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NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #75
Nashville, Tennessee 3720
(615) 244-235
Alvin C. Shackelford, Director
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Marv Knox, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367
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NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
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WASHINGTON 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Following is part one of a two-part series on AIDS

Shock, confusion, sadness precede acceptance of AIDS

By Linda Lawson

F-SSB

HARTFORD, Ky. (BP)--Shock. Confusion. Sadness. Hope. These stages marked Belinda Mason's journey toward acceptance of the reality that, with a transfusion of untested blood, she also had received the deadly HIV virus that could lead to a full-blown case of AIDS.

The news in the spring of 1987 that she had tested HIV-positive came on the heels of a victory over death.

In January of that year, at age 28 and pregnant with her second child, Mason suffered a stroke and cardiac arrest. Her son, Clayton, was born healthy, but for days she hovered, blind and paralyzed, between life and death. Prayers of family and friends from East Hartford Baptist Church in Hartford, Ky., made the difference, she believes.

"I had had such a feeling of victory when my baby was OK," she recalled. "So many people were holding me up in prayer. It didn't occur to me to worry because I couldn't walk or I couldn't see. I thought, 'This is great. I've beaten this sucker. I'm going to be OK.'"

As her sight returned and she went through rehabilitation to begin recovery from other effects of the stroke, Mason began to experience the first signs of the HIV virus in her system -- fatigue, swollen lymph glands, no appetite. By July, she was sick enough to be eligible for AZT, a drug which slows down reproduction of the AIDS virus in the system.

"I was shocked and felt in some ways like this victory had been a mistake," she said. "I can't say I was ever angry, but I was so confused. Then I felt an incredible sadness, a grief and a loss."

The focus of her sadness was her family -- husband Steve Carden, a professor of philosophy at Owensboro (Ky.) Community College, and her children, infant Clayton and Polly, then 3.

"My little girl already was suffering from me not being able to be her mom like I had been," she said. "I just really pined and worried about the future a lot, like who was going to take care of them and who was going to make sure Polly's hair got braided in the morning."

At her wit's end, Mason prayed.

"I didn't feel it was too good for me to ask God to make me whole again. I figured if he wanted to do that, he could," she said. "So I asked to have the sadness lifted away from me. I feel that was the reason I was delivered. Once I stopped worrying about dying, it was like I was ready to live."

With the lifting of the sadness came two other challenges -- how to spend the rest of her life and how to tell people, especially those at East Hartford Baptist Church, she was HIV-positive.

"I knew they (church members) didn't have a lot of experience with what AIDS was except for probably negative experience," said Mason. She anticipated acceptance from Pastor Bill Holladay but worried that fear might cause members to stay away from church if she attended.

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However, when she told Holladay of her fears, he asked her permission to share the information with the congregation.

At a Wednesday night prayer service, "I simply laid out the facts to the church. They wept openly in the service," he said.

Added his wife, Lucille Holladay: "In our little church we all get involved in each other's lives. When our prayers for Belinda's recovery from the stroke were answered, we believed that was our miracle. We told everybody how she had been saved to rear her children."

To the announcement about AIDS, "the response of the church was so wonderful," Mrs. Holladay recalled. "We all just about dehydrated."

And, Mason added, when she and her family arrived at church the next Sunday, "they met me at the door and they were hugging me, like always."

A short time later, Mason, reared a Presbyterian, and her husband, a member of the Disciples of Christ church, were baptized together into the fellowship of the congregation that had prayed for them and wept with them.

Acceptance by the church did not guarantee total acceptance in the community. An incident at a swimming pool where some people left the water when she entered caused Mason and Carden to decide to move where no one knew them or their circumstances. After several months in Indiana, they returned to Hartford.

A former reporter, a free-lance writer and a promising playwright, Mason had numerous options for making contributions in the time left to her. Instead, she came to believe God had given her a special mission.

"I had always known I was supposed to do something, like I had a mission. But I never wanted to give myself completely over because I was so afraid of where I would end up. I was afraid I would go to Africa or something," she laughed.

"After I got delivered from the sadness and felt hopeful, I knew there was a reason I had been spared. I felt like I wanted to pray and really get close to God so I could figure out what the reason was. I really believe this work that I do is the work that he wanted me to do."

"This work" includes heading up the National Association of People with AIDS and serving on the National AIDS Commission.

But Mason believes her most important work is to go before church and community groups, allowing them to see into the life of a person living with AIDS, providing information and encouraging them to reach out to patients and family members with love and support.

