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November 5, 1993

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Sunday School Board announces
women's enrichment ministry

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press
11/5/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--In a continuing effort to meet the needs of churches, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board officials have announced the beginning of a women's enrichment ministry.

The board plans "to help churches meet the obvious needs of various ministries relating directly to women," said Roy Edgemon, director of the discipleship and family development division where administration of the ministry will be housed.

"The churches have been speaking to us and consequently we are developing plans -- ministry and materials -- that will enable women to be better disciples of Christ," Edgemon said.

"We will not be involved in missions education at all," he said. "In fact, with this ministry we want to lift up and support missions education through WMU."

To lead the new ministry, Edgemon said the Sunday School Board has employed popular speaker and author, Denise George of Birmingham, Ala., to act as the women's enrichment ministry specialist. She will continue to live in Birmingham.

George, author of 10 books and more than 800 articles for various denominations, said, "Women are crying out for enrichment resources and the Sunday School Board is the natural place to come for such resources. Women have been calling from local churches asking for ... resources. "My vision for women's enrichment ministry is every woman in church walking intimately with the Lord, becoming women of prayer absorbed in Bible study, then reaching out to a hurting world of women," she said. "Women understand women, and women speak the same language.

"We all share common hurts and it is just natural for us to support each other in times of crisis," she added.

A former Acteen and a writer of WMU materials, George said she "strongly supports WMU, what they have done so well for 105 years and applauds them in their fine work."

WMU leaders learned of the BSSB initiative only the day before the BSSB announcement and have not yet had opportunity to study details of the plans and materials.

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The Sunday School Board's purpose statement for the new women's enrichment ministry reads: "Women's ministry will provide churches with the best, most relevant programs, resources and services to meet the distinctive needs of women, enabling them to experience enrichment through their relationship with Christ. Women will be encouraged to reach their Christian potential through Bible-based study, prayer, worship, fellowship and evangelism. Women's ministry will undergird and support the total ministry and mission of local churches."

Two resources are presently in the works to support the women's enrichment ministry, according to Jay Johnston, interim field service manager for the discipleship and family adult department.

They are: "Journey; A Woman's Guide to Intimacy with God," a monthly devotional guide due for release in April 1994, and "God's Heart, God's Hand: Reaching Out to Wounded Women," a resource designed to guide women "in ways to reach out to other women in the name of Christ to bring healing," according to George, who is the author.

A native of Chattanooga, Tenn., George, who has attended Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, is a member of Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham. She is married to Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School of Samford University. Previously, the Georges served as Home Mission Board missionaries in the inner cities of Boston.

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Art Toalston contributed to this story.

Court orders rehearing
in child pornography case

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
11/5/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court, responding to the Justice Department's new interpretation of a pornography law, has returned the case of a convicted child pornographer to a federal appeals court for rehearing.

In vacating the conviction and returning Knox v. U.S. to the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, the Supreme Court acted after a brief filed by Solicitor General Drew Days of the Justice Department argued the case was wrongly decided. The brief contended child pornography must "show minors engaged in the conduct of lasciviously exhibiting their (or someone else's) genitals or pubic areas" and must include visible depiction of the genitals.

The previous interpretation focused on the intention of the adults producing the material rather than the children in the photos or on videotape.

Three days after the court's action, the Senate showed its displeasure by passing by a 100-0 vote a non-binding resolution saying the Justice Department's brief "did not accurately reflect the intent of Congress" in enacting child pornography legislation.

Earlier on Nov. 4, Sen. William Roth, R.-Del., asked Attorney General Janet Reno in a hearing before the Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee if she agreed with her department's new definition of child pornography. She said she agreed with the reinterpretation and had discussed the change with Days, said a member of Roth's staff.

Those who have been involved in prosecuting child pornography in the past and other opponents of pornography have been sharply critical of the Justice Department's new definition.

"The Clinton Administration ... has succeeded in snatching defeat from the jaws of victory," said Patrick Trueman, chief of the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section of the Justice Department under President Bush, in a prepared statement after the court's action. "At a time when President Clinton is posturing himself as tough on crime, his administration is attempting to weaken the federal child pornography law."

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Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, said, "Janet Reno has spoken widely about protecting children. I would be interested to hear her explanation of how this lower standard is better for children.

"Clinton-ized kiddie porn is legal unless the child intends to be 'lascivious,'" Whitehead said, "but 8- and 10-year-olds don't know how to spell lascivious, let alone how to intend it. The law always has focused on the criminal intention of the adults involved, not the children who are legally incapable of formulating such intentions."

