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August 2, 1993

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NORTH CAROLINA -- Southeastern debt free, saving \$500,000 in interest.
ARGENTINA -- Missionary Jim Johnsonius dies in Argentina auto crash; photos.
NASHVILLE -- This 4-year-old knew she was the one for him.
DALLAS -- Youth leaders urged to take stand on sexual purity, homosexuality.
NEW MEXICO -- Age of accountability varies for childhood faith decisions.

Southeastern debt free,
saving \$500,000 in interest

By Jon Walker

Baptist Press
8/2/93

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--They are burning the mortgage at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

Southeastern President Paige Patterson announced the payoff of a \$1 million dollar loan that will, in turn, save the seminary nearly \$500,000 in interest payments over the next eight years.

"We are delighted that this institution is debt free," Patterson said. "This is something we did not see as a possibility until 1996, and it represents the very gracious blessings of the Lord upon us this year."

Southeastern owed about \$993,000 on a loan used to build student family townhouses that were completed in 1981.

Paul Fletcher, vice president for financial affairs at Southeastern, said the money for the payoff came from "unrestricted excess reserves" that were part of the seminary's working capital.

"We feel we still have adequate working capital reserves to cover any foreseeable future needs at Southeastern," he said.

Retiring the debt increases the seminary's yearly cash flow by nearly \$55,000, Fletcher added.

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Missionary Jim Johnsonius
dies in Argentina auto crash

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
8/2/93

CONCEPCION, Argentina (BP)--A car accident claimed the life of first-term Southern Baptist missionary Jim Johnsonius and severely injured his wife, Jan, Aug. 1.

Johnsonius died of chest and head trauma shortly after he arrived by ambulance at a hospital in Concepcion. Mrs. Johnsonius, who suffered a broken pelvis and several other bones, was still in intensive care Aug. 2.

They had left a church meeting in the town of Villaguay and were driving to Buenos Aires, about six hours away, when the accident occurred 13 miles past Concepcion at 10 p.m.

Details of the accident were sketchy, but initial reports indicated they were traveling on a straight stretch of newly paved road and swerved to avoid an oncoming car in their lane. Johnsonius lost control of his car and it overturned.

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Mrs. Johnsonius has been moved to British Hospital in Buenos Aires where she can receive more up-to-date medical care, said Tom Vassar, associate director for the Foreign Mission Board's work in Spanish South America.

Missionaries in Argentina were planning funeral services for Johnsonius. Mrs. Johnsonius has asked that her husband be buried in Argentina, Vassar said.

The two were appointed missionaries by the Foreign Mission Board in June 1991 and had lived about a year in Villaguay. He was a church music promoter.

Johnsonius, from Paris, Tenn., received the bachelor of arts degree from Murray (Ky.) State University and the master of music degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He was minister of music at Calvary Baptist Church in Portsmouth, Va., and First Baptist Church in Dyersburg, Tenn.

Mrs. Johnsonius, of Springfield, Ohio, is the former Janice Smallwood. She worked in public relations and journalism before becoming a missionary.

The two were married in 1981. They have no children. Besides his wife, Johnsonius is survived by his mother, a twin brother and two sisters.

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(BP) photos (mugshots) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Cutlines available on SBCNet Newsroom.

This 4-year-old knew
she was the one for him

Baptist Press
8/2/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--James L. Sullivan, retired president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, described the day he met Velma Scott who would become his wife of 57 years.

"It was love at first sight," said Sullivan during the July 31 funeral for his wife at First Baptist Church of Nashville. Mrs. Sullivan, 80, died July 29 after a lengthy illness.

"I had never seen anyone like her. I went home and told my mother that someday she would be my girl," Sullivan recalled during a time in the service when friends and family members were invited to share memories.

After describing his wife's role as "helpmeet," mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, Sullivan said, "How can you forget a day like that (the day they met)? I always go back to that day. I was 4 and she was 2 and a half."

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Youth leaders urged to take stand
on sexual purity, homosexuality

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
8/2/93

DALLAS (BP)--Youth ministers need to confront prevailing attitudes in society by teaching teen-agers the value of sexual abstinence until marriage and by denying that homosexuality is an unchangeable lifestyle, according to Richard Ross, youth ministry coordinator for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Ross addressed critical youth ministry issues during a leadership conference held as part of Baptist Youth Day at Six Flags, July 30.

