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June 25, 1996

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Minister's wife has unique role
in husband's work, author says

By Sue H. Poss

Baptist Press
6/25/96

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--It was a lesson learned early for Virginia Wilson, that wives of ministers don't have the same calling and gifts as their husbands.

Wilson has since learned many other lessons that have helped her and her husband, Gene, weave their lives successfully together through 25 years of ministry. In her first book, "Lose the Halo, Keep the Wings" (New Hope, 1996), Wilson uses her sense of humor to share advice directed specifically to ministers' wives -- but it is advice that is just as applicable to any woman wanting to maintain a Christian home.

"I hope it will apply to a lot of women who are serving the Lord," said Wilson, who wrote most of the book while her husband was director of missions for Calvary-Arrowhead Baptist Association in California. "My husband worked with over 140 churches and missions there and I had many of the ministers' wives ask me to write a book to give them guidance on being a pastor's wife," Wilson said. "So I wrote it in California and then revised it when we moved to Illinois."

The Wilsons moved to Springfield, Ill., in October 1993 when Gene became executive director of the Illinois Baptist State Association. Virginia finished the epilogue to her book after her husband became incapacitated last year, the victim of an aneurysm.

While the Illinois convention turned to interim director Keith Stanford for direction after Gene Wilson's illness, Virginia Wilson has turned completely to the Lord. "During these last few months, I have learned more than anything to stay focused on the Lord," said Wilson. "I have to remember that he is my provider and my comforter.

"Through all of this the Lord has become my husband," Wilson continued, "since my own husband doesn't really know me as his wife. God has stepped in and taken care of every need that I have.

"Gene's illness has tremendously changed my ministry," she said. "I have not been able to do as much speaking in churches but I foresee that changing soon. It is remarkable how the Lord is working things out. I hear from people everyday telling me about how Gene's illness and our circumstances have touched their lives and encouraged them."

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Wilson never expected to be a minister's wife. When she married Gene, he was working in the retail business. But soon came the call to ministry and enrollment in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. "I had never imagined in my wildest dreams that I would ever become a minister's wife," Wilson said. "I didn't choose this life for myself, but looking back, I wouldn't trade it for any other."

Early in their ministry, Wilson said she discovered that the pastor's wife was often expected to play the piano and sing a solo. She couldn't do either. "They seemed to think I was absolutely useless. Because of this rejection, I began a search to find who I was and what I thought my responsibilities were as a minister's wife."

The lessons she has learned through the years sometimes came easy, some were more difficult. But she quickly learned she and her husband were different, in fact opposites, in their gifts and abilities. "My husband has the gifts of preaching and teaching, prophesy and administration. My gifts are entirely different -- exhortation, mercy, teaching and discernment."

So her advice to other minister's wives: "Don't be misdirected by thinking your husband's ministry is your ministry. You can both minister together using different gifts."

"We found that wherever we served we were each able to use our own gifts in our own special ways," she said. She, for example, has used her gift of discernment throughout their ministry to offer Gene advice on potential staff members. "It's a gift I can't define but I have the ability to see how people are going to fit in," she said.

The Wilsons also have learned not to speak for each other, and especially not to make commitments for each other. "We have always been careful not to accept a position for the other. We have guarded each other in that way," Wilson said.

On the issue of ministers' kids, Wilson offers basic advice that church members sometimes tend to forget: Children are children whether or not their parent is a minister. "We need to remember that it's not possible for our children to be perfect just because they're the preacher's kids," she said. "We need our church members to pray for them, love them and accept them as kids."

"A key to being a successful minister's wife is to be flexible and innovative," said Wilson. "You never know what people are going to do. Different churches have different personalities. You've got to learn not to be too hard on yourself. You need to spend time in prayer and do what God wants you to do, not what others expect."

Wilson also advises ministers' families to have a circle of people praying for them regularly. "This includes members of the church where you're serving, but it also includes churches that don't even know you," Wilson said. "There are some things for which you need prayer but which your congregation doesn't need to know about. You can find a church with a strong intercessory prayer group that doesn't know you and share with them your deepest prayer needs."

Always a journal writer, Wilson has continued writing throughout her husband's illness. "I expect to do a lot of other writing in connection with this trial," she said.

She has two other books already outlined, both of which she had originally planned to be a part of *Lose the Halo, Keep the Wings*. The first is a book directed to ministers on how to be better husbands and fathers. The second is a book directed at churches on how to better minister to the pastor and his family.

