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Mercer Officials Condemn
'Playboy' Philosophy

By William Neal

MACON, Ga. (BP)--Mercer University officials condemned Playboy magazine and its exploitation of women following the appearance of Mercer coeds in the magazine's current "back to school" issue.

Douglas Skelton, provost of the Mercer College of Liberal Arts, deplored the way Playboy had exploited the Georgia Baptist school. Last November the magazine ranked Mercer among the top party schools in the nation.

"The undeserved and undesired ranking was followed by a Playboy photographer's visit to Macon," Skelton said. "Playboy's deceit and distortion are evident in the current issue, where it is stated that one of the pictures was taken in the Mercer dorm. Not true.

Welton Gaddy, senior minister to the university, attacked the philosophy of sex espoused by the magazine: "Playboy's ruthless exploitation of individuals and institutions is indicative of its perverted prostitution of sexuality from a moral perspective. The problem with Playboy is not that it takes sex too seriously. The problem with Playboy is that it does not take sex seriously enough. A healthy, wholistic understanding of the subject of sex is best found in the book inspired by the Creator of sex."

The university has no plans to discipline the six women students included in Playboy's current issue, officials said. Although Mercer officials believe the women made a big mistake, it was their decisions to make as adults, Gaddy said, noting, "We can't monitor everyone's personal life off this campus."

Mercer officials apparently were told any efforts they might make to dismiss the students could be challenged in court and add to the publicity already generated by the controversy.

Playboy's purpose was to sell magazines and exploit people, so Playboy managers desired all the publicity they could get, Skelton said.

The Mercer leader added he hopes "all our students are ready to put the Playboy matter to rest and to focus on the important business at hand, which is getting an education."

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William Neal is associate editor of the Christian Index, newsjournal of the Baptist Convention of the State of Georgia.

Baptist Biker Completes Ride
With Disneyland Celebration

By Mary E. Speidel

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ANAHEIM, Calif. (BP)--Disneyland literally rolled out the red carpet for multiple sclerosis victim Ed Chasteen, a Baptist college professor from Liberty, Mo., as he ended his 5,000-mile cycling trip across America Aug. 17 in Anaheim, Calif.

Chasteen, professor of sociology at William Jewell College, a Baptist school near Kansas City, Mo., spent the summer biking from Disney World near Orlando, Fla., to Disneyland, by way of Seattle. He was raising funds for the MS Society and the Human Family Reunion, a program bringing people from all races and religions together for fellowship.

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On the morning of Aug. 27, the professor pedaled down a red carpet in front of Disneyland's train station, where a crowd of well-wishers waved American flags. During a celebration complete with a Disneyland band and cartoon characters, Mickey Mouse presented Chasteen a Mickey Mouse trophy honoring him for the feat.

Also participating in the Magic Kingdom welcome were Chasteen's wife, Bobbie, and Liberty, Mo., bikers Bob and Jean Watts. Watts built Chasteen's bike, named "The Spirit of Kansas City."

The Disneyland event ended a 5,126-mile bike ride for Chasteen, who was told six years ago he would never be active again. On May 18 in Orlando, Chasteen, 51, began his trek with no money and no idea where he would sleep each night.

Along the way, he depended on the generosity of others for his food and lodging needs. "I discovered it really is true. There is good in all people," says Chasteen, who slept in churches, rescue missions, private homes, police stations and on the front porch of a house where no one was home.

When possible, Chasteen spoke at Baptist churches and stayed in homes of Baptist families he met along his route. The professor is an active layman at Second Baptist Church in Liberty.

Throughout the trip, Chasteen says he discovered what he calls "the principle of audacious asking."

"The Bible says, 'Ask and you shall receive.' But most of us think of ourselves as givers instead of receivers. We have trouble receiving," he explains. "But on this trip, I never turned down a thing someone offered me. And as I was receiving, I felt I was also giving. It was a two-way exchange."

Along his journey, Chasteen says, many people responded to him because he was doing something different: "I found people like adventure. There's so much tedium in our lives. When people see someone doing something unusual, they want to be a part of it. I think I brought a little excitement into some people's lives this summer."

The trip brought its own set of adventures for Chasteen. On the way to speak at Central Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tenn., he had to walk his bike through a dark traffic tunnel while traffic whizzed past him. Lifting the bike's front end, he had to edge his way along a narrow pedestrian walkway.

Near Anna, Ill., he pulled a muscle in his back. To keep his ride on schedule, he had to continue riding in spite of pain. When he arrived in St. Louis in time for the Southern Baptist Convention, he received free medical care at a sports medicine clinic.

Near Portland, Ore., he took a wrong turn. When he was crossing the highway to turn around, his tire went flat. "Fortunately, there was no traffic coming, so I was able to safely get the bike over to the shoulder of the road," he says.

In spite of such dangers, Chasteen says he didn't fret about his journey: "The Bible says, don't worry. I didn't worry about anything all summer and it worked."