The Knox case, which was remanded to the appeals court Nov. 1, will have a widespread impact, Trueman said.

"If the Court of Appeals now accepts the Justice Department's interpretation, much if not most of the child pornography prosecuted by that department in the past will be removed from prosecution in the future," said Trueman, who now is the American Family Association's director of government affairs.

Already, convicted child pornographers are seeking to take advantage of the Justice Department's new position. A motion for a new trial recently was filed in a Texas case in which a defendant was convicted on four counts under the federal child pornography law, Trueman said.

This is "just the first in a series that can be expected in child pornography cases throughout the country," he said.

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Madonna, Michael Jackson shows
spark moral furor in Mexico

Baptist Press
11/5/93

MEXICO CITY (BP)--Outcries by Mexican moral crusaders over concerts by entertainers Madonna and Michael Jackson in Mexico City are having little impact on young people -- even young Christians, according to a Southern Baptist observer.

The first-time performances in Mexico by the two pop stars have sparked a national debate on morality and censorship in the traditionally Roman Catholic country among religious leaders, politicians and teen-age fans.

Madonna's performances often feature sexually provocative dancing and costumes -- or the lack of them -- and she uses symbols that parody or insult religion, particularly Christianity.

"She makes a joke of religious values," said Francisco Gonzalez of Mexico's Union of Parents and Families. "Her concerts are immoral."

Jackson also has turned to lewd gestures on stage. And he faces allegations of child sexual molestation when he returns home from his extended world tour.

But the furor is having "no effect" on Mexican youths eager to see both stars, said Southern Baptist representative Basilio Fierro, who works with Mexican students.

"There's a gap between parents and young people -- a gap parents don't understand," Fierro observed. "Perhaps the kids are looking for love and acceptance they don't find in the family and are looking for it somewhere else. So they turn to their peers where they can relate and where they feel accepted -- and this includes Christians."

Some Baptist young people in Jalapa, where Fierro works, told him they wished they could attend Jackson's concerts. They like his showmanship.

But Madonna "is a different story," he added. "She promotes illicit sex, drugs, ridicule of the Bible and Satanism in her music."

Mexico isn't the first stop where Madonna has sparked controversy on her current tour. Orthodox Jews were outraged by her appearance in Israel and some Puerto Ricans were offended by her use -- or misuse -- of Puerto Rico's flag on stage during a concert there.

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David Daniell, press representative for Southern Baptist workers in Mexico, contributed to this story.

House passes amended RFRA;
bill awaits Clinton signature By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--The House of Representatives passed a Senate-approved technical amendment to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act Nov. 3, leaving only President Bill Clinton's signature necessary for it to become law.

The president has endorsed RFRA. A date for the bill signing is unknown, said a member of the coalition supporting RFRA.

The Senate had passed the religious liberty legislation Oct. 27 but the version it approved included a technical amendment not contained in the House-approved bill. When the amended bill returned to the House Nov. 3, it was approved without opposition. The House initially passed RFRA in May by a voice vote.

The technical amendment inserted the word "substantially" before the words "burden" or "burdened" five times to clarify the "compelling interest" test to be used under the legislation applies only when there is a substantial burden on the free exercise of religion.

RFRA was introduced in mid-1990 as a legislative response to the Supreme Court's Employment Division v. Smith opinion. In Smith, the court ruled government no longer has to demonstrate a "compelling interest" before restricting religious freedom. Since Smith, it has been easier to limit individuals' religious expression.

The technical amendment's language is consistent with the Supreme Court's rulings before the Smith opinion, sponsors of the bill said.

The 68-member coalition supporting RFRA includes the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

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Baptist teacher honored
by Chinese government

Baptist Press
11/5/93

BEIJING (BP)--Southern Baptist teacher George McDow is one of just 40 "foreign experts" in China -- out of more than 40,000 -- to be honored by the Chinese government this year.

McDow and the other foreigners from 13 countries received 1993 national Friendship Awards in recognition of their "outstanding contributions" to China's modernization drive.

The honorees include experts in science, technology, agriculture, fine arts and economics.

McDow, who teaches music at the Yunnan Arts Institute in Kunming, is the only representative of the fine arts. He recently joined the other honorees in a government-paid trip to Beijing, China's capital, during National Day festivities.

They met for 45 minutes with Chinese Premier Li Peng, who thanked them for their dedication to helping China, and attended a state dinner at the Great Hall of the People in recognition of National Day.

A member of Northeast Baptist Church in Norman, Okla., McDow is on leave of absence from his job as instrumental music director at Central Mid-High School in Norman. He fulfilled a long-held dream of teaching in China by going in 1992.

