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Fear of witnessing plagues  
students' evangelism efforts

By Terri Lackey

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--High school students who wish to be good Christian witnesses at school are sometimes plagued by fears and anxieties that limit their efforts, a youth minister said.

"It's difficult to be willing to take a stand and be counted as a Christian when there are so many worldly things going on at school," said Brian Foster, minister of youth at Rockdale Baptist Church in Conyers, Ga.

Materialism, cliques, alcohol, drugs and an overall apathy in high schools makes breaking through to non-Christians and telling them about God difficult, Foster told about 40 students attending a seminar at a summer youth conference at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

The mid-July conference for youth ran simultaneously with the Church Training Leadership Conference, where almost 3,000 people registered. Both were sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church training department.

Foster noted some preliminary steps high school students can take before they begin to witness at school.

"You must prepare yourself to become a Christian witness," he said. "You can do that by having your own prayer time and Bible study time and by coming to weeks like this at Ridgecrest where you can learn about the Bible and Christian witnessing.

"If you're not right with God, you can't tell someone else how to be right with him."

Foster suggested the students begin each morning in quiet time with God: "Psychologists say the first 15 minutes of your day sets the whole tone for what the rest of your day will be like. Starting your day off right with God is good preparation for sharing Christ with others.

"When you spend time with God every morning, you will become strong in the Lord, and you will be able to stand up for Christ in your high school."

Common elements that keep young people from being strong Christian witnesses are fear of rejection and fear of being ridiculed, Foster said.

"There's a lot of pressure on you to always act like a Christian. You have to practice what you preach," he said. "If you keep acting like a Christian, you may be ridiculed, but you will be respected."

High school students must constantly watch how they act, watch the type of music they listen to and watch how they dress, he noted: "The way you dress has a whole lot to do with your witness at school. The way we wear our clothes has a lot to say about our Christianity."

Even so-called small wrongdoings, such as running a stop sign, may portray the wrong message to non-Christian friends, Foster said: "We as Christians are taught to obey the law. If we don't do simple things like stopping at stop signs, we send our non-Christian friends a message that it's OK to break the law."

In preparing to be good Christian witnesses, Foster told the students to write down their personal testimonies and practice sharing them with a Christian friend.

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"You should also practice using the Scripture," he said. "You could either carry a small New Testament with you to school, or even better than that is to hide God's word in your heart."

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For Missouri dentist, ministry  
means pulling teeth in Brazil

By Jacquelyn Huffman

Baptist Press  
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FARMINGTON, Mo. (BP)--On her third mission trip to Brazil, Beth Patterson finally learned the reason a dental patient kept trying to lift her sleeve as she worked. The dark-skinned Brazilian wondered if the American dentist's arms were as white as her face and hands.

Patterson first became interested in volunteer mission work while attending dental school at Washington University in St. Louis. She heard about work as a dental volunteer when two fellow students went to Haiti under the direction of Perry Short, a St. Louis-area retired dentist who frequently is involved in volunteer mission work.

Short was a classmate of Patterson's father, and when the elder Patterson was in St. Louis, they discussed volunteer missions. She subsequently joined a mission as a volunteer to the Bahamas, where she worked for a church in Nassau in 1978 while still in dental school.

After completing school, Patterson became a dentist for the Elks Mobile Unit, working with mentally and physically handicapped children and adults. The area in which she works covers nearly 40 counties in southeastern Missouri. With a home base in Farmington, Mo., the unit moves from county to county, staying at one place as long as interest and population requires.

Patterson, a member of First Baptist Church in Farmington, said she decided to do dentistry for the handicapped because "it was just the right set of circumstances. When I was in dental school, a part of the training requirement was to spend a month in community service. This was the field I chose. I liked it, so when this job became available after graduation, I took it."

Patterson's first volunteer mission trip after graduation was in September 1985. Her father, J.D. Patterson, learned of an Arkansas-Brazil partnership mission program called the Amazonas-Arkansas Exchange. Shortened to AMAr, the acronym means "love" in Portuguese.

The Pattersons, accompanied by a musician, worked with Luther Williams, a Southern Baptist missionary in Manaus. When they arrived at Manaus, they boarded a 37-foot boat for a 15-day trip on the Amazon.

"We go up river until we spot houses," she explained. "We then anchor and Luther goes ashore. He introduces the program and asks if anyone needs any teeth pulled.

"If we have been there before, everyone wants teeth pulled. The nationals have very poor dental health, but if a governmental dentist removes teeth, he uses no anesthetic. If we are new in the area, someone eventually volunteers to have a tooth removed. Once the word gets out that it doesn't hurt, because we use anesthetic, we are swamped by the end of the day."

On the trips, she cares for the children, and her father cares for the adults. During the day, Williams interprets for the Pattersons as they extract teeth.

After supper, the team holds a two-hour evangelistic service. The musician provides music, and the missionary preaches. At the end of the service, the team retires to the boat. The pilot moves the boat up the river the next morning, and they repeat the schedule.