And even though he didn't worry, Chasteen admits there were times when he felt the trip would never end, "especially when I was going across Wyoming and Montana, riding against the wind," he recalls. "But I thought about all the people who were counting on me to do this and all the people who believed I was going to make it. They helped me keep going."

Pledges for both his causes are still coming in, so Chasteen doesn't know yet how much money his trip generated. Now that he's finished his ride, he will write a book about his experience.

"I'm going to call it 'Spirit Trail: Trek Across America.' I came up with that title when I passed various trails, such as the Oregon Trail, throughout the nation," he explains. "And while I was biking across America, I realized this trip was a spiritual journey much more than a physical one."

Home Mission Board
Elects New Book Editor

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptist Home Mission Board directors elected Mike Livingston as book editor and approved 74 people for missionary service during their September meeting.

As book editor, Livingston will oversee the planning, editing and production of Home Mission Board books, including the annual home mission study series. He will succeed Celeste Pennington who resigned last spring to become a freelance writer.

For the past two years, Livingston owned and operated a professional writing service in Memphis, Tenn. Previously, he was employed at the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission for 10 years as editor of Probe magazine, for Royal Ambassadors, and editor of World Mission Journal, a monthly missions magazine for Baptist men. He also was a senior news writer in the news department of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. Livingston's secular experience includes stints as a design editor, college instructor and newspaper reporter.

He holds bachelor's and master's degrees from Memphis State University and a master's degree from the University of Arkansas. He also is a doctoral candidate in the field of adult education at Memphis State.

Livingston and his wife, Sheril Raye, have two daughters.

In addition to electing Livingston, directors approved 15 missionaries, six missionary associates, eight church planter apprentices, and 45 mission pastors and interns.

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Nicaraguan Baptist Appointed
To Central American Peace Panel

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MANAGUA, Nicaragua (BP)--Baptist leader Gustavo Parajon has been named by Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega to a panel that will monitor compliance with the new plan to bring peace to Central America.

Parajon, a medical doctor, will serve on the National Commission of Reconciliation along with Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, who was appointed as the Roman Catholic representative. The cardinal, who has been a critic of the Sandinista government, will be president of the commission.

Parajon is to "represent the category of distinguished citizen," a Nicaraguan press release said. Others on the four-member panel are Mauricio Diaz, president of the opposition Popular Social Christian Party, representing registered political parties; and Vice President Sergio Ramirez, representing the government.

The Nicaragua commission is one of the national panels called for when chiefs of state of five nations in the troubled area met Aug. 7 in Guatemala to sign a peace accord.

Parajon and his wife, Joan, are commissioned missionaries of the Board of International Ministries of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. The Parajons have been active in Baptist World Alliance affairs. She is a member of the BWA Human Rights Study Commission, and he has been a member of Baptist World Aid and other alliance committees.

Parajon is a member of the executive committee of the Baptist Convention of Nicaragua and directs the convention's program of primary health care, Provadenic. Some of Provadenic's 27 clinics throughout the country have been attacked by Contra forces.

He also is president of CEPAD, the evangelical committee on relief, which unites some 80 evangelical groups within Nicaragua. Parajon is interim pastor of the First Baptist Church of Managua, where he regularly teaches an adult Bible class.

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(Editor's Note: Following is the second of a four-part series on church conflict.)

Trust Must Be Earned
By Caring For People

By Jim Lowry

KINGS MOUNTAIN, N.C. (BP)--Southern Baptist pastors who find success in ministry often have the gifts of trust, caring and security -- which they have received from loving church members.

Richard Plyler has learned in 25 years as pastor of Patterson Grove Baptist Church in Kings Mountain, N.C., that pastors cannot assume a role of ministry and trust without permission.

"You can't make somebody trust you, but you can generate an atmosphere of acceptance and respect," Plyler said. "Whether I agree or disagree with church members, I can always get across respect for their opinions, which potentially generates respect for me."

As the longest-tenured pastor in Kings Mountain Baptist Association, Plyler has seen and dealt with many areas of change and conflict, some of which potentially were divisive to the fellowship of the church.

"In my first pastorate, I ran away from change and conflict," he explained. "When I moved to the second church, all I did was change my address. Then I began to realize, where there are two or more people gathered together, there is potential and likelihood for disagreement.

"I also realized that it is not necessary for me to always get my way. When someone decides to get one's own way, there is a price to be paid. When people feel like they are being heard, however, something happens psychologically. It is the same as feeling loved and accepted."

Seven to 12 years is needed for a trust level to be established between pastor and church members, Plyler maintained. Genuine trust is not just a surface relationship, but a point in time when the pastor is invited by a family into its private circle of crisis and hurt.

"It is a gift of trust from people to pastor when you can step into their circle of hurt and hope," he continued. "Caring, or love, is at the core of the relationship when people can feel empathetic vibrations. They know that you know their failures, sorrows and secrets -- but you love them anyway.

"I've seen people devastated by painful situations and wonder how they will survive, but there they are next Sunday. The commonality of human suffering can make us enemies or brothers and sisters."