At the Yunnan institute he works with choirs and the school orchestra and teaches instrumental music.

Premier Li cited efforts of foreign experts as one of the reasons China is making rapid progress each year and said he hopes they will continue to work closely with their Chinese partners.

State Councilor Luo Gan echoed Li, paying tribute to the "remarkable role" of foreign specialists in China's recent advances.

"We owe (them) special gratitude to their sincerity, hard work and patient guidance," Luo said, noting their efforts in China require a spirit of sacrifice.

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The annual Friendship Awards are given by the State Bureau of Foreign Experts, based on recommendations from other state ministries and provincial governments. They are regarded as equivalent to the Model Worker Awards granted to outstanding Chinese, according to the China Daily newspaper.

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(BP) photo (mugshot) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Outline available on SBCNet Newsroom.

Research finds children read
modern Bible translations best By Susan Simko

Baptist Press
11/5/93

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Children do not understand the King James Version of the Bible as well as they understand modern translations, according to findings in research conducted by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary doctoral student Gail Linam.

Linam, director of the associate degree program at Dallas Baptist University, studied biblical reading comprehension for her doctor of education dissertation at Southwestern. Her research revealed the KJV frustrated some children to the point of tears during testing, Linam said.

"In reality, that beautiful language translated in 1611 represented a whole new language for the boys and girls, one that they didn't understand," she said. "I contend they need an opportunity to read and understand what the Scripture says."

Linam's dissertation may help give them that opportunity. A Baptist Sunday School Board curriculum-redesign task force currently is studying Linam's findings as part of a decision to switch some KJV children's literature to modern translations.

Both churched and unchurched children grasped the modern translations best, Linam said. She conducted the tests twice -- once with Sunday school members at First Baptist Church of Arlington, Texas, and once with unchurched children who attend Mission Arlington, a ministry of First Baptist.

During testing, the children were divided into three groups and asked to read a Bible story using either the KJV, the New International Version or the New Century Version. Later, they were filmed retelling the story to a research assistant. One girl from the KJV group couldn't even begin to retell her story.

"I don't know," she said, staring into the camera. "I didn't understand. This is too much stress for me."

In addition to the retelling method, Linam also administered a Cloze test, which deletes every fifth word from a biblical text. Children fill in the word they think should go in the blank. Neither retelling nor Cloze showed a significant difference between children's understanding of the two modern versions.

Linam's dissertation is the first complete study on children's biblical reading comprehension to be published in the United States.

"We've all thought this version or that version was better," said Linam, who anticipates receiving her degree in December. "But it is fascinating to read the study and to see accurate education methods that actually present us with solid facts instead of just supposition."

But Linam was not just after facts. She saw herself on a crusade to give children Bibles in their own language.

"I had a sense of carrying out a holy work," she said. "I have invested more prayer, more effort and more research than was ever really necessary, because I believe in it so much. It can have long-term yield for anyone who loves and cares about children."

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Linam's life reflects her own love for children. She has written children's curriculum for the BSSB for 20 years. She served as the minister of childhood education at Calvary Baptist Church in Waco, Texas for 17 years before she started teaching at Dallas Baptist University. Her doctoral degree is a practical next step in her lifetime work of bringing the gospel to children, she said.

"What I found at Southwestern is that the professors are so eager to help a motivated student move from the carrel in the library to discovering the ways that research -- utilizing the soundest statistical methods possible -- can directly impact our ministry for Christ in the church," she said.

"I felt as though the windows of my mind and heart were being thrown open through my studies at Southwestern."

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

Southern's Christian ed school
celebrates 40th anniversary

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press
11/5/93

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's school of Christian education has stressed throughout its 40-year history that "the ultimate goal of Christian education is to make disciples," said a veteran Southern Baptist Christian educator.

That aim surpasses in importance efforts to perfect organizations, expand enrollments and break attendance records, said Lucien Coleman, retired professor of adult education at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He addressed a November chapel service at Southern that commemorated the 40th anniversary of the Louisville, Ky., seminary's school of Christian education.

To place prime importance on making disciples "is to risk being misunderstood by those who are willing to settle for lesser goals," said Coleman, a Southern graduate and professor at his alma mater from 1966-83. "There is a time and place for the pursuit of secondary aims but they should never be substituted for ultimate objectives," he emphasized.

Christian education students at Southern always have been trained in personal evangelism, outreach methods, enlistment strategies and church growth principles, Coleman maintained. "But they have also been reminded that we can accomplish all these things, yet fail to make disciples."

