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SBC Executive Committee
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Robert J. O'Brien, News Editor
James Lee Young, Feature Editor

77-83

Couple Weeps, Prays
& Faces the World

By Fred Wickman and Christina Floan

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Thursday Dec. 16, is the date on a calendar in the boys' bedroom.

Before she goes to work, Mrs. Linda J. Robinson, 33, usually pauses in the room. She sees photographs of them, mementos of them, recalls the hopes she held for them.

After a prayer, she leaves the student apartment she and her husband, Jimmie, occupy at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, North, to work at a department store.

The calendar is a tragic reminder of the date the Robinson's only children, James, 13, and Kevin, 9, drowned in Englewood Lake near the seminary.

That morning, Dec. 16, the boys were playing on the ice. Having come from California, they had no experience with ice. Kevin fell through and James jumped in to help him. Divers recovered their bodies.

It was the day after the Robinson family arrived at Midwestern Seminary, where Robinson, 34, was to begin work on a master of divinity degree, when the tragedy occurred.

The couple says now their Christian faith and Robinson's desire to become a church pastor have helped them cope with their loss. But the sorrow is still there, and Mrs. Robinson cries when she talks about her boys.

"I had a little literature that was sent with some of the sympathy cards...and it said, 'Go in your room and weep, mourn and pray. And then go out and face the world,'" she said. "If I go to work at 9 a.m. or 11 a.m.," she added, "I usually go to the boys' room and weep and pray, and then I go out and face the world."

Robinson, 34, in addition to seminary studies, drives a school bus for the North Kansas City School District.

"Generally speaking, it helps me to be around the children. Some of the kids--I can just see our boys in them," he said.

The death of his own children could have fostered bitterness and doubts about staying in the ministry, Robinson said, "but then I think they would have died for nothing. It has the effect of giving us added determination to go on. We couldn't quit now."

He and his wife have known each other since they were children in Irondale, Mo. While Robinson was in the Air Force, and after they were married, the family lived in Sacramento, Calif. He left the Air Force in 1973 after 12 1/2 years service.

To prepare for seminary, Robinson studied for a social science degree at American River Junior College in Sacramento and at California State University at Sacramento.

Study at Midwestern Seminary followed as a natural because it is a Southern Baptist school and because of its nearness to the Robinsons' relatives in Irondale.

"Not once did we consider another seminary," Mrs. Robinson said. "The boys wanted to be here."

She remembered their visit to the seminary in August 1976. "When we entered the gates we all just fell in love with it." It was like the Lord said, "This is the place for you and the children."

The boys helped their parents unload their belongings Dec. 15 and then played and explored the seminary housing area. James protested that his mother was too protective when she called them indoors after sunset, Mrs. Robinson recalled.

The next day the boys' exploration took them out onto the ice and tragedy.

After the funeral, the Robinsons stayed about two weeks with relatives and then returned to their seminary apartment, to pick up their lives.

"We didn't consider not coming back," Robinson said. "We did talk about moving to another apartment and maybe taking some more time, like not coming back in January. Linda didn't seem to think that was too good.

"We looked at a new apartment and then came back here, and, I don't know, we just seemed to feel closer to the boys here," he noted.

Facing the tragedy has come in steps, however.

"I find reading the Bible," particularly the book of Job in the Old Testament, "is where I get most of my strength, most of my courage, most of my comfort, and if I get depressed, I just pray," Mrs. Robinson said.

"...At the end of life's road, there's going to be Christ. There's going to be Jamie and Kevin waiting for us. That gives me a little comfort, knowing we're going to be with them," she added.

Robinson believes their loss will help him deal with the sorrows of other persons in his ministry. He cannot accept the death of his sons as punishment, he said.

"The main thing that gives us any kind of peace at all about it is our Christian lives," he noted, "the knowledge that they were Christians and, if what we believe is true, they're at peace with God and in a better environment than they had here--although we were happy together.

"It seems like in that kind of perspective--the divine perspective--there's nothing sad at all about God taking two little boys out of this world, with all of its problems...to be completely removed from that and protected for eternity with God," he said.

"That's not sad if you think of it that way," Robinson concluded.

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G. Fred Wickman and Christina Floan are staff writers for The Kansas City Star.

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NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Robert J. O'Brien, News Editor
James Lee Young, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Orville Scott, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Tex. 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1998
MEMPHIS Roy Jennings, Chief, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38104, Telephone (901) 272-2461
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2000
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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**Research Ignores Religion
Baptist Youth Leaders Told**

NASHVILLE (BP)--A nationally recognized Lutheran research psychologist, known as "the George Gallup of the churches," told the first National Conference on Youth Ministry here that studies and research in the social sciences have consistently given little attention to religion.

"It's extremely odd that in attempting to understand human behavior, the most important force in society has been largely ignored," Merton P. Strommen, head of Search Institute, Minneapolis, told some 800 Southern Baptist ministers of youth and other key youth leaders at the four-day conference.

