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RU-486 patent rights transferred
at Clinton administration urging By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
5/17/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--Eventual use in the United States of the French abortion pill RU-486 moved much closer to reality recently, but the turn of events was not surprising, given the efforts of the Clinton administration, said a Southern Baptist ethicist.

On May 16, Donna Shalala, secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, announced French pharmaceutical company Roussel Uclaf will transfer its United States patent rights for mifepristone, commonly known as RU-486, to the Population Council Inc., a nonprofit corporation in the United States. The French company is doing so without compensation and at the repeated urging of the Clinton administration, Shalala said.

The action clears the way for the Population Council to pursue the manufacture, testing, licensing and marketing of the controversial abortion pill. Roussel Uclaf, which has been lobbied fervently by both pro-life and abortion rights advocates in recent years, had refused to attempt introduction of the drug into this country because of the controversy.

"None of us are surprised at this new attack on women and the unborn," said Ben Mitchell, director of biomedical and life issues for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "President Clinton set these wheels in motion" Jan. 23, 1993, when, on his third day in office, he issued a memorandum directing HHS to decide if the import ban on RU-486 should be maintained, Mitchell said.

"When the history of the late 1990s is written, President Clinton and HHS Secretary Donna Shalala will be recorded, not as great liberators of women, but as accessories to the murder of women and their unborn children," Mitchell said. "The president waffles on most issues but not on the relentless assault on babies in the womb.

"The drug is not safe. For the unborn it is more lethal than an AK-47 assault rifle. Sadly, the drug is fairly effective -- if your goal is to kill babies in the womb."

Pro-choice groups hail d the action.

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"Today's announcement signals the beginning of the end of the shameful era in which American women have been denied access to a critically important medical breakthrough," said James Wagoner, vice president of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, in a prepared statement. "We commend Secretary Shalala and the Clinton administration for ending the tyranny of anti-choice extremists who for too long have held science hostage to their religious and ideological views."

RU-486 may be available for use in the United States by early 1996, said Food and Drug Administration Commissioner David Kessler, according to news reports. The FDA will determine whether the Population Council's drug application is approved.

More than 150,000 women have used RU-486 as an abortifacient in Europe. While RU-486 is being studied for other uses, it has been marketed as an abortion drug in France, Great Britain and Sweden. It can be used only through the seventh week of pregnancy. Critics of RU-486 have charged it is unsafe sometimes for women.

"Women should not think that pregnancy termination using a medical regimen will be simple," Kessler said in prepared testimony for a May 16 congressional hearing.

In Europe, the "procedure requires several visits to a medical facility, a precise dosing scheme using two different drugs and close monitoring to care for women who may experience excessive bleeding or other complications," Kessler said in prepared remarks. "We anticipate that any use of RU-486 in the United States would have to follow the same type of strict distribution and use conditions."

An Operation Rescue official said his organization will use its activist strategy against the drug.

"RU-486 is even more damaging to women and children than surgical abortion," said Flip Benham, director of Operation Rescue National, in a written statement. "Operation Rescue will continue to be at abortion mills or doctors' offices that subject women to it."

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Committee's vote on SAFE Act
canceled; lack of support cited

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
5/17/95

WASHINGTON (BP)--The first congressional committee vote on a bill requiring warning messages in alcohol advertisements failed to occur May 17 when a chief Senate sponsor withdrew his request for action.

A vote on the Sensible Advertising and Family Education Act, S. 674, in the Senate Commerce Committee was canceled at the request of Sen. Strom Thurmond, R.-S.C., because "at this point in time he felt there were not enough votes to move the bill," said his press secretary, Chris Cimko.

A poll of the committee showed an 11-8 vote against the SAFE Act, a Thurmond staff member said, according to Food & Drink Daily. The cancellation effectively kills the bill for this year. The legislation still has not received a committee vote since its introduction in 1990.

"Unfortunately, we have the worst of both worlds -- not only did we lose, the senators who are responsible are able to hide because there wasn't a vote," said James A. Smith, director of government relations of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "The failure to get a vote in the Commerce Committee is the result of going up against two major political forces in this town -- the broadcast and alcohol industries.