Balancing opportunities to change attitudes about people with AIDS and having time for her family requires constant attention.

"The time I have with my family is limited. It is for all of us, though all of us maybe aren't aware of it. I want to have some of that time, however much that is, with Steve and my kids."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SSB bureau of Baptist Press

NOTE TO EDITORS: Following is part 2 of a 2-part series on AIDS.

Churches urged to reach out
to people living with AIDS

By Linda Lawson

F-SSB

Baptist Press
10/16/89

HARTFORD, Ky. (BP)--If Belinda Mason had her way, churches would reach out with hands -- an hugs -- to people living with AIDS.

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In this kind of atmosphere of openness, a mother coping with the secret of a homosexual son who has tested HIV-positive could share her fear and grief with Christian people and receive support and compassion.

"If we can just get people in our churches, in our small towns, to respond with their hearts, then we can turn this country around on this disease. It's not going to come from Washington by making a law," said Mason, president of the National Association of People with AIDS and a member of the National Commission on AIDS.

But as a person living with AIDS, Mason's strength comes from her family, her church and her Christian faith -- not from the organizations with which she works.

After receiving a blood transfusion early in 1987, Mason, now 31, learned a few months later she also had tested positive for the HIV virus and could develop AIDS. She now is termed to have AIDS-related complex.

The members of East Hartford Baptist Church in Hartford, Ky., have rallied to the support of Mason, her husband, Steve Carden, and their two children, Polly, 6, and Clayton, 2. Prayers on behalf of Mason became the beginning of a prayer ministry for the church. Belinda Mason's name remains first on the list each week.

"Why can't we have the kinds of churches and communities where people can come forward with their deepest hurts such as AIDS?" Mason asks when she speaks to groups and often is the first person living with AIDS they have seen.

"I just don't think it's fair for people to have to grieve in silence. It's not right," she said.

She challenges Christians simply to model their lives after Christ. He did not ask how people got into difficulties before he helped them, she insists.

"Some people have said to me, 'Well, you got AIDS from a blood transfusion, and it's a real tragedy.' Well, it's a tragedy for anybody. It doesn't matter how they got it. It doesn't matter," she said.

Bill Holladay, pastor of East Hartford Baptist Church, sought to educate himself and his church about AIDS, collecting and disseminating facts. But love more than information has enabled church members to accept and support and minister to Mason, he said.

To other churches, he urges, "Respond like our church did and like any Christian should."

To Southern Baptist people and churches which have not yet been directly impacted by AIDS, Mason warned: "If AIDS hasn't touched them yet, it will. "The idea that AIDS happens to other people was never true. It especially will not be true in the future."

"Everybody who has AIDS is somebody's child or somebody's cousin. And all of us are God's children, whether or not we're walking the walk and living the life.

"What I really hope to do, my best hope, is to try as hard as I can to be Christlike.

"I think it's highly possible for Christian people to do the right thing. I've seen people turn around in their attitudes. I've seen them say, 'I was wrong' or 'I didn't realize' or 'What can we do to help?'"

Helping church members be prepared for the inevitable time when they are impacted personally by AIDS is a task pastors and church leaders should be involved in now, said to Doug Anderson, director of the family ministry department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

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"AIDS is such an insidious problem that within the next few years everyone will know someone with AIDS or have a family member with the disease," said Anderson, also convener of an ad hoc task force of Southern Baptist program leaders developing resources to help churches deal more effectively with AIDS.

"I am increasingly coming to understand the AIDS crisis as one of the very best opportunities for Christians and churches to focus on the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ," said Anderson. "Church leaders must bring the attention of their congregations to the problem of AIDS and prepare their churches to be proactive in caring."

A national conference, AIDS: Crisis for Church and Family" will be held Feb. 12-13, 1990 in Nashville, Anderson said. The conference will be sponsored by the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the family ministry, church administration, discipleship training and student ministry departments of the Sunday School Board.

For more information about the conference, write P.O. Box 25266, Nashville, Tenn. 37202-5266.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SSB bureau of Baptist Press

Prayer consultant
cites 8 principles

By Breena Kent Paine

N-CO
(NOBTS)

Baptist Press
10/16/89

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"The closer the bond when you pray together, the greater the authority God will invest in that prayer," T.W. Hunt told students and faculty at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary during the Layne Foundations Lectures.

Hunt, the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's consultant on prayer, was the guest speaker during the seminary's lectures and provided students and faculty with eight prayer principles.

-- Pray in the Spirit. A Christian's prayer time should be deep and heart-felt, Hunt said.

