, and I knew God was the answer."

So at 15, she rededicated her life, telling God, "My life is a mess, but now it's yours." Since then, her life has revolved around her desire to get an education while relying completely on the Lord to provide.

After graduating as valedictorian of her senior class, Isbell enrolled at Louisiana College. Her grandparents were financially unable to afford the cost of a private school, but Isbell told her grandmother, "If you'll take me and give me your blessing, God will take care of the rest. And he did."

With the assistance of several scholarships, including one from First Baptist, Tallulah, and additional grants, all of Isbell's on-campus expenses were provided.

"Anne's greatest asset is that she never used her disability to compromise her assignments or duties," said Susan Myrick, associate professor of education and Isbell's student teaching advisor. "I never thought of making exceptions for her because she fit in so well."

Indeed, Isbell was much the traditional student at LC, participating in various on-campus events including an education honor society which she served as vice president and a women's dorm Bible study. During her first two years at LC, she was involved with the drama department, appearing in "JB," the first production in the college's Martin Performing Arts Center in 1992. She also attended Donahue Baptist Church and volunteered as a teacher at the Abraham Mission sponsored by Pineville Park Baptist Church.

She was a participant in LC's Program to Assist Student Success, or PASS, an individualized program providing support services and personal attention to students who need special counseling, tutoring or classroom assistance.

"Anne could have been an honor graduate without PASS," said Vickie Kelly, the program's director. "She has a very keen mind and a dogged determination. We only helped her with the physical things that might have been difficult for her."

Isbell said PASS provided typing and note-takers, both of which are difficult for her because of the motor impairment in her hands, and assisted her with study skills and organization. They also provided an assistant for her teaching methods class, which required a lot of cutting of bulletin boards and children's games.

"Even when she was tired physically, she did what needed to be done while still respecting her limits," Kelly said. "She is a good steward of her physical being."

Myrick said Isbell never asked for a favor because of her disability, citing a time when Isbell asked to bring a doctor's excuse to wear her orthopedic shoes while teaching. "The dress code calls for ladies to wear flats or low heels, and I just forgot about Anne. I was amazed at her sense of maturity."

While student teaching, Isbell approached Myrick about doing a lesson on CP for the children. "Elementary school children are honest to the point of being cruel," Myrick said. Myrick approved the plan, and Isbell began telling the students about her disability.

"I knew the children would have questions. They always do," Isbell said. "I used a book about handicaps and brought my cane, leg braces, the glasses I wore as a child and a map of the brain. I showed them which parts of my brain are damaged and asked them about their own experiences with disabled people.

"I told them what I can and cannot do and answered their questions," she continued. "Then we talked about making fun of people and how it feels to be made fun of. Children respond better than adults. They accept things once they understand them, and they understand being different."

"It worked every time," Myrick said. "Anne will be a wonderful teacher because she is so gracious about her own disability that she'll accept the children that way, too."

Isbell is hoping to find a job teaching in the fall in Madison Parish, or county, to teach for a few years before returning to school to get her master's degree as a reading specialist or a school counselor.

"Because of my background, I know there are so many children who are hurting and who need someone to talk to and to care," she said. "I was distressed my senior year at LC and saw Wade Tyler (director of counseling and special services at LC) who taught me coping skills. I have a greater stability in my own self now than I have had since I was a kid.

"My teachers have taught me self-confidence and to believe in myself and that I could achieve," Isbell said. "If I can touch the life of only one child the way they touched mine, I will have changed the world."

In the opinion of many, Isbell already has changed the lives of the world around her, but she is still waiting to see what God's plan for her life is. "God has fixed my life like he wants it, and he has a purpose I don't understand. But he's the one who's been faithful."

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