"I hope and believe there will be a day of reckoning on this issue," said Smith, a member of the steering committee of the coalition supporting the bill. "Congress should have to take a stand and be counted on to do something about the irresponsible and harmful advertising, since the broadcasters and beer companies have demonstrated an unwillingness to correct the problem themselves."

The short legislative year, because of congressional elections, hurt the bill's chances, Cimko said. Some senators had expressed interest in working with Thurmond on the bill but wanted to wait until the next Congress, she said.

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"The Christian Life Commission appreciates the work Sen. Thurmond put into this legislation," said. "Long before his daughter was tragically killed by a drunken driver, Sen. Thurmond was a strong advocate of sound public policy on alcohol."

The SAFE Act would require health and safety warnings to be in all alcohol ads broadcast on radio and television or printed in newspapers, magazines or promotional displays.

The proposed print warnings contain more information than the broadcast ones and also include a toll-free telephone number providing more details on alcohol use. The broadcast warnings are:

-- SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: If you are pregnant, don't drink alcohol. Alcohol may cause mental retardation and other birth defects.

-- WARNING: If you are under the age of 21, it's illegal to buy alcoholic beverages.

-- WARNING: Alcohol is a drug and may be addictive.

-- WARNING: Don't drink and drive or operate heavy machinery.

-- WARNING: Don't mix alcohol with medications and other drugs.

-- WARNING: Alcohol poisoning can kill you. Don't drink too much too fast.

-- WARNING: Drinking increases your risk of high blood pressure, liver disease and cancer.

The chief sponsors of S. 674 are Paul Simon, D.-Ill., and Thurmond. The companion bill in the House of Representatives is H.R. 1823. Joseph Kennedy, D.-Mass., and Joseph Conyers, D.-Mich., are the prime sponsors.

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Pastor chides media overlook
of upbeat seminary picnic

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
5/17/94

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--"Where were you guys?"

That's the question Jack M. Allen Jr., pastor of Parkridge Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, posted to the news media for failing to cover a recent "upbeat," picnic at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Allen was successful in getting his point printed as a letter to the editor of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram May 15. He is a 1993 master of divinity graduate from the seminary who will begin his doctoral program there this fall.

"Where were the anxious reporters, tape recorders in hand?" Allen asked, in reference to broad media coverage given to the March 9 firing of President Russell H. Dilday Jr. by seminary trustees.

"Where were the media masts craning into the brilliant sky, shipping the waves of the day back to their stations? Why weren't you covering some good news about the Baptists?"

Allen continued: "Southwestern Still-Baptist Theological Seminary had a picnic May 5. Students and faculty and staff members gathered on the west lawn. Dr. Russell Dilday showed up. Free hot dogs and a big cake, shaped like the main building, were devoured. I saw fundamentalists laughing with moderates. Everyone (it looked like about 2,000 people) had a wonderful time -- less than a week before final exams!

"One guy brought a little dog. One guy brought his pet serpent. (I wonder what that means?) Lots of people brought their children. Music ranging from the Flintstones theme to classic hymns was played. It was wonderful. We were acting like Christians -- getting along and loving the beautiful day that God provided. We were acting like regular people. Jesus was pleased.

"These phenomena typify the true spirit of Southwestern Seminary. Sometimes wars break out in peace. Please report all the news from Seminary Hill."

Allen, in his letter to the editor, voiced no opinion on the firing of Dilday.

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Asked by Baptist Press for his opinion, he said he cannot judge the trustees or Dilday for the action but noted the trustees' acknowledgement of mistakes made in the process. While he did not know who the seminary president was when he enrolled at Southwestern in 1990, he said, "My experience here was far and away a great, wonderful experience."

When Christians air their differences in public, Allen said he questions, "Are we acting in the best interest of the Lord?"

"God has called me to help him change this world, until such time he calls me home," Allen said. "I'm going to be in support of the new president of Southwestern. I believe God is going to continue to use the seminary."

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**Tolar charges Southwestern grads
to guard ministerial essentials**

By Bob Murdaugh

Baptist Press
5/17/94

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's 403 graduates for spring 1994 were challenged May 13 by the school's acting president, William B. Tolar, to maintain the spiritual basics of personal prayer, daily Bible study and loving service outside their regular ministerial duties.

In his address to the graduates, Tolar said he has seen highly educated ministers lose their staff positions and "forfeit their testimonies" because they wrongly thought their academic degrees would sustain them in their ministries.