"Have you ever read the Bible and the words leaped out of the page and grabbed you with new meaning? This 'deep unto deep' ought to (penetrate) our lives all the time," he said. And yet, praying in the Spirit is not based on feeling, for "the Holy Spirit takes our weak, ineffective prayers and translates them. ... Even when you think you're powerful, that doesn't really matter very much, because the Holy Spirit intercedes for us."

-- Pray with the mind. "Think about the words," he explained. "Remember this is not a casual acquaintance."

-- Pray in Jesus' name. "The name of Jesus is our legal entrance into the throne room. It is not our righteousness; it is Jesus' righteousness," he said. For example, a Christian might pray, "I do not come today in my worth, but in the moral worth of Jesus."

-- Abide in Christ. "To bear fruit, you must abide; and that does not happen overnight," he said, noting that abiding in Christ comes from consciously acknowledging Christ's presence, studying the Bible, praying and eliminating sin in one's life.

-- Ask in faith. "Faith is not feeling; faith is reckoning on the certain word of God. ... Faith is the certainty that God is hearing you; it is not based on feeling," Hunt said. "I've found people who think they don't have faith, but they don't really give God a chance by spending enough time in prayer. God hardly has time to speak to us (because) we rush in and out of his presence so quickly."

-- Ask in humility. "God must increase, we must decrease, (for) it is God-centeredness that makes worship what it is; it is not what we are," he said.

-- Ask in sincerity. "You've got to be real," he said. The spirit of the prayer is more important than the material of the prayer.

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-- Persevere. Some Christians have prayed for a family member 30 years before that member came to know Christ, he added, urging: "Be persistent. We need to cry after the Lord. Perseverance does not change God; it changes us."

"The Bible was written about folks just like us. There are times God seems to be silent; there are times we don't know how to pray; times when he seems to be hard on us. Sometimes God wants to give more than we want to ask."

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Louisiana touts education
as key to American's future

By Breena Kent Paine

F-10
(NOBTS)

Baptist Press
10/16/89

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Higher education for lower income people is no longer a dream in Louisiana; it is a reality, and Pat Taylor hopes such opportunities will spread to other states.

The owner of Taylor Energy Co., an oil and gas company worth more than \$300 million, Taylor encouraged New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary students during a chapel service and a dialogue session to spread the news and let young people know they have a chance for higher education.

"If you want a solution to the social ills in this country, if you want to break the welfare cycle, if you want to bring our people together, why don't you equalize opportunity?" Taylor asked.

"We excuse ourselves by saying poor kids ... can't learn, so it doesn't make any difference if we deny them an opportunity. That's got to stop. And, of course, in Louisiana it has stopped. Our kids are going to show us the way now."

About 18 to 25 percent of American teenagers today are high school drop-outs, and a similar number receive high school diplomas, although they read and compute at an eighth-grade level -- "functionally illiterate and unemployable," Taylor said. "Most of our inner-city schools are nothing more than warehouses for our young people, and they're warehouses more and more full of drugs and crime and teen pregnancy.

"The problems extend to our lower and middle schools, and since poverty is increasing in this country, things are just going to get worse unless we do something."

Many educators suggest the answer is to pay teachers more, offer better facilities, or intervene earlier in a child's life; but Taylor feels "kids only learn and educate themselves if they make the personal decision to do so.

"How can we expect our kids to stay in school, study and learn, stay off drugs, stay out of crime, not get pregnant, if we don't offer them a future?" he asked. "It has to do with the way we administer education in this country. We do, in fact, deny college to most of our people. The Wall Street Journal estimates that 82 percent of American families cannot afford the least expensive public college. So their kids know that they're denied success in our society, and they literally drop out.

"There is a solution. Show the way, and then get out of the way. Show the way by setting standards, telling our children what they have to learn in school in order to succeed in college, then get out of the way by removing the barriers.

"If I could do it, they can do it," said Taylor, who enrolled in Louisiana State University with only \$55 in his pocket to buy food and a bill of \$205 for school costs. LSU paid his bill and the East Texan's gratitude led him to stay in Louisiana and base his multi-million-dollar company in that state to help the economy.

His experience also had led him to be instrumental in raising the requirements for college admission, as well as providing a way for low-income students to attend college and motivating teen-agers to take high school seriously.

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About a year ago, Taylor was asked to visit a junior high school in a low-income area of New Orleans to serve as a "role model." The 221 teen-agers were 95-percent black, had failed in school two or three times, and were children of single parents on welfare.