During his address, Coleman said he learned "durable convictions" while studying in Southern's school of Christian education that have remained with him throughout his ministry. "There was something about this school that went beyond the myriad textbooks, the ever-changing curriculum, the passing fads," he explained. "There was a unique ethos, a central core of values, a cluster of distinctive ideals that molded the character of the school and shaped the ministries of a generation of graduates."

The school of Christian education, one of four graduate schools at the seminary, offers the master of arts degree in Christian education, the master of divinity degree in Christian education and the doctor of education degree. During the 1992-93 academic year, 381 students were enrolled in the school.

The service also included remarks by former President Duke K. McCall who noted Southern began teaching Christian education many years before the founding of the school of Christian education in 1953. Southern established a chair of Sunday school pedagogy in 1906, said McCall, adding Southern was the first seminary in the nation to establish an endowed chair devoted to educational ministries.

The seminary's department of religious education eventually grew to be the largest academic department in the seminary which necessitated the need for the separate school, said McCall, seminary president from 1951-82. However, McCall declared the school of Christian education was founded with a deeper purpose than administrative convenience. "It came into being because God's hand is still on human history and God was and is at work."

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Great-grandson updates
Sheldon's 'In His Steps'

By Jim Lowry

NASHVILLE (BP)--"In His Steps," a little book of inspiration and advice for practical living published around the turn of the century, has been updated for Broadman & Holman Publishers by the author's great-grandson.

"What Would Jesus Do?" is a contemporary retelling of Charles M. Sheldon's classic to bring the examples of everyday problems and crises into a more current perspective.

Garrett Sheldon, the elder Sheldon's great-grandson, is a professor and chairman of the department of social and behavioral sciences at the Clinch Valley College campus of the University of Virginia. He also is the author of books on Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

In the classic original, which has sold 30 million copies, the pastor made apology to a beggar because he had only one cow to care for and didn't need help. The younger Sheldon observes that few pastors today have a great deal of concern for the care and feeding of cattle.

Although the same principles apply, contemporary problems need to be addressed directly, Garrett Sheldon noted, to help youth and adults in the '90s deal with questions related to drugs, sexual immorality and the destruction of the family.

Sheldon said when people face decisions, they need to know where they can turn for help and what resources are available for choosing wisely. One way to start seeking wisdom, according to Sheldon, is to ask the question that serves as the title of the November 1993 update, "What would Jesus do?"

Adults and youth alike, faced with life's challenges and crises, need to turn first to Christ, Sheldon explained. To know how or why they would choose a certain path or decision-making route, individuals need to know more about Jesus through Bible study and prayer.

Sheldon, who is 39, experienced a life-changing recommitment three years ago, which caused him to consider priorities in his life and how he could influence others.

As a child, Sheldon said, he remembers hearing stories about his great-grandfather and his book, which the younger Sheldon first read as a teen-ager. His continued association with young adults has led Sheldon to carry a personal burden for the problems faced by college students, while being encouraged by the commitment he sees in students today.

When it was first published, "In His Steps" served as a revival book for Christians.

"I hope 'What Would Jesus Do?' can strike the same chord today," Sheldon said. "In their everyday circumstances with family, friends, co-workers, acquaintances and strangers, people need to ask if they exhibit a Christ-like presence."

"What Would Jesus Do?" is set in a fictitious First Church of Ashton, where the pastor works hard on beautiful sermons of great content which are delivered with style.

The needs of a homeless woman bring the pastor and the entire congregation face-to-face with the question of ministry and service. It is not an easy path.

After failing to meet the needs of the woman, the pastor challenges the congregation to "take the pledge to ask what would Jesus do in my place in this decision."

The minister and members of First Church of Ashton determine church is not just rules, tithing and showing up for worship.

"Being a good Christian is a way of life to challenge the world's values of power, wealth and prestige with love, peace, humility and forgiveness," Sheldon said. "It takes a deliberate walk with Christ, with deliberate decisions to love and care for each other. We can't rely on the government or other people."

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"What Would Jesus Do?" features a television executive, a beautiful singer, a professional couple, a ghetto youth, a divorced couple, a businessman, a seminary president, a teacher and parents. Each faces the question of whether to accept the challenge of the pledge. Many of the characters find that their vocations and families require changes if they are to daily face the criteria of honestly considering how Jesus would make the next decision they face.

Each character, representative of ordinary people encountered every day in every city, must decide what route they will follow in their Christian walk.

"What Would Jesus Do?" is available through Baptist Book Stores, Lifeway Christian Stores and other retail bookstores.

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