"Without meaningful, personal prayer life, I do not have much hope for your lasting effectiveness in this world of great turmoil and anxiety, no matter how brilliant you are," said Tolar, who also is the seminary's vice president for academic affairs and provost.

"Watch for and guard against the toxic attitude that negates prayer," Tolar warned. "Even Martin Luther said, 'The busier I become, the more important prayer becomes.'"

Describing the Scripture as "life-sustaining spiritual milk, bread and water," Tolar urged the graduates not to let their daily Bible study during personal devotionals be replaced by the time they spend in reading God's Word and teaching others how to interpret it. He told them to further their spiritual growth by devoting time outside their regular staff work to help the sick, shut-in and non-religious people who can't give anything in return.

"Do it simply because we are servants of the one who said, 'I did not come to be served, but to give my life as a ransom for many,'" Tolar said.

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**Gray named acting dean
of SWBTS music school**

Baptist Press
5/17/94

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Scotty W. Gray, executive vice president at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has been appointed acting dean of the seminary's school of church music.

While continuing at his current position, Gray will assume responsibilities as acting dean Aug. 1, the day after the current dean, James McKinney, retires. McKinney has led the school of church music since 1956.

The announcement of Gray's appointment was made by Acting President William B. Tolar at Southwestern's spring commencement May 13.

"I am extremely pleased that we could go with an insider for acting dean of the school of church music and that insider is Scotty Gray," Tolar said. "He is so skilled in administration and has been associated with the school of church music so long that I have no doubt he will be highly effective as acting dean."

Gray holds the master of church music and the doctor of musical arts degrees from Southwestern. He has been a grader, teaching fellow, assistant professor, associate professor, professor, assistant dean and associate dean for doctoral studies in the school of church music. Gray joined the music faculty in 1966.

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"I have a very high appreciation for the faculty and I have every expectation that we can appeal to new students, retain current students and continue the quality teaching we've had for several years," Gray said.

"Any interim position poses a challenge for the person at it, and with the current climate of transition and uncertainty at Southwestern Seminary, my work as acting dean of the school of church music will not only be a challenge, but will be an opportunity for us to probe academically how we can continue to give students the tools, skills and attitudes for a lifetime of music ministry. There is a tremendous variety of styles of music through history that we want to continue to explore."

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HMB directors challenged
by metropolitan ministries

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
5/17/94

CHICAGO (BP)--Effective ministry in cities requires living and working amid the urban chaos, a Chicago pastor told Southern Baptist Home Mission Board directors.

"Jesus did not commute. He did not make weekend trips. He so loved the world he came here," said Charles Lyons of Armitage Baptist Church. Lyons, his wife, and their five children live three blocks from the church.

Armitage was one of 16 churches the directors visited on a tour of mission sites in northeastern Illinois and northwestern Indiana. They also saw ministries on college campuses, a seamen's center, a state prison and a county hospital.

This was the first experience in inner cities for several board members. "I've heard and read about the inner city, but it took this experience for me to understand its hurts and needs," said Harold Epperson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Kissimmee, Fla.

"I've never seen the poverty that I've seen in these inner cities," said Marvin Capehart, pastor of First Baptist Church of Alameda, N.M. "In New Mexico children have a place to play and clean air. Here there are just people, people, people."

Living in an impoverished community means "every need known to humanity is beating on our front door," Lyons said. But he is undaunted. "The whole world is a bad neighborhood."

Indiana pastor Cato Brooks is equally committed to ministry amidst crime and poverty. "Being in the inner city gives you all kinds of opportunity for the church to be the church," said the pastor of Tree of Life Baptist Church in Gary, Ind.

Located between Chicago and Detroit, Gary is a battleground for rival gangs from the larger cities. Gary has Indiana's highest crime rate.

The church established Tree of Life Community Development Corporation to tackle issues such as substance abuse, homelessness, continuing education and hunger. Led by Brooks' wife, the corporation has 22 full-time staff members.

By sharing Christ with people who participate in the development projects, "we can turn our city around," Brooks said. "Any other thing would be a waste of time."

On the opposite end of the economic ladder, board members met Ken Morris, pastor of Near North Baptist Church near downtown Chicago.