"When I found out in Orleans Parish, at that time, 43 percent of the kids were dropping out of high school, I started thinking about the (government housing) projects and the drugs and the crime," Taylor said. "It wasn't just that these kids weren't succeeding; it was that (these) kids were dying."

Taylor wanted to provide the alternative of a good education, but first had to find out if the teens indeed placed no value on education, as their poor school attendance seemed to indicate. When he asked how many would like to go to college, "every hand in that room went up."

Taylor explained to them the LSU and University of New Orleans entrance requirements of 17 1/2 high school course credits, requirements he helped put into effect hoping to challenge students to work harder to obtain their college goals. "If you stay in school and you take those courses and you make a B-average, I'll see that you go to college," he told them. Now, a year later, 172 of the original 221 still are in school, the decrease attributed to family moves, not intentional drop-outs.

"Twelve of our 15 universities have set admission standards to tell our kids what to learn, and the state has agreed to pay tuition fees for all those whose parents cannot afford college. Louisiana's the first state to guarantee equal opportunity for all its people," Taylor said.

Taylor's motivation to provide a college education for all students who want it comes from a further concern: "The greatest threat facing our nation internally is not drugs. Threatening the very existence of this nation as an industrialized nation is our shortage of engineers and scientists. ... Forty percent of the students in our universities studying engineering and science are foreign students. ... In math and science we're scoring 14th in the world."

Taylor hopes to decrease that threat as the opportunity of higher education is offered to more and more youth throughout the nation.

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Ethics professor at Southwestern
gives students a new perspective

By Chip Alford

F - CO
(SWBTS)

Baptist Press
10/16/89

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Guy Greenfield wants to change some things at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas -- the minds of his students.

"I am not here to just be a disc jockey of someone else's information. I'm here to use the truth as we know it in Scripture, theology and other sources, to change people," said Greenfield, professor of Christian ethics at the seminary.

"Education, in my way of thinking, is not opening up empty heads and pouring in information. It's an experience of transformation and growth, of seeing an opportunity for ministry that you may not have seen otherwise, and of equipping yourself to work with people in a redemptive way."

Although he has taught at three colleges and three seminaries, Greenfield originally was called to the pastorate as a college student in his home state of Oklahoma.

"I was a 19-year-old student at Oklahoma State University," Greenfield recalled. "My roommate was going through a lot of severe trauma, doubts and questions. One weekend after his girlfriend broke up with him he committed suicide.

"It really had an impact on me because he wasn't saved. It was a kind of thunderous message to me that lost people were all around me and I wasn't doing anything about it. Through that experience and the influence of the Baptist Student Union, I realized that God was calling me into the ministry, and I responded."

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Greenfield transferred to Oklahoma Baptist University, where he earned his bachelor of arts degree in religion and Bible. He later earned a master's degree in sociology from Texas Tech University and two degrees from Southwestern -- a master of divinity and a doctorate of philosophy.

While at the seminary, Greenfield was under the tutelage of the late Christian ethics pioneer T.B. Maston. "He was my main professor," Greenfield recalled, "and he really encouraged me to consider teaching. He kept telling me he could see me in that role."

Greenfield didn't want to choose between teaching and preaching, so he found a way to combine the two ministries. His 20 years of pastoral experience include churches in four states, and his 22 years of teaching experience include terms as a sociology professor at Judson College in Marion, Ala., Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, and the University of New Mexico at Los Alamos, and as professor of Christian ethics at Southwestern. He was guest professor at Baptist seminaries in Argentina and Uruguay in 1986.

"I see teaching and the pastorate as a combined calling for me," Greenfield said. "I really enjoy both, and I continue to do interim work (in churches). I think it is important for seminary professors to keep in touch with the local church in a vital way."

Drawing on his counseling experience as a pastor and teacher, Greenfield has written four books dealing with family and interpersonal relationships and self-esteem.

Greenfield said he decided to write the book "Self Affirmation" after counseling so many active Christians struggling with a poor, negative self-image.

"My thesis is essentially this: What you see is what you do," Greenfield explained. "If a person sees himself as a loser, he is probably going to be proving it true in his behavior."

To achieve a healthy self-image, Greenfield said, individuals must let the Bible transform their lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. "We must use the word to replace the negative labels of our old, sinful nature with new, positive labels we receive through our relationship with Jesus Christ," he said.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary

CORRECTION: Please change the last sentence of the 10th paragraph of the 10/13/89 BP story titled "HMB, Louisiana leaders plan New Orleans effort" to read:

Local churches will provide transportation in New Orleans.

Thanks,
BP
