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Federal funds to be used
for 'lesbian' performance

By Tom Strode

N-CO (BGC)

WASHINGTON (BP)--Holly Hughes, who describes herself as an "openly lesbian performance artist," says she plans to use a recent grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to discuss female homosexual themes on stage.

The performance will feature two girls of about 12 years of age as its main characters, Hughes' grant application revealed.

The grant for a work by Hughes, whom the NEA had rejected in a different application last June, may fulfill the fears of legislators as well as evangelical and other groups that pushed for restrictions on content in October's reauthorization of the endowment. The legislation that was adopted after a lengthy battle directed NEA Chairman John Frohnmayer to take into account "general standards of decency" when making grants.

"This grant validates our claim that Congress should have imposed content restrictions on the NEA last year," said James A. Smith, director of government relations for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "This is another example of how the NEA and its grantees can flaunt their perverted agenda at taxpayers' expense and expect to get away with it."

Hughes, a playwright/stage performer, said that the NEA should have known of her plans for the performance because they were included in her grant application, which was announced as approved on Jan. 4. Hughes made the statements in a telephone interview from New York City with Baptist Press.

The grant application, released by the NEA following a Freedom of Information Act request by Baptist Press, does not state explicitly that the performance will be concerned with lesbianism. The project description, which is included in the application, says that the performance will analyze female sexuality. It also reveals that one of the sources for the work is a lesbian vampire short story, "Carmella," by a 19th century writer, Sheridan Le Fanu.

The \$15,000 grant for "No Trace of the Blonde," which is a collaborative effort by Hughes, as playwright, and Ellen Sebastian, as director, was given to the Downtown Art Co. of New York City and later transferred to Performance Space 122 of New York after Hughes left Downtown Art. It was one of about 1,200 grants that were announced Jan. 4 and total about \$47 million in federal funds. The grants were part of the NEA's 1990-91 total of \$152 million to be given.

The application, which names Hughes as project director, says that "No Trace of the Blonde" will have as many as five performers with "two pubescent girls, black and white, about 12 years old, as the main characters."

The project description says the work "will explore the gothic image of vampires, investigating the image of vampires as an expression of irrepressible sexuality within an oppressive social order, and exploring the image of vampires using (a) feminist revisionary approach which views female vampires as a projection of male anxiety. Through research into non-western religious rituals such as voodoo and Sant(e)ria, we will attempt to reclaim what the West has rejected but other cultures retained as central to their religious experience, including the power of female sexuality. We will also develop the vampire as a political metaphor, setting the work in a non-white culture colonized and culturally dominated by Western Europeans."

In the interview, Hughes was asked if her new work would deal with lesbian themes?

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"That will probably deal with lesbian themes," she said. "Yes, it will."

Hughes said she thinks "that the 25-million, tax-paying lesbian(s) and gay men in this country who have no civil rights, who have found that the AIDS crisis has been pretty consistently ignored by this government deserve to see at least some of their 67 cents that they pay each year for the NEA to go to support work that talks about their lives... ."

Hughes, whose performances in the past have been described as "sexually explicit," said that such explicitness probably would be included in this project "because all of my work that I've ever done has talked about issues of sexuality and sexual power and powerlessness ... There will be sexual material in this work."

The nature of the sexual content is uncertain, Hughes said, because the project is only in its early stages.

"It's a piece that I haven't created yet," she said, "but I think that it's very unlikely that anybody who had gone to see any sort of experimental theater or ... gone to any comedy clubs in the last 20 years would find my work so shocking in terms of its sexual graphicness."

She added, "I don't buy into this sort of neo-Puritanical trip that this country is on."

Hughes said she was concerned whether her new project would receive NEA funding after being rejected last June for a solo performance fellowship.

"It was very clear in 1989 the United States Congress attached language to the NEA appropriations bill that equated homosexuality with obscenity," she said, "and I am an openly lesbian performance artist, and I thought that made it very clear that I was in danger of not getting federal funding and that any openly gay or lesbian artist was in the same sinking ship."

The 1991 grant for Hughes was approved by two review panels and the National Council on the Arts, the advisory board to the NEA, appointed by the President. Frohnmayer also approved the applications.

Her project was among five applications that were voted on as a bloc by the National Council on the Arts after being referred to a second panel because of conflict of interest concerns. Hughes' application was the only one of the five questioned as to its merit, according to a partial transcript of the arts council meeting received through the FOIA request. The grants were approved with one abstention.

Frohnmayer, in announcing the grants, said the NEA does not "automatically accept or reject the submission of any given artist or group. Each application is judged on its own merit."

The endowment was "concerned that it not get into any blacklisting" of applicants because of previous rejections, a spokesman for the NEA said. An interim report is required of the grantee before the completion of the project, endowment General Counsel Julianne Davis said.

The Christian Life Commission and other supporters of content restrictions face the impediments of a recent ruling by a federal judge that such requirements by the NEA are a violation of free speech and an endowment leadership that has not expressed publicly a desire to appeal the decision.

Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Christian Life Commission, said after the decision by U.S. District Judge John G. Davies in Los Angeles that it should be appealed because "the case raises the important issue of the power of government to oversee the use of public funds." Whitehead said, "If the courts ultimately adopt Judge Davies' rationale, voiding any and all content restrictions on tax-supported grants, then this becomes a compelling argument for abolition of the NEA."

"No Trace of the Blonde" is scheduled for readings, workshops and residencies in New York City and San Francisco. Performances are scheduled for 1992.

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Nationalism, techno-worship
blasted by Baylor professor

By Ken Camp

N-~~TX~~
Texas

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AUSTIN, Texas (BP)--Nationalism, the concentration of power, society's embracing of violence and belief in "technological messianism" are obstacles to reconciliation in contemporary political life, according to Dan McGee, professor of Christian ethics at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

The Christian use of power must be exercised in the pursuit of reconciliation, said McGee, addressing "Power in the Political Arena" at the statewide workshop of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission. "The Ethics of Power" was the theme of the workshop, held in February at First Baptist Church of Austin.

"The Christian understands that the primary purpose of our power is reconciliation," McGee said, adding that reconciliation is "God's program for human history."

Nationalism is a hindrance to reconciliation domestically because it elevates the nation-state to a position of highest loyalty, treating national symbols as holy relics, and it views expression of dissent as treason, McGee maintained. Internationally, it turns conflicts between nations into holy wars.

"Nationalism turns all opposition to your national interests into a Satan. Saddam Hussein, who was a partner when he fought the demon of yesterday, the Ayatollah, is now evil personified. There is no good in him, we are told," McGee said.

"One of the things that really concerns me about the American scene today is that we seem to have a need for a demon," he continued.

"Nationalism tends to create demons. What is wrong with that? What's wrong is that you can never reconcile with a demon. You can only destroy it."

While recognizing the value of the "balance of power" doctrine within the political system, McGee challenged Christians to move beyond that to a "redemption of power" doctrine.

"It's not enough just to shove power around enough so that everybody's got some. We must take whatever power we have and direct it at reconciliation," he said.

Society's preference for violence as the means of first resort rather than a regretted means of last resort is a stumbling block to reconciliation, McGee said.

It has made coercive force the power of choice in the political arena, he maintained, noting both the problems of overcrowded jails and the current conflict in the Persian Gulf.

"Domestically, we believe the way to deal with crime is capital punishment and more jails," he said.

"Internationally, after four or five months of an economic boycott and diplomatic efforts, we threw up our hands and said, 'Oh my goodness, five months and it didn't work! Let's give up.'

"Now we turn to the faith assumption that enough violence will do the job quickly, though I do hear the caveat that if it doesn't happen too quickly, we're willing to pursue the war for as long as it takes at \$ 1 billion a day, presumably, in order to get the job done."

It seems the one lesson some leaders learned from Vietnam is "that we didn't use enough violence soon enough," he noted with regret.

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"We are addicted to violence -- in our movies, in our families, on our streets, in our souls," he said. "As General (George A.) Patton said, 'God, I love it!'"

"We embrace violence, and as with all idolatries, we become its captive."

Citing society's fascination with "the new technological whiz bang," McGee said modern technology has "sanitized war" in the minds of many people, transforming armed conflict into a video game and numbing consciences to war's horrible consequences.

"The potential of nuclear violence has upped the ante on violence to the point that we now feel virtuous when we only pour tons of conventional weapons on people," he said.

"Christians must point out what the world should have known since Hiroshima," he continued. "It's what Christians have known since the crucifixion: Our power can destroy us. Christians must also point out what we have known since the resurrection -- the dramatic limitations of the power of coercive violence."

Christians should bear witness to the potential goodness of power in the political arena while safeguarding against the sinful exercise of power, McGee said. Christian especially should testify to the interdependence of all humanity and be willing to listen to persons of other cultures and from other nations.

"The church has the potential, and thus the responsibility, to contribute to a political Pentecost where all the nations of the earth gather together and the miracle of understanding still happens," he said.

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Recreation ministers need
purpose for viable program

By Terri Lackey

F-SSB

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ESTES PARK, Colo. (BP)--A church recreation program that spins out of control and becomes nothing more than fun and games can devastate a ministry beyond the point of repair, a recreation leader said.

Recreation ministers who are not confident of their purpose and mission as a support program of the church cannot adequately meet the needs church recreation was designed for, said John Garner, field services coordinator for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church recreation department.

"In keeping recreation a ministry, you cannot lead others to be in tune unless you are," Garner told church recreation ministers attending Rec Lab at Estes Park YMCA Center in Estes Park, Colo.

"A ministry out of control will absolutely eat your lunch; the games will take control unless you know your purpose," Garner said. Once you lose the ministry aspect of your program, it is a real struggle to pull it back," he added.

Church recreation is not overtly religious in nature and "because of that it tends, without focus or direction, to take its own direction, Garner said. It is so important that churches with rec ministries know what they want to do with them and where they want to go with them."

