

# (BP)

## - - BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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June 24, 1994

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Work permit problems imperil  
Baptist mission work in Zambia

By Craig Bird

Baptist Press  
6/24/94

LUSAKA, Zambia (BP)--Southern Baptist mission work in Zambia faces serious disruption or even suspension following aggressive action by Zambia Baptist convention leaders to have missionaries' work permits denied.

After months of appeals and negotiations, a decision by the Zambia immigration office June 17 not to renew work permits for missionaries Joe and Gloria Turman and Lonnie and Fran Turner led the Baptist Mission of Zambia to file a legal appeal June 22. The Turmans are from Tyler, Texas, and Brownsville, Tenn., respectively. The Turners are from Harlan, Ky.

The Zambian government may allow missionaries with expired work permits to remain in the country during the appeals process. However, the government has yet to make this ruling, said area mission officials.

Organized in 1959, the Baptist Mission of Zambia, the official organization of Southern Baptist missionaries in Zambia, includes 45 Southern Baptist workers. They relate to the Baptist Convention of Zambia, formed in 1974.

Decisions on work permit renewal for Ed and Linda Miller, from Paris, Texas, and Mike and Lindy Howard, from Brazoria and Corpus Christi, Texas, respectively, are due from the immigration office June 29. The status of other Southern Baptist missionaries will be reviewed as their work permits expire.

The central issue in the dispute is the convention's request to approve all renewals of work permits for Southern Baptist missionaries, although the mission is a separate legal entity registered with the Zambian government. Unlike most other African countries where Southern Baptist missionaries work, the Zambia mission has for years sought convention approval for any new missionaries assigned to Zambia. But renewal of permits for established missionaries has never been a part of the working agreement with Zambian Baptists.

The conflict has caused serious breaches in the Baptist Convention of Zambia. In protest of the elected leaders' actions, many churches have announced plans to withdraw from the convention and have suspended financial support.

The U.S. embassy has said it is willing to argue the mission's case at the diplomatic level, if necessary, since it appears the Baptist mission is being treated differently from other expatriates seeking work permits in the country.

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"I continue to grieve over this break in relationships at a time when Baptist work is moving forward in Zambia in significant ways and after a history that had made Zambia a model for missionary-convention relationships," said John Faulkner, who directs Foreign Mission Board work in Eastern and Southern Africa. "It is not in the best interest of anyone."

A crusade in Livingstone, Zambia, where the Turmans work, last year resulted in 950 people becoming Christians. In Zambia's Cooperbelt area, 320 people accepted Christ in a May evangelistic effort involving the Millers, Zambians and volunteers from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

In the past two years the convention's total churches have grown from 500 to 575, including 40 new churches begun in 1993 during the growing controversy between the mission and convention. Missionaries and Zambian Baptists reported 3,500 baptisms last year.

In the late 1980s the two Baptist entities created a joint governing body, the Zambia Baptist Council. The council was to coordinate Baptist work in Zambia and oversee a planned transfer of property and programs from the mission to the convention.

But the council was dissolved when Zambian Baptist leaders petitioned the immigration office to deny work permit renewals without the convention's official endorsement. Also, the governing board of the Baptist Theological Seminary of Zambia was reconstituted and a program of transferring property from the mission to the convention halted.

"The pain and damage this issue is causing is impossible to measure," said Miller, who has worked in Zambia for more than 17 years. "Not only are the relationships between missionaries and Zambian Christians being strained but relationships among Zambians are being harmed. Zambian pastors who want to treat us as brothers and co-workers are called 'doubled-tongued' by those who agree with the convention's leadership's call to stop cooperating with us at any level.

"Certainly it would be hard if all of the missionaries have to leave, but even then the healing between Zambians could be difficult -- and all this at a time when Zambians are responding to the evangelical Christian witness as they've never done before. We literally weep over what is happening."

"Our position is very clear," Faulkner added. "We want relationships to be restored and we want to continue to work alongside Zambian Baptists in every possible way to advance the cause of Christ in that country. We want to resume and continue the process of turning over property and programs to Zambian Baptists.

"But we expect to be treated by the Zambian government the same way as it treats other expatriate groups who are registered independently like the Baptist Mission of Zambia (who are not required to have authorization from the Zambian groups they work with) and we will turn over property and programs in compliance with guidelines established by the trustees of the Foreign Mission Board."

Mission officials have met with M.B. Kamuwanga, the convention's general secretary, but so far had not been able to resolve the issue. "We will continue to pray and work toward that goal," Faulkner said.

"But if her (Kamuwanga's) stance, and the decision by the government to allow the convention to unilaterally block the renewal of our missionaries' work permits, continues then we obviously will be forced to transfer our people and our programs to countries where we can work. That is not what we desire but it may become the necessity," Faulkner added. "I urge all Southern Baptists to join me and the missionaries and Zambians in praying earnestly that God's will and God's solutions will be clear to all of us."