She returned to the same area in 1987 and again this year, continuing the volunteer work.

Each time the team leaves Amazonas, they feel they are ready to return as soon as they have had a good bath and a short rest out of the heat and humidity. They have seen results from their crusades, but not always while they are in Amazonas.

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In 1985, they saw no results, but when they returned in 1987, they found one man had accepted Christ as a direct result of the 1985 crusade. This year, four people professed faith in Christ while the team was there.

Although the mission trips have been physically exhausting, Patterson noted they have been spiritually exhilarating. She described the people as very poor but also very giving and loving.

"It makes me aware of how much others do without," she reflected. "I have been reminded that I have so much compared to most people in the world and that medical and dental care are so accessible in the United States."

Although she is "thankful to come home because of things we take for granted like running water and flush toilets," she quickly added, "I want to go back."

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(Huffman is a regional correspondent for Word & Way, newsjournal of the Missouri Baptist Convention.)

Vines urges Americans  
not to see 'Temptation'

By Dan Martin

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JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Americans should "refuse to spend their money" to see the controversial movie "The Last Temptation of Christ," urged Southern Baptist Convention President Jerry Vines.

Vines, co-pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., commented to Baptist Press on the Martin Scorsese film, produced by Universal Pictures and Ceneplex Odeon Films.

"The movie may be the the most offensive film yet to be produced in the United States," said Vines, who was elected president of the 14.7-million-member denomination in June. "The depiction of Christ as a collaborative, voyeuristic, whoremongering wimp is an affront to all decent people. I do not resonate with such a trashing of my Savior, but fervently reject it.

"I urge all Americans to refuse to spend their money on such, thus assuring Universal Studios of its most colossal financial failure ever."

Vines made his comments as controversy continued over the film, which has been criticized by Christian groups led by the American Family Association, headed by Donald Wildmon of Tupelo, Miss., and Christian psychologist James Dobson of Pomona, Calif.

Wildmon said the film presents Jesus "as a mentally unstable person who fights being the Son of God, a sinner who doesn't know who will pay for his sins, a person who lashes out at the sick and poor, a traitor to the Jews, one who lusts after Mary Magdalene and a bigamist." It also reportedly contains nudity and "fairly explicit" sexual scenes.

Wildmon, who said he has not seen the film but has an early version of the script, said the movie is blasphemous and has urged Christians to circulate petitions, telephone Universal Studios and to call their local theaters asking that the movie not be shown.

The July edition of Wildmon's AFA Journal has a petition that includes excerpts from the script and the suggestion that it be reproduced and mailed to local theaters.

In the continuing controversy, reports have circulated that Universal Studios released the film in selected cities July 15. The report was printed in the July 21 issue of the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger, newsjournal of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

Associate Editor Bob Mathews quoted an unnamed publicity spokesman for Universal Studios as saying the film had been released in what is called a platform engagement in selected cities, probably New York, Chicago, Toronto and Los Angeles.

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Another Universal publicist, Allen Sutton, told Baptist Press the studio has not received the finished film from filmmaker Scorsese and is not planning to release the film until sometime in the fall. "The report we have already released the film is completely false," he said.

The film was screened in a "rough cut" for representatives of religious groups July 12 in New York, but, according to sources, has not been generally released nor advertised there.

In his story, Mathews quoted the unnamed spokesman as saying protests will not stop the film's showings. "I think people should reserve judgment until they've seen the film," the spokesman said. "They (Wildmon and others) are protesting something they haven't seen, and much of what they are saying is exaggerated and inaccurate."

Managers of theaters in Oklahoma City, and in Norman, Tulsa, Lawton and Ponca City, Okla., said protests would probably not have any effect because practically all bookings of films are done by regional and district offices out of state. "The local manager has no say over the films. We just do what the booking office says," one manager explained.

That sentiment was echoed July 13 on an Oklahoma City radio show. Robert Osborne, a film industry observer for 24 years and a columnist for the Hollywood Observer magazine, said protests just play into the hands of the studio. Petitions and protests just add up to free publicity for the film and result in a greater turnout for the movie, he said. "The best way to fight it is to ignore and not patronize theaters showing the movie," he added.

An Oklahoma City theater manager said the best way to combat the film is to ignore it. He cited the movie "Colors," a film about gang warfare, as an example of protests and publicity bringing more people into the theater.

"Without all the attention, 'Colors' wouldn't have done beans in our theaters, but with all the furor, it sold out in places that haven't had a sell-out all year," he said. "It did well for a short while, then people realized it wasn't a good film or story, and attendance dropped drastically."

One manager said a film such as "The Last Temptation" probably will have limited bookings, such as only one or two theaters in a metropolitan area compared with eight to 10 for films such as "Rambo III" and "Crocodile Dundee II."