To keep recreation in line with theology, churches must employ a key person who is responsible for knowing the ministry aspect of the program, Garner said.

"Some churches just throw up a gym and say, 'Ya'll come.' They fail to get anyone to do the programming or training or to design a creative recreation ministry," he said.

Keeping recreation a ministry, Garner said, involves a lot of research, some kind of proper program organization and the support of the pastor, the staff and the church.

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The pastor especially needs to understand what an effective support church recreation can be to many church program areas.

For example, Garner said, church recreation is used to support Sunday school by providing outlets of fellowship and sports for outreach.

It can support the music program by offering helps and aids in drama and pageant production, all under the auspices of church recreation.

The camping, day camping, hiking and sports aspects of recreation are "extremely effective" for missions projects, he said.

Another means of keeping recreation a ministry, Garner said, is for the recreation minister to see himself or herself as a "true minister of the gospel."

Garner also suggested that recreation ministers "dress appropriately for worship services or special events.

"When you go to the church, don't go in gym shorts, but dress in what is acceptable for other ministers," he said.

He also suggested make hospital visits or preach when the occasion arises.

"Round out your ministry with traditional ministry roles," he said. "As that happens, the church will begin to see you as ministers with validity."

Church recreation ministers should receive as much outside training as possible and be prepared with a program, Garner said. They should know God, know themselves, love their people, and know and believe in their work as a ministry.

"A valid church recreation program is sweat and hard work," Garner said. "It takes blood, sweat and tears for people to see you as a viable ministry."

Rec labs are sponsored by the Sunday School Board's church recreation department. About 75 attended the rec lab at Estes Park, Feb. 22-27.

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Self-image called key
to keeping teens off drugs

By Barbara Denman

F-10
(Fla.)

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LAKE YALE, Fla. (BP)--Teens with a good self-image have a better chance of staying off drugs, especially if they can communicate, make decisions and cope with stress, a social worker says.

"This is prevention and intervention warfare," said clinical social worker Shelly Vaughn. "One of the primary reasons why young people use drugs is because they feel worthless and powerless."

"Drugs act as a crutch to deal with others and to cover up fears and insecurities," she told a recent seminar.

Vaughn, associate director of the Texas Baptists' Christian Life Commission, drew from her experience in treating drug-dependent teens to write "On Trac," a drug-prevention curriculum designed for churches.

"Our self-esteem affects our decision making, our ability to take calculated risks, our coping ability and our spiritual lives," Vaughn said.

Studies and surveys indicate that young people turn to drugs during stressful situations when they are unable to tell people how they feel, Vaughn said.

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By mastering communications skills where they can express their thoughts in an honest manner, young people are better equipped to deal with daily life stresses without turning to drugs as an escape, she explained.

Teens who can make decisions based on Christian principles have greater control of their lives, Vaughn said. "They learn to reduce the amount of ambiguity in their choices and limit the degree to which outside influences affect their decisions."

Thirty youth leaders from Florida Baptist churches attended a seminar led by Vaughn during the Christian Action Against Drug Dependency seminar sponsored by state convention's mission ministries department at Lake Yale Baptist Assembly.

Another 25 participants at the Feb. 8-9 seminar attended a concurrent conference on developing Christian recovery and support groups, led by Ray Hughes, program director of Community Christian Counseling in Hollywood, Fla.

When it comes to drugs and alcohol abuse, Vaughn said, churches need to get involved in preventive education. "Our society is not teaching its youth how to make good decisions, and the churches are not in every case teaching them to apply their faith to decision making."

Drug abuse is "rampant in our churches," she said. "Just because kids are in a youth group, doesn't mean they are not using drugs."

Congregations that refuse to admit that drug use is a problem among their youth are "in denial," Vaughn said. "We are enabling their drug addiction."

Tommy Pophin, minister of youth at Southside Church in Brandon, said he has encountered drug problems among the teens in his youth group. Drug use is not discussed among the teens, he said, so he only discovers the problem when teens drop out of church activities.

"Suddenly we wake up and find they're in drug or alcohol rehabs," he said. That's when parents request help from the youth minister, he added, but then "it's too late."

The "On Trac" curriculum includes a section that helps parents prevent drug abuse. From her experience, Vaughn noted, addicted teens usually come from dysfunctional homes. That makes it even more crucial for a church to provide Christian role models who can cope with stress, she added.

The "On Trac" program provides exercises and role plays designed to help youths develop their self-image and their ability to cope and make decisions. The curriculum begins with a biblical perspective on drugs and alcohol that calls for abstinence from alcohol.

A videotape included in the curriculum kit shows several youths talking about their drug and alcohol addictions. Their stories are revealing. One young woman tells that she first experimented with alcohol and marijuana on a ski trip sponsored by a Baptist church. A pastor's son reveals a darker and ambiguous side of his family's home life.

Vaughn encourages churches to begin educating youths at an early age, noting that the average addicted teen began experimenting with drugs and alcohol at age 8.

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(BP) photo available upon request from the Florida Baptist Convention