The conference, jointly sponsored by the youth-related areas of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Woman's Missionary Union and Brotherhood Commission, also featured SBC President James L. Sullivan, introduction of three new youth ministry resources, and such Christian entertainers as Grady Nutt, Cynthia Clawson and Ragan Courtney, Minnie Pearl, and the Imperials.

"The whole area of the impact of religious faith is largely left out of all the literature you will read, and it's left out of all the scholarly work coming out of our schools," continued Strommen, who has spearheaded several research studies on religious issues which have received national attention.

In contrast, Strommen told participants from 28 states, "we have found that the way you can best predict what a person will say and do is to know what he believes and values."

The findings of a survey of young people on the subject of drugs offer one supportive illustration of this point, Strommen added.

"The one thing most highly associated with taking or not taking drugs was a belief in a personal, caring God," he stated. "Those who believed in God were least likely to be involved in drugs."

Strommen told the conference gathering that Baptist youth leaders have impressed him with their "unusual eagerness to get below the surface" in their work with young people.

His extensive surveys of young people in various denominations have resulted in several books, including "Five Cries of Youth," which identifies the most pressing needs faced by young people and offers suggestions for meeting those needs.

Conference leaders announced that Strommen, in cooperation with the Sunday School Board's church administration department, has developed a Baptist Youth Research System available to churches. It incorporates a survey and a computer analysis to help young people discover more about their values, beliefs and concerns and determine directions to follow.

Although the system assures confidentiality of individuals, it allows compilation of group profiles which may be useful for counseling, general youth ministry planning, and training of adults for youth work.

Sullivan stressed in his address the importance of youth work and challenged the youth leaders not to overlook existing programs in their ministry.

"I look at your work as indispensable," Sullivan told the ministers of youth. "The minister of youth is not just a step to something bigger and greater beyond. It's a profession in itself."

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Sullivan briefly outlined the history of the Southern Baptist Convention from a time when persons were persecuted for their beliefs to today when many nationally prominent figures are active Southern Baptists.

"If we look at what has happened to our denomination, it's miraculous in the religious world," Sullivan said. "But," he warned, "if we feel we've arrived, then we've lost already. We have visibility, but we also have immense responsibility."

One of the things he appreciates most about the denomination, Sullivan said, is its emphasis on the worth of people, adding that Christ embodies this type of attitude and ministry.

"Two of the greatest sermons ever preached were to audiences of one," Sullivan reminded the youth leaders, referring to Christ's encounters with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. "Yet we think we have to have 500 in the audience to justify our time."

"If we can keep in our minds the worth of persons," he said, "our work will never be routine, it will be a romance."

Sullivan, who headed the Sunday School Board for 23 years, urged conference participants to utilize existing Southern Baptist programs in their work.

"I've heard more sermons against organizations than sin in the last 20 years," he said. "And the persons who were being so critical usually didn't know what they were talking about."

"The programs that are developed aren't hairbrained ideas that somebody just thought up. They all have a theological base which issues from the word of God."

"Organizations and programs are instruments in your hand," Sullivan emphasized. "They're tools for you to use."

Besides the Baptist Youth Research System developed by Strommen for the Sunday School Board, the conference also introduced two other youth ministry resources. They are "Youth Ministry Planbook," a compilation of practical helps for the full-time and part-time or volunteer minister of youth, and the "1977 Youth Ministry Packet," which includes summer planning suggestions, a youth ministry missions project booklet, items for youth-led Sunday evening worship services and two books for youth studies--"I Believe" and "Book Alive."

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(BP) Photos mailed to Baptist state papers.

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Nationals Continue Work,
Growth in Angola Reported

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LISBON, Portugal (BP)--Growth among national Baptists in Angola continues, almost two years after Southern Baptist missionaries left that country in the midst of a civil war, according to reports received here.

Garcia Benedito Jr., a national pastor, told Southern Baptist missionaries in Portugal that the Uige (formerly Carmona) District in Angola now has 17 churches with 11 pastors, 73 congregations and 90 lay evangelists. He said 959 baptisms have occurred during the year for a total of 9,073 members in that district.

The missionaries reported that a third Baptist church--the Third Baptist Church--in Luanda, Angola, has reopened for worship services.

"Third Baptist Church is experiencing such growth and attendance that a larger building is greatly needed to accommodate the crowds," according to Betty (Mrs. Curtis) Dixon, Southern Baptist missionary press representative for Angola, stationed in Portugal.

Materials in theological education, such as textbooks and study schedules are being sent to Angola for 20 students in 12 courses. Mrs. Dixon said 100 Bible and Scripture portions, a gift from another Third Baptist Church--in Lisbon--have also been sent.

Work continues in two other districts of Angola, but statistics for those areas are not available as yet, she said.

Since the missionaries left Angola in August 1975, Southern Baptist missionary Curtis Dixon (Mrs. Dixon's husband), has made five trips back into the country.

Angolan Baptists have expressed a desire for Southern Baptist missionaries to return to Angola, according to earlier reports.