"The dollar is what the studio is interested in," another explained, "and if enough publicity can be generated through protests, ticket sales will climb. There are publicity people in Hollywood who sit around trying to think up ways to get films noticed and tickets sold. Protests just play into their hands and do the work for them."

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Seminarian's race  
honors former student

By Brenda J. Sanders

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--The 15th annual Hospital Hill Run held recently in Kansas City, Mo., was a special event for Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary student David Gregory.

For him, the race accomplished two purposes: It commemorated a personal celebration. It also honored the memory of a former seminary student.

Gregory came to Midwestern in Kansas City from Europe in 1985 and entered the associate of divinity degree program. Originally from Great Britain, he had been a professional ballet dancer for 10 years in Austria before he became a Christian in his late 30s.

Gregory's dancing career was interrupted when doctors discovered he had cancer. Surgery and chemotherapy treatments sapped his strength. But through the experience, he sensed a call from God to enter the ministry.

He and his wife, Alice, moved to the United States and came to Midwestern Seminary for the theological training he needed.

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As he opened his mind to biblical truths in the classroom, Gregory returned to running in his spare time, a hobby which he had pursued with enthusiasm before becoming a dancer. He later took up race-walking, a form of exercise in which a person walks at a rapid pace and utilizes muscles in both the upper and lower portions of the body.

When Gregory heard of Kansas City's Hospital Hill Run, he became interested in participating. The event includes races of different lengths, the longest of which is a half-marathon of 13.1 miles.

Although he had never raced more than six miles, he decided to race-walk the entire distance of the half-marathon. He also decided his effort would do more than meet a personal goal.

Shortly after Gregory came to Midwestern, a memorial scholarship fund was established honoring one of the institution's former international students, Rufus Adetona.

Adetona, a native of Nigeria, received a master of divinity degree from Midwestern Seminary in 1976 and a doctor of ministry degree in 1985. After earning his doctorate, he returned to Nigeria to live with his wife and five children. He died suddenly, just four months later.

A memorial fund was established in Adetona's name to assist international students at Midwestern.

As an international student, Gregory felt a special kinship to Adetona, whom he never met. He decided to use his effort in the Hospital Hill Run to raise money for the memorial fund.

When he presented the idea to Wornall Road Baptist Church in Kansas City, where he is a member, members agreed to sponsor him in the race, pledging donations to the fund for each mile he completed.

In addition, a number of Midwestern students, faculty members and staff also made pledges.

On the day of the race, Gregory completed the half-marathon and raised about \$1,000 for the fund.

Of his effort, Gregory said: "It's a thank you note to the seminary, out of a sense of gratefulness for all I've received here. I wanted to give back to the seminary something in return for what I've gained from it.

"Being an international student, I know what it's like to come here without a job. I just had a desire to help other people."

The race also held personal meaning for Gregory, who is in perfect health five years after his struggle with cancer.

"For me, this was kind of a celebration," he said. "Some people go through these kinds of illnesses and can't do things like run a race anymore. I can, and I wanted to celebrate and thank God for what he has done in my life."

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Texas Baptists restore home  
for widow, handicapped son

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press  
7/19/88

DALLAS (BP)--The fire-gutted home of a 79-year-old widow and her handicapped son will soon have a fully rebuilt interior, thanks to the disaster relief ministry of Meadowbrook Baptist Church in Irving, Texas.

In mid-May, the Irving Fire Department notified Meadowbrook Church that a fire had completely ruined the interior of an uninsured elderly woman's home. A representative of the disaster relief team at Meadowbrook then contacted the Red Cross to coordinate rebuilding efforts.

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After temporary housing was arranged for the fire victims, the Baptist Men and Woman's Missionary Union chapters of the church scheduled a clean-up day at the burned-out house and enlisted volunteer workers to begin the refurbishing project.

"We had about 36 volunteers involved in the clean-up that first weekend," said Bud Tarver, director of the disaster relief team. "Since then, we've had about four or five retired men who have been working during the week."

Volunteer workers have completed taping and bedding the interior of the house and now are involved in repainting. Laborers expect the project to be completed by the end of July.

Although the woman whose home was damaged professes to be a Christian, she readily admits to not having been active in any church, Tarver said. However, he believes she may become more involved in church and more faithful in her Christian walk as a result of Meadowbrook's ministry to her.

"I've extended an invitation to her and told her we've still got a few empty pews available," he said. "Maybe I'm overly optimistic, but I fully believe she'll be visiting us soon."

Meadowbrook Church has sponsored a disaster relief ministry for eight years. The team has responded to a number of emergencies, including the crash of Delta Flight 191 at Dallas-Fort Worth airport in August 1985.

"We've worked with the fire department in disaster relief before, so they know to call us," said Tarver. "In fact, there was another fire three days after the one at this lady's house, involving 24 families. We put six of them up in a motel."

Although Tarver said he has been involved in disaster relief and special ministry projects for several years, he said he is always gratified by the response in his church when an appeal is made for volunteers.

"I never cease to be amazed at how people respond in these situations," he said.