## Fifth National Acteens

Convention draws 14,000 teens By Roy Jennings

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Almost 14,000 Southern Baptist teenage girls and their leaders filled the coliseum at Birmingham-Jefferson Civic Center for four days of experiences in contemporary Christian missions.

The occasion was the fifth National Acteens Convention, held every five years under the auspices of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union.

Acteens is the missions organization in Southern Baptist churches for girls in grades 7-12.

Program planners drew on pageantry, missionary commissioning and testimonies, an Acteens birthday party, and 37 conferences on topics of interest to teenagers to communicate the Christian message.

To show their concern for others, the girls brought 5,000 stuffed teddy bears and 7,000 pairs of canvas shoes for their missionaries to give to needy children where they work.

Texas Acteens led states in attendance with 1,957. South Carolina followed with 1,446; Tennessee, 1,181; Alabama, 1,070; North Carolina, 994; Mississippi, 840; Georgia, 827; Virginia, 569; Oklahoma, 383; Missouri, 361; Arkansas, 337, and Florida, 333.

The teenagers opened the convention in downtown Birmingham by learning a new song, "Heart of the Journey," sung by Michele Wagner of Cleveland, Ohio, a contemporary Christian singer. The song served as the theme of the convention.

A procession of flags of 126 countries where Southern Baptists missionaries live and work led to a challenge for the girls to commit themselves to take the Christian message to others.

Testimonies of missionaries ranged from the difficulties of sharing the Christian faith with Navajo Indians in New Mexico to reaching out to apartment complexes and mobile home parks in Jackson, Miss., through Vacation Bible Schools, tutoring, and cooking classes.

At the closing session the girls witnessed the commissioning of Lori Fitzsimons of Lanette, Ala., as a new home missionary, and Sharon Williams of Charlotte, N.C., as a new foreign missionary. Fitzsimons will work in Charleston, S.C., while Williams will start churches in Taiwan.

Southern Baptists have about 7,000 missionaries serving in the United States and 126 foreign countries.

In a series of specialized conferences, the teenagers were introduced to a new Southern Baptist program called "True Love Waits" which encourages people to commit to sexual abstinence until marriage.

Specialists in race relations cautioned the teenagers about using slang terms to refer to people of other races "because it really hurts." At a conference on homosexuality, Lane Powell, professor of human relations at Samford University in Birmingham, reminded the girls while homosexuality is a sin in the Bible, Christians should show compassion just as Jesus did in dealing with outcasts.

The girls learned children join gangs because they feel insignificant. Ron Climer of Fresno, Calif., a home missionary and counselor, called on parents to spend more time with their children, take them to church, and involve them in family activities.

In a conference on dating, the teenagers learned "to get a godly guy, you've got to be a godly woman."

Conference leaders advised the girls to take a close look at what they plan to wear on dates to avoid sending the wrong message to boys, stay away from R-rated movies and avoid compromising situations.

The girls were challenged to overcome fears and include people with AIDS within their sphere of Christian witness.

Since AIDS spreads most commonly through sexual contact, churches need to talk boldly, honestly, and comfortably about sexuality, said Fred Loper of Oklahoma City, a home missionary and physician.

Between specialized conferences and general sessions, the teenagers flocked to a large exhibit hall designed as a city where they personally interviewed missionaries while making video tapes and audio cassettes for use later in their churches.

Convention leaders said 600 girls made commitments to missions service and another 900 asked for special counseling.

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EDITORS' NOTE: A packet of photos from NAC is being sent overnight to state Baptist newspapers by WMU.

14,000 Acteens celebrate 25th  
birthday at national convention By Dianna Cagle

Baptist Press  
6/24/94

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Southern Baptist teenage girls from across the country gathered June 22 to celebrate 25 years of missions work at the National Acteens Convention at the Birmingham-Jefferson Civic Center.

Alicia Williamson, a contemporary Christian singer from Mobile, Ala. began the birthday celebration by singing "Happy Birthday," the Acteens way. Party favors were passed out to the screaming crowd of almost 14,000.

The Acteens' cheer winners were announced during the ceremony. Videos were sent in from Acteen groups depicting their way of cheering on the Acteens. The winner was the Acteen group from Fremont Bible Fellowship in the San Francisco Bay area in California.

Acteens is a missions organization for girls in grades 7-12. It is sponsored by the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union.

The new Acteen song, "Together Hand in Hand," was introduced at the ceremony as well. Trish Landers, a video producer with the Foreign Mission Board in Virginia, sang the song.

She told the girls to "grab a hand" next to them and to remember they were gathered to "serve the Lord."

"Remember, together, hand in hand we can make a difference," Landers said. "The song says, 'Lord we are yours and we praise your holy name. Teach us to be what you want us to be.'"