In the everyday relationships of churches, Plyler said, people have different dreams for what would make the church a success. Regardless of the size of the church, the number of staff members or the length of tenure, maturity is needed by the pastor and the church members to do their part, plant the seed and not care who gets the credit.

And when a decision is made which is different from an individual's dream, it is not the end of the world, Plyler pointed out. The pastor cannot think less of people or feel attacked because they have disagreed.

The success of guiding a church through the years depends on cooperation, effort, shared responsibilities and partnership, Plyler said. Determining success may require looking beyond the generally accepted denominational milestones of how many people, how much money and how fast the growth.

Another way to measure success is in growing people, he said. The pastor must be a caregiver, peacemaker and catalyst to work toward settlements that allow ministry.

"I deliberately made a choice to stay here in this small pastorate because that is where I wanted to invest my life's energies," Plyler explained.

"I have learned that changes made too rapidly create conflict, but not necessarily destruction," he said. "Change can create an atmosphere of uneasiness because there is security in sameness.

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"Some pastors institute change with a machine gun instead of with a single shot rifle," Plyler continued. "If there is to be peace, the people have to have time to rest between changes.

"Whether a pastor is in a church with 160 in Sunday school, like Patterson Grove, or 1,600, he needs to be at home with himself, knowing inside he has done the best he can with his skills," he said.

"And as Forrest Feezor, former executive secretary of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, said, 'One day that pastor will share the profits and hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."'

"I labor over sermons, pray and consider life's issues as I prepare to preach," Plyler said. "Then I assume that when I preach, it might be the last opportunity I have to say anything. That has revolutionized my preaching."

A pastor cannot force trust or acceptance, but through caring, empathetic sharing and earnest interest in good will, he can generate respect, he said.

"This grows out of a belief by pastor and members alike that when there is trust, you know they really don't want to do you any harm," he concluded. "I know I am a success here, at this point in time in this church ... by God's grace, and the permission of the people to include me in their family."

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New Course Produces Confident
Counselors, Maturing Christians

By Terri Lackey

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NASHVILLE (BP)--A sermon has ended, the invitation hymn begins and people with varied types of special needs walk to the church altar in search of healing, help and answers.

At the front of the church stands the pastor who spends a few seconds counseling each one. Due to the press of time, he directs those who have come to the altar to church members who fill out name-information cards and render a compassionate smile or pat on the back.

The next few minutes could mean spiritual life or death for those who have made religious decisions, said Leonard Sanderson, a Pineville, La., evangelist and author of a course to train church members to be spiritual counselors.

"Often people who come forward really don't know why except that they are hurting," said the author of "DecisionTime: Commitment Counseling," a 13-week Lay Institute for Equipping course prepared by the church training department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. "This is the reason we spend 13 weeks of study creating the best-trained counselors we have ever had in (Southern Baptist) history.

"Instead of spending two to three minutes with someone, a counselor can spend 20 to 30 minutes helping them understand their decision and then advising them to talk to the pastor."

Sanderson believes "that all of us need more help" learning counseling techniques. And taking this Lay Institute for Equipping course -- to be offered to churches in October -- provides church members with simple biblical strategy for immediate decision counseling, he said.

Sanderson said he fears one reason churches are losing 50 percent of their members -- 30 percent, non-resident; 20 percent, inactive -- is because many people do not understand the religious decisions they have made.

"It (loss of church members) says something is basically wrong with the whole decision-making experience," Sanderson said.

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Churches could combat membership loss by training members to lead the person who has just walked down the aisle toward a better understanding of his or her commitment, he said. The result would be "growing, maturing Christians and more faithful church members."

The DecisionTime course does not stop at merely producing effective counselors, Sanderson said. It prepares witnesses for all areas of the Christian life, including home and hospital visitation, camps, retreats and revivals.

"Christians who have completed the course no longer need to fear biblical questions," he said. "DecisionTime will take the average person who doesn't feel he has the gift of gab and turn him into a Christian who is comfortable sitting down and talking with people about Christianity.

"A person who has biblical training has a freedom -- he is not scared of questions or afraid he won't know what to do. Just think about what this will mean to Sunday school and church training when church members have confidence in counseling."

Sanderson said making counselors out of church members could become a great relief to pastors: "The pastors have done a good job (of counseling), but it's impossible for one person to do it all. And this course fits so nicely into the emphasis on laity."

As an interim pastor, Roy Edgemon, director of the church training department, said many times he has needed the talents of trained counselors at the end of a service.

"This course will multiply a pastor's ministry manyfold," Edgemon said. "It will give him assurance in knowing those people are being dealt with by trained counselors.

"This will allow the invitation to flow better," and, in turn, reduce the bottleneck effect that can occur when the pastor tries to deal with each person who comes forward, Edgemon said.

Meanwhile, Sanderson said, the understanding and support of pastors will be the key to the use of the DecisionTime course in churches.

The pastor must study it "and find out what the real benefits are. Once pastors see the potential, they will get excited and lead their church to do it," he said.

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