While the ministry of Gene and Virginia Wilson has changed drastically since August 1995, Virginia continues to depend on the same promise that has directed her throughout her years as a minister's wife: Hold on to God and he will lead.

Wilson's book is available from Woman's Missionary Union's customer service, 1-800-968-7301, and in local Baptist Book stores.

**Charlie Warren to leave
'Home Life' editor's post**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Charlie Warren, editor of the Baptist Sunday School Board's "Home Life" magazine since January 1988, will leave the position July 31 as the board pursues new leadership and direction for the family publication, according to Gary Hauk, director of the discipleship and family magazine department.

"During his tenure, Charlie has overseen a major redesign of Home Life that has moved the magazine forward in an excellent way," Hauk said. "I pray that the Lord will open a door of fulfilling service for him."

Warren said, "Home Life has touched hundreds of thousands of lives during my eight years as the editor. I am grateful that God chose to use me in such a high-impact ministry. I am confident he will guide me to my next opportunity to serve him."

Before joining the board, Warren served for eight and a half years as associate editor of the Baptist & Reflector, Baptist state paper of Tennessee. Earlier, he was an associate editor at the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission and senior editor at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

Home Life, which has been published by the board for 49 years, has a monthly circulation of 525,000.

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**Tossing hymns is chucking
history, hymnologist says**

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press
6/25/96

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Discounting the significance of singing hymns at church would be like dismissing the importance of learning history at school, a hymnologist from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary said.

The Baptist Hymnal is rich with history, according to Harry Eskew, NOBTS professor of music history and hymnology, who taught a week-long workshop on hymnology during Church Music Leadership Conference at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center, June 15-21. Eskew said flipping through the pages of the hymnal is like traveling through time.

"Most people get interested in hymns by way of hymn stories," he said. "They have a lot of human interest."

For example, Baptist Hymnal, 410 -- "It is well with my soul" -- was written by Horatio Spafford after he lost his two daughters to a shipwreck in 1873. Spafford, whose wife was spared in the accident, wrote the song near the very spot his daughters perished as he traveled by ship from Chicago to meet his wife in Great Britain.

Hymn 559, "Rescue the perishing," is a description about author Fanny Crosby's work with the homeless and destitute in New York City. Crosby (1820-1915), a blind Methodist teacher, wrote a total of about 8,000 songs during her lifetime. Stories behind the origins of all hymns in The Baptist Hymnal can be found in the "Handbook to The Baptist Hymnal," published by Convention Press.

As a hymnologist, Eskew said his mission is to "help people understand the purpose of hymns and help them make more effective uses of them through worship. Congregational hymn singing creates a more vital and meaningful worship for the individual and church."

A hymn worth singing is worth studying, Eskew said, quoting from "Sing with Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Hymnology," a book he wrote with Hugh McElrath, senior professor of church music at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

"People learn more theology from the hymns they sing than from the sermons they hear," Eskew asserted. "When a congregation actively participates in worship, as they do when singing hymns, they become more aware of what they are learning.

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"Most pastors who are really knowledgeable about hymnology (and) know hymns have a lot to teach us.

"For example, repetition, or singing the hymns over and over, includes one of the laws of effective learning," Eskew said. "Furthermore, with hymns, you are using words and music, therefore making use of both sides of your brain."

A fear among many hymnologists and worship traditionalists is that church music ministers are turning away from hymns and using more choruses, Eskew acknowledged.

"Often churches make little or no use of hymnals, thus neglecting the tradition and educational benefit of hymns," he said. "A concern among many hymnologists is that churches that change their worship style do not abandon the rich heritage of hymns."

He said most churches that sing choruses typically use them for only a short time, discard them and find new ones. Hymns, however, have long-term effects on churches and individuals, he said.

"The favorite hymns of most adults are the ones they learned as children," he said. "When they are exposed to good, solid hymns when they are growing up, those will be the ones they appreciate more than others."

According to Eskew, hymns:

- Communicate the message of the church and convey Christian theology.
- Teach individuals and congregations to worship through singing.
- Provide instruction in Christian living.
- Pass on the historical heritage of the church through the study of such church giants as John Calvin and Martin Luther. "There is no area where we are more ecumenical than when we sing hymns," Eskew said.