Also announced was the number of teddy bears and shoes that are to be given to missions. About 7,000 pairs of shoes and 4,250 teddy bears were given by the Acteens through Wednesday night.

During the party, games such as a screaming contest, The Shoe Shop, Oh, Really! Relay, earth ball race and Name that Tune were played. Each contestant was a representative of several states.

In the scream contest, each grade level from seventh through twelfth participated, as well as the leaders. The judges were missionaries from the U.S. and abroad. The leaders were chosen as winners in the contest.

In the Oh, Really! Relay, girls wore capes and crowns. They also carried a scepter. Each girl was to run around the track passing her paraphernalia to another girl. Four girls were on each team.

Things were a little different for The Shoe Shop game. The four girls and a missionary had to put their shoes in a wading pool. Things were made more difficult by pouring a full shopping cart of shoes into the pool. The first team to get all their shoes back on and tied won.

In the earth ball relay, each section of the coliseum was given an earth ball. The object was to get the ball from the bottom to the top and back down again. The first to finish was the winner.

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Two missionaries from Africa told the girls about African customs for birthdays. They demonstrated to the girls "the chicken," which is a dance in Africa.

Since the Acteens organization began in the 70s, the party was geared to remembering what happened in that decade. Pictures of former Acteens and their leaders were shown and they mentioned fashion, TV shows, songs and other things that stood out to them in the 70s.

Becky Nelson, Acteens products editor, said the celebration was beyond her "wildest dreams."

"There's no way to describe it," Nelson said. "I thought the girls were sensitive to what was being said and showed their support for each other and the Acteens.

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Lack of significance is  
why kids join gangs

By Dianna Cagle

Baptist Press  
6/24/94

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Children join gangs because they do not feel significant, a home missionary from Fresno, Calif. told Southern Baptist teenage girls and their leaders June 23 at the National Acteens Convention at the Birmingham-Jefferson Civic Center.

Ron Climer, a home missionary and counselor, held two different types of sessions at the national convention. One was geared specifically for teenagers and the other for their leaders.

The conference was one of 37 on key issues facing teenagers offered at the 4-day convention sponsored by Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union.

"Gangs appear to be increasing in all areas," Climer said.

The reason gangs are increasing is because gang members are some children's only source of significance.

"Significance is vital," Climer said. "There is a God-given responsibility to make people in our sphere of influence feel significant."

Children join gangs because they "think it's cool," Climer said. It sometimes gives them a sense of security.

Other reasons to join are fear, intimidation, racial issues or because it is exciting.

"A lot of times, these kids don't get acceptance from anywhere or anyone else," he said. "They think it enhances their image and it gives them a sense of power."

Climer said some people consider survival man's basic human need, but he does not think so.

"If survival was man's basic human need, man could not override that natural instinct and kill himself," he said. "Dying of natural causes is another way for a doctor saying, 'we don't know man, they just died.'"

This is the reason why Climer believes significance is man's basic need. He said we all have a right to feel significant.

"Jesus died for us," Climer said. "He died for all of us."

"I look to other people to get a message about who I am," Climer said. "Look at the disciples. Look at who Jesus reached out to.

"Jesus treated the disciples as if they were lovable and because the disciples thought they were lovable, they became lovable to Christ."

Every child has potential, he said.

"For some people, you have to scrub them and shine them, but it's there," Climer said.

There are three levels of gang involvement: hard core members, members or regulars and the outer circle or associate group, the missionary explained.

Climer said the most dangerous group is the outer circle.

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"They are violent," he said. "They are trying to establish themselves -- prove themselves worthy to the hard core members.

It is hardest to try to reach the hard core member because of the level of their involvement, Climer said.

"It would take a miracle to reach these people, like God parting the Red Sea."

Climer said the number one place gangs recruit members is in schools. One way to cut down on recruitment is to have a strict dress code to prohibit any gang-associated clothing.

Reaching out to those people in need of a feeling of significance is what Climer thinks the older Acteens and leaders should do, as well as others in the community.

He said people should try to spend time with a child. Take them to church or to their own family activities, he suggested.

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EDITORS' NOTE: A second group of stories from the NAC is available in the SBCNet Newsroom under NAC.94.

Bulgarian scientists find  
cure for spiritual longings

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press  
6/24/94

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--While renowned for their scientific inquiry, Bulgarian natives Parush and Nina Parushev could not find the formula for spiritual fulfillment.

The Parushevs had gained wide acclaim for their pioneering work in "biom chatronics," a technical medicine aimed at increasing people's capacity for physical activity. The technology they developed helps train Olympic athletes.

Yet the Parushevs, now students at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., sensed an emptiness in their lives that neither professional success nor Marxist philosophy could satisfy.

Parush and Nina, who hold doctorates in applied mathematics and exercise physiology, respectively, began their spiritual quest long before Bulgaria's communist regime fell