The Near North community of high-rise apartments has 1,000 people per square block. Residents' per capita income is \$61,000 and 70 percent of them have at least a college degree. Most residents are single adults or couples without children.

Though they do not have many physical needs, Morris said the community has a lot of lonely people. He began the church 12 years ago by developing relationships with neighbors through recreational activities. Now the church has 47 active members and 60 to 70 in worship each week.

In addition to economic diversity, board members saw ethnic pluralism by visiting Korean, Russian, Romanian, Hispanic, Polish and African American congregations. Of the 146 churches in Chicago Metropolitan Baptist Association, one-third are ethnic, one-third are black and one-third are Anglo, said Jim Queen, director of missions.

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The board also met pastors working to start congregations. The Stat Convention of Baptists in Indiana expects to start 54 churches this year, said Carrol Fowler, state director of missions and Brotherhood. His primary focus is 10 cities with a population of 5,000 or more and no Southern Baptist church.

Board members were reminded of the Home Mission Board's support in a variety of ways:

- Seeing churches built with funds from the board's church loans division.
- Meeting a US-2 missionary and a semester missionary assigned to Chicago college campuses by the HMB student missions department.
- Being at Uptown Baptist church which provides 3,000 meals a month to needy residents with partial help from the HMB hunger fund.
- Meeting church planters who receive HMB salary supplements.

"It's good to see what the Lord is doing, but there is still a great job to be done," said Linda Principe, a member of First Baptist Church of Brandenburg, Ky.

"I have a fresh appreciation for the sacrifice of home missionaries," said Synd y Odom, interim pastor of Southside Baptist Church in Cochran, Ga. His wife, Cloma, is a board member.

"I've been impressed with the commitment of these workers and how much they give up to do what they do," he said. "I used to think foreign missionaries were the martyrs."

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers in Illinois, Indiana, Florida, Louisiana, Georgia, Kentucky, New Mexico, West Virginia, Texas and Alabama by th Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press.

Mississippi College looking up
as Nobles inquiry continues

Baptist Press
5/17/94

CLINTON, Miss. (BP)--Student enrollment and gifts to Mississippi College in Clinton are setting new records, even as the Baptist-affiliated college's community of supporters continues to reel from allegations made against former President Lewis Nobles, according to a pair of copyrighted articles by Jerry Mitchell in the May 15, 1994, edition of The Clarion-Ledger newspaper in Jackson.

The newspaper quotes Rory Lee, the college's vice president for institutional advancement, as saying the school had 3,792 students -- 148 more than last year -- and contributions have risen almost \$1 million over the previous year, from \$5.45 million through April 1993 to \$6.4 million through April 1994.

Lee credited tighter oversight and a donor education program for the increased gifts after Nobles, 68, was pressured by the school's board of trustees to resign in August 1993 amid allegations of financial mismanagement and missing donations. He had led the college 25 years.

Nobles likely will face a federal grand jury in the coming weeks, according t the newspaper, as well as a civil suit on behalf of the college seeking return of more than \$3 million in donations that the school's lawyers claim was embezzled by Nobles.

Howell W. Todd, 50, was chosen by the college's trustees in March to become the n w president and is expected to be on campus full-time in early July.

Todd, who holds bachelor, masters and doctorate degrees in mathematics, addressed Mississippi College graduates May 14 in ceremonies that closed the 168th academic session at the school. He used the speech to set the tone for his administration.

"Let there be no doubt about the condition of this institution. Our foundation is solid. We value our Baptist heritage and tradition and we consider it more than a souvenir of the past," Todd said.

"We need to strengthen our resolve, focus our efforts and position ourselves as an institution for the next century," said.

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**Minist rs relieve stress
on Appalachian Trail hike**

By Michael Clingenpeel

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--By the time the late-m rning sun turns hot the 11 hikers have climbed through Hog Camp Gap and up Tar Jacket Ridge. Dead ahead lies Coal Mountain, over 4,000 grueling, breath-robbing feet high.

Below and far away are the concerns and demands the hikers -- all ministers -- have escaped for the day. The only pressure now is to follow the narrow trail, little more than a footpath, to the lunch break that awaits on the other side of the mountain. The only way to get there is to walk -- straight up and over.