Because hymns are so valuable to understanding Christianity and the church, Eskew said he believes the study of hymns should be incorporated into other ministry areas of the church.

"The Sunday School Board has done a very good job of including hymns in children's materials, but churches could be using them in their Bible teaching and discipleship programs as well," he said. "Hymns could very well support Bible study and discipleship curriculum. They are so multifaceted."

Hymns convey Scripture, Christian theology, literary information, culture and history, Eskew said -- "all to the sound of music."

Church Music Leadership Conference was sponsored by the music ministries department of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

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Children love to sing, especially
when they understand the words By Terri Lackey

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--If you want your congregation to experience some heartfelt singing, stick a Baptist Hymnal in the hands of the children, a music minister told children's leaders at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

If you want to double the impact, teach the child the meaning behind what he or she is voicing, said Chester Whisonant, minister of music at Gethsemene Baptist Church, Glenwood, Md. Whisonant led preschool and children's leaders classes during Church Music Leadership Conference, June 15-21.

"If you teach a child the meaning of what he is singing, he will really sing it from his heart," Whisonant said. "It might not always be in pitch, and you need to work on that, but God wants praise that's honest, not perfect."

Whisonant said he believes music ministers should begin teaching children hymns from the Baptist Hymnal at a very early age.

"Hymns convey biblical truths, and those truths are everlasting," he said. "That hymn book has been around forever. Some of the songs in it are old as dirt, but they are still relevant."

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Whisonant said he is careful when selecting songs for children to learn. "I pick songs that children can sing. There is a plethora of songs in the '91 Baptist Hymnal that they can sing that are in their range."

He said he looks for songs with a rhythm children can enjoy, musical ranges they can handle and texts they can understand.

"I might change the words of a text slightly so the children can understand it," Whisonant acknowledged. "I won't let them sing it if they don't know what it means." For example, Whisonant said, he often switches the word "thy" for "your."

He also is careful when he teaches songs that, in a child's eyes, might seem gory or macabre.

"Children are very literal. So when we sing about blood being drawn from Immanuel's veins, I try to explain what that means."

Whisonant said he is concerned Southern Baptist children are rarely being taught songs from the Baptist Hymnal.

"Today in America, the Baptist Hymnal is not being made a priority. Somewhere along the line we owe it to our children to teach them what is in the hymn book, and expose them to the hymns of our heritage."

Harry Eskew, professor of music history and hymnology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, said children need hymns to teach them about Scripture, Christian theology, literature, culture, history and music.

"There are hundreds of hymns for children to use," Eskew said. "If children grow up with a substantial number of these, it will provide them with a good educational core and help them in their Christianity."

"The favorite hymns of most adults are what they learn as children," Eskew added. "When they are exposed to good, solid hymns when they are growing up, those will be the ones they appreciate more than others. Children can learn a hymn and, as they get older, they can understand it and appreciate it more fully."

Whisonant listed several ways to expose children to hymns:

- Establish a "Hymn & M" Club in which children memorize hymns for M&Ms and other prizes.

- Choose a hymn of the month. Additionally, choose six hymns they would know and six hymns they would not know and incorporate them in several learning activities.

- Allow children to take turns conducting hymns.

- Study how hymns are written and allow them to write one with a predetermined easy or common meter. Whisonant suggested using the book, Handbook to the Baptist Hymnal (Convention Press, 1992), to study the origin and history of hymns, and "Singing with Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Hymnology" (Church Street Press) for a list of age-appropriate hymns for children.

- Rewrite words to hymns using common vernacular.

- Conduct a hymn drill.

Whisonant said he would advise anyone considering teaching music to children to "first determine if it's God's call; second, find out everything you can about children in whatever age group you are going to lead; third, get as much training as you can; and fourth, love children."

"The most important thing to teach children is that Jesus loves them, and that they can tell Jesus they love him by singing to him," Whisonant said. "Kids love to make a joyful noise; they love to sing and they sing from their hearts."

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(BP) photo (horizontal) posted in the SBCNet Newsroom and is slugged childsing. Mailed copies of photos can be obtained by calling (615) 251-2791.

Initiative & work nurture
creativity, minister says

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press
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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--So you think you need some sort of innate gift to be creative. Nah. Not according to Jim Tippins, minister of music at First Baptist Church, Myrtle Beach, S.C.