In spite of temperatures over 100 degrees, more than 13,500 young people and their leaders braved the heat for Baptist Youth Day at the Arlington, Texas, amusement park, sponsored by the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the eight Texas Baptist universities.

Capacity crowds filled Six Flags' outdoor Music Mill Theater for two evening performances by D.C. Talk, a contemporary Christian rap group, and Living Song, a select ensemble from the 1993 Texas Baptist All-State Choir.

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Speaking to more than 900 adult leaders of youth, Ross -- who launched the nationwide "True Love Waits" sexual purity campaign -- cited independent studies demonstrating the high failure rate and degree of viral leakage in latex condoms as proof that "safe sex" is not safe.

While not every teen will abstain from sex until marriage, Ross insisted the best way to help the greatest number of young people is to hold up that high standard. "We need to say to young people, 'Don't have sex. It kills people. It hurts people's lives,'" Ross said.

"Of course, not all will heed that admonition, but we can save more lives by giving them the challenge to seek God's best for their lives -- first of all by modeling Christian sexual purity and then by challenging them to sexual purity."

"True Love Waits" campaign backers hope to receive more than 20,000 cards from Texas young people pledging sexual purity, according to Chris Liebrum, youth consultant for the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Hundreds of those teens are expected to participate in a "True Love Waits" rally Oct. 26 in Dallas in conjunction with the annual BGCT meeting.

At the 1994 Southern Baptist Convention in Orlando, Fla., Ross and other national "True Love Waits" organizers hope to have received 100,000 signed covenant cards from teens nationwide pledging sexual abstinence.

More than a dozen other denominations and para-church groups have joined Southern Baptists in the campaign, and planners hope 1 million signed commitment cards will be displayed at the National Mall in Washington during a rally next July. On the subject of homosexuality, Ross said youth ministers will be able to help confused young people only if they show them unconditional love.

He encouraged youth ministers to create such a climate of acceptance teens would feel free to talk with them about feelings of attraction toward members of their own sex or about troubling experiences of abuse or experimentation.

"One homosexual-type experience does not a homosexual make," Ross said, pointing out that young people need assurance that isolated experiences do not necessarily determine lifelong sexual orientation.

And even people who have had a series of homosexual encounters can be delivered with the help of qualified Christian counselors, he said.

"It is not an inalterable lifestyle," Ross said.

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Age of accountability varies
for childhood faith decisions

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
8/2/93

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Churches should guard against influencing children towards premature professions of faith, a worker in children's evangelism said during Home Missions Week.

"You can't educate them to conviction. It's God's action," said Camille Hamilton, former children coordinator for First Baptist Church of Snellville in metro Atlanta, during the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board-sponsored week at the Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

Because children want to please adults and respond to praise, they may respond to a church's invitation for salvation without having true conviction, Hamilton said.

"Leading a child to a premature decision is like giving a vaccination," she said. "You give them just enough of a religious experience that it will be a barrier to them having a genuine salvation experience when they're ready."

The age when a child is ready to make a profession of faith can range from pre-school to 12 or older, she said.

"There is no set age," she said, adding she's heard some people assume it automatically begins at age 12.

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"The older they get, the greater the probability that they will be ready," she said. "Always be ready for that 5-year-old child who is ready. My oldest son was saved at age 4 1/2."

Hamilton said children must understand four concepts before they are ready to make a profession of faith:

- What sin is.
- That they are sinners.
- That their sin is against God.
- That they are under condemnation because of their sin.

"They need to realize that what they have done has separated them from God," she said. "It's the concept of, 'I choose to do what I want to do instead of what God wants me to do.'"

Children can respond to a church invitation for several reasons, she said, including to get attention, out of curiosity, because a friend has responded or a genuine readiness to accept Christ.

Counselors must be able to discern whether a child is ready or not and respond positively in either case, she said.

Counselors should avoid yes-or-no questions with children, she said. "I heard one counselor ask a child, 'You want to ask Jesus into your heart, don't you?'"

When children are not ready, some churches present the child to the congregation as making "a step towards God" so the child will feel affirmed and comfortable coming back to accept salvation, she said.

"A lot of time people want to make salvation different for a child than it is for an adult," she said. "We need to share the gospel with children and be prepared to deal with each child on an individual basis."

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