Every year many hikers follow the Appalachian Trail, a footpath that goes from Maine to Georgia through some of the eastern United States' most beautiful scenery. On this spring morning 11 of them are Virginia Baptist ministers.

Their leader is D. Gwynn Davis Jr., director of family and Christian life development for the Virginia Baptist General Board. Since 1990 Davis has been leading pastors on day hikes through this eight-mile piece of the Appalachian Trail in Virginia known as the "religious" section, because it winds past mountains called the Priest, Cardinal and Friar.

Davis, for years a hiker and camper, started the hikes "out of ministers coming to me with obvious symptoms of stress." Davis said he believes pastors benefit from the exercise, fellowship and new perspective gained by being on the trail on the crest of the mountains.

"At one point in the trail you look back over where you've been and look forward to where you're going. There's something profound about that. It's a good time to look back on your ministry and look forward to where it's going."

The pastors agree. "When we are on top of the mountains and we look over all the vastness of God's creation, the problems and stresses within our lives look so minuscule," says Ron Wyatt, pastor at Tar Wallet Baptist Church in Cumberland, Va. Wyatt has gone on several previous hikes with Davis.

First-time hiker David Lee Johnson, pastor at Sedley (Va.) Baptist Church, affirmed the value of the exercise and fellowship with other ministers. But Johnson found it was also a learning experience.

"I learned a lesson -- if you want to make it to the top and see the glory of his beauty, you have to take the hard trail up. Many people like to get to the top the easy way. They want to see the view from the top, but don't want to take the trail up."

To document the value of the hikes in reducing anxiety, before and after each hike Davis administers to each participant a questionnaire that measures his anxiety level. The scores show that many have reduced stress levels at the end of the day.

By late afternoon the hikers have reached their pick-up point, weary, relaxed, ready to come back, "but not tomorrow," according to one.

"Anything that helps ministers live longer and happier lives is a priority for me," says Davis, already excited about the next hike. "I hope more and more will take advantage of it."

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**'Perfect' couple weathers
son's addiction, death**

By Dianne Shaw Casolaro

**Baptist Press
5/17/94**

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--"Things are not always as they seem," as the saying goes. The lives of Christians are no exceptions. Successful careers, a nice home and positions of church leadership don't exclude believers from struggles. Just ask Royce and Sandra Watkins of Birmingham, Ala.

The couple had all these things and more, yet they faced a silent battle. They watched, prayed, cried and wrestled as their oldest son, Tim, struggled with drug abuse for three years. They could not understand why God did not take Tim's addiction away, even after he became a Christian. Finally, Tim's drug dependence led to his death from an overdose in late 1988.

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Royce and Sandra, Louisiana residents at the time, were in Birmingham on business when they learned of their son's death. A phone call from their pastor, Fred Lowery of First Baptist Church in Bozier City, La., gave Sandra the staggering news her 20-year-old son had died.

Tim and two friends had a party in the Dallas apartment Royce had rented in preparation for the family's move there. The friends were unable to wake Tim after a night of illicit drug use.

Upon receiving the heart-wrenching phone call, Sandra recounted: "I was so stricken with grief and surprise. I just said, 'Jesus.' I felt warmth surround me. I knew he was really there with me all the time." Almost immediately there came a knock at the door of her Wynfrey Hotel room. The maid, who was a Christian, responded to her tears and offered Sandra comfort.

Royce and Sandra flew home by private plane loaned by Royce's company which "enabled us to talk it out, to express the emotions that needed to be expressed," Royce said.

They had been privately expressing those strong emotions, even to the point of anger, for the years during Tim's drug abuse.

"Certainly you question God" in such situations, Royce said. Over a period of three years "you think 'enough already,'" he said. Because of his son's weaknesses, he also questioned himself as a parent, wondering if he could have acted differently to prevent the drug abuse.

Royce said he never understood the hold drugs have on people, even though he is national sales manager for a pharmaceutical company. Drugs took away Tim's ambition and changed his personality. He told his parents obtaining drugs consumed him; his first thoughts in the morning and his last thoughts at night were of how he would buy drugs.

During the summer when Tim was drug-free, he would be smiling when he woke up. "It was a joy to have him back," his father said.

But even after he made a profession of faith in Christ, his body's craving for drugs led Tim to begin the drug use again.

"When you pray and pray and pray for so long and you've done all you can do, finally you're to the point of being really angry with God," Sandra said.

She was to that point about two weeks before Tim's death, by which time they had realized he was again involved with drugs. Sandra said she turned her back on God because she couldn't understand why the addiction continued. "I could never treat my child the way he was treating me," Sandra said she thought at the time. "I didn't want any part of God. It was a miserable two weeks," she said.

But when she cried out to God in that hotel room, none of that mattered to him, she said. His comfort was immediate. "The power is so strong. You absolutely know another person is with you."

Tim's funeral was attended by a large number of teens including many of his "drug friends." Lowery preached an evangelistic sermon at the request of the family and called parents and teens to a time of commitment.

Grieving had been done during the previous years, so the funeral was not one of bitterness or anger. "We had a peace that Tim was in heaven," Sandra said. "He was saved in July -- we have no doubt."

Soon after Tim's death, the family found written in the front cover of his Bible his salvation date and Scriptures underlined for strength to battle his addiction.

"We felt God saw he (Tim) would not be able to overcome his addiction and it was God's mercy that took him (to heaven)," Sandra said.

Even with that assurance, they still questioned why the addiction happened in the first place. They have found hope and strength in Scriptures as they try to understand.

By studying Hebrews, Sandra said she has learned that to become like Christ, people have to suffer through grief and heartache. God allowed this tragedy so she might become more like him, she said.

She also read 1 Peter 5:10 daily: "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you."

"That carried me through," she said.

F r Royce, the "be grateful for trials" teachings of James 1 have become real. Tim's addiction and death "made us grateful for brokenness. We can speak from grace instead of about grace," he said.

The couple said their faith and hope in the Lord is stronger because of the experience. Had it not happened, "We would have so much pride in what we had done in raising our family," Sandra commented. "When you're broken, you realize your source is the Lord."

Throughout the ordeal, the Watkinses worked to keep their home from crumbling, cleaving to and depending on the Lord and each other. Youngest son Jim, now a student at Baylor University in Texas, continued to show his brother love despite Tim's mistreatment, Royce said. And, Jim comforted his parents by assuring them they were not "bad parents" because of Tim's addiction.

The family acknowledged it made mistakes relating to Tim's drug abuse and has since tried to help others facing similar circumstances. "We went through almost two years trying to keep it a secret. That was the wrong thing," Royce admitted. "You should get it out in the open and have friends praying for you."

Royce also acknowledged they probably should have set limits, such as forcing Tim to move out if he continued using drugs. But that's difficult to do, even though counselors say parents should, because he's still their child. "We were so ashamed," Royce said.

"We felt we had a certain image to uphold," Sandra added, pointing out Royce was a deacon and they worked in the youth department. She also was an administrator in the school system. "People had no idea what we were going through.

"My faith wanted to see something happen -- to know that God was working," Sandra said of the trying times. "My faith was shaken when I didn't see something." She later understood she didn't need to "see" what she prayed for. "When it seems blackest and darkest and you feel the most alone, you don't have to see it. He is there and he is able," Sandra said.

Royce said he can't imagine how anyone who doesn't have a relationship with Christ can handle the anguish and emotions they have faced.

Yes, they believe they will see Tim again one day in heaven, but "you never get to the point you don't miss them or think about them," Sandra said.

When he sees boxes of memorabilia or his sons' pictures in his den, Royce thinks about the hunting and fishing trips and other fun times they had together, as well as the difficult times. "I always thank God for his grace and his protection and for how he saw us through that ordeal," he said.

And they find comfort too in knowing Tim's death wasn't in vain. Shirley Purcell, a neighbor, said watching the way the family handled Tim's death reinforced her need to be involved with a church and to have a closer relationship with God.

Purcell also has a young son, Jarrett, whom Tim befriended. As Sandra emotionally related the story, 9-year-old Jarrett told his mother: "Tim died for our family. If he hadn't died, you would have never taken me to Sunday school and I would have never known Jesus."

The Watkins' home has endured quakes that could have crumbled their structure, or at least left cracks in the foundation. Yet, they have survived with their foundation intact and reinforced. "God showed us (job advancements, social status) really aren't that important," Royce said. "The things I was striving for can be taken away 'just like that.' This event increased our growth and faith in God."

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HOUSE MAIL

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