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Tippins, who taught drama workshops at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center during Church Music Leadership Conference, June 15-21, said if you're a child of God, then you are creative.

"Creation comes from God," Tippins said. "Creativity is not a special gift possessed by a fortunate few, but a human capacity possessed to some degree by everyone, due to our being created in the image of God."

But don't expect to sit idly by and act as a conduit through which God's creativity flows, he warned.

"Certain independence is needed in order to create works of art. Man has free will and is responsible for his own free activity," he said.

In other words, he said, being creative takes initiative and the willingness to learn new ideas and undertake new skills.

"Some may argue that you can't teach the basic something that makes a person creative," Tippins said. "While that argument may be technically true, in practice, it doesn't wash."

Take athletes, for example, he said. What would be the purpose of a "high-paid" coach, if he or she was not able to teach the players new techniques of the game? he asked.

"The truth is, all of us, beginners and veterans, are creative and can improve the creative process," Tippins said. "Over time we can all learn a few things from listening to creative people. Inspiration can't be taught, but it can be improved."

People can help themselves become inspired, Tippins said, by reading others' creative ideas and applying the information they learn.

"Use your imagination and see your vision through to completion," he advised. "Creativity is just a different way of seeing an old idea."

Tippins said to be creative a person needs some of the following skills:

- spiritual and mental preparation;
- a sense of humor;
- well-being;
- the ability to analyze and prepare;
- the ability to correlate ideas;
- the ability to see non-standard meanings;
- the ability to scan ideas;
- the ability to visualize;
- a facility with words; and
- the ability to pick up rhythm.

Tippins advised those who think they have even "an inkling of (creative) ability, to just begin" by: reading creative resources and keeping an ideas folder; outlining your desired message; attending seminars; drawing from your own experiences; discussing and writing down topics no matter how strange they seem; considering the needs of the congregation; getting out into the world; and staying close to God.

"The closer you are to God, the better your creative vision," Tippins said. "You can find the will of God by getting as close to him as you possibly can, then you can do what you want to do. Because what you want is what God wants if you are as close to him as you can be."

Church Music Leadership Conference was sponsored by the music ministries department of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

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Launching a dance program?
Start slowly, artist advises

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--The sheer number of Scriptures found in the Bible about dancing seem to indicate God thinks it's OK. But music ministers launching an interpretive movement team might begin with a low-key approach in their churches, a freelance dramatist said.

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"Start slow, start safe, start with a hymn that everybody already thinks is OK," Darlene Tullos, a freelance dramatist from Nashville, Tenn., told music leaders attending Church Music Leadership Conference, June 15-21, at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

"Don't start with some rock and roll song that will blow them out of the water," Tullos said. "Then you will never get to do it again."

The safest way to begin an interpretive movement program, she said, is to use children.

"Using children is a very good way to start slowly."

Tullos explained the two types of dance churches might use -- celebration and interpretation.

Celebration dance -- jubilant interpretative movement with no real message behind it -- might not be the best way to ease a church into a drama program, she acknowledged, because it is so lively and doesn't carry with it deep meaning as interpretive movement can.

"We as Baptists are not good at pure celebration; we tend to want to go for the message," Tullos said.

"You also have to be very moderate about what you pick to wear. Collars need to be high and skirts long enough.

"The number one criticism we hear the most is about what people wear," she said.

The second type of dance, Tullos said, is interpretation.

"The goal is to engage worshipers by appealing to more than just one sense," she said. "Most of what we do when we worship engages only one sense, and that's hearing.

"Through interpretation, we want to try to paint pictures in the minds of the worshipers while they are hearing the words of a song. That way we engage two senses in the worship experience rather than one. By seeing and hearing, the worshiper is more quickly drawn into the experience as a participant," Tullos said.

She listed some qualifications needed by dramatists who choose dance as their primary means of expression.

"First you must walk with God daily in your life, and you must let his Spirit guide you."

Interpretive movement performance is an outgrowth of a growing relationship with Christ, to a place to exhibit personal talent or ability, Tullos said.

"This is a place where you draw people to Christ, not a place where you display a personal talent," she said. "As a matter of fact, talent is sometimes an obstacle."

Secondly, Tullos said, interpretative movement artists must let God work through them as they design skits or dances.

"You must yield your gifts and creativity to God, and let him guide your thoughts," she said.

Thirdly, she said, artists must practice modesty and humility when performing a ministry.

"Sometimes in movement there can be some competition" between various actors or performances, Tullos said. "Let other people benefit from your performance, and don't worry about how great you or it is.

"Without God's anointing it, it's just stuff, anyway."

Darlene and her husband, Matt Tullos, a drama consultant at the Baptist Sunday School Board, have written a book incorporating several ideas about dramatic sketches, traveling teams, interpretive movement, dinner theater, drama revivals, judgment houses, readers theater and more. The book, "Show Me: Drama and Evangelism," will be released Aug. 1.

Church Music Leadership Conference was sponsored by the music ministries department of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

**Near-death gives teacher chance
to focus on needs of parents**

By Terri Lackey

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Tee Billingsley's death has given her a second chance at life. And among her list of new priorities is the desire to be a mentor to the parents of the children at her church.

Complicated emotional circumstances brought about Billingsley's sudden death nearly four years ago, but her husband, through CPR, was able to revive her until she made it to the hospital. Her story was featured on the cover of Home Life magazine and through Baptist Press in Baptist state papers across the nation, and now Billingsley's heart beats with the aid of a battery pack attached to her side.

A preschool/children's music specialist from Eagleville, Tenn., Billingsley taught a workshop on "Ministering to Parents" during Church Music Leadership Conference at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center, June 15-21.

"Not everybody gets a second chance at life, and I had to think and rethink very closely about what God wanted me to be," she said.

Billingsley said she chose seven priorities, and after God, her husband and her children, comes the relationship with the parents of the children she teaches at church.

She said she learned how important a teacher's relationship to parents could be when she began receiving letters from them after the articles about her were published.

"That's when I realized my ministry was as much to the parents as to the children," she said.

Billingsley, who joined Bellevue Baptist Church in Nashville as choir coordinator in May, said she is working toward getting to know the parents of the children she teaches and is trying to learn "what is important to them."

While football is not among her most compelling interests, Billingsley said she will learn which football teams the fathers of her kids root for, and she will make a point to know the scores. "Men like football, and I know how to talk about it."

For the mothers, Billingsley said, she plans to make herself available to talk to them whenever they need it.

"If they have a problem, they can call me anytime, and I'll be there for them. I want these parents to feel like I'm someone they can talk to and build a strong family relationship with," she said.

After emerging from some of the physical complications of her near-death experience, Billingsley decided to start her "new life" with a personal mission statement. "In it, I say what I want to be, I say what I want to do and I say what I want to have in life."

The mission statement, she said, helps her stay focused on her priorities, and helps the parents she ministers at her present church and the one she just left to "to see I'm living my life differently."

It also gives Billingsley direction in guiding parents who ask for her help.

"If I know where I am going, I can help them find out where they want to go."

In her mission statement, Billingsley promises to attempt to live a more "abundant life" by balancing her spiritual, mental, emotional, physical and social life. Included in her 38-item list of goals are: being closer to God, exercising initiative in accomplishing life's goals, enjoying her adult children and guiding them only when they request help; maintaining a joyful attitude even in hard times, keeping a sense of humor and having a 25-minute quiet time and a 30-minute Bible study time each day.

Billingsley told the music teachers attending her workshop to be "value driven and principle driven as you work with parents."

"Know where you are going in your life. If you don't have a mission statement, write one down, and plan your life around it."

Other advice Billingsley offered the teachers included:

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-- "Acknowledge when you've made a mistake. If they don't like something you've done with their child, just say, 'Now that I think about it, maybe I could have handled it differently.'"

-- "Don't hassle with things you can't control."

-- "Make your behavior the result of your own mental choices, and not the consequences of what is going on in your life. Never blame circumstances and present-day conditions for your bad behavior."

-- "Help parents see that the problems aren't 'out there.' For instance, if they say, 'I'll be happy when all this is over,' the truth is, you're never going to be happy if you're not happy now."

-- "Choose to respond positively, not negatively."

-- "Clarify your expectations of the parents."

-- "Keep your commitments to parents and to your fellow children's workers."

-- "Be loyal to those not present. When someone comes to you and complains about another person, don't say anything about that third person."

-- "Use good listening skills. Listen to understand, and repeat back what they are saying."

-- "Apologize sincerely when you hurt someone, mean it, and don't do it again."

-- "Get a book on interpersonal relationships, and read it."

Church Music Leadership Conference was sponsored by the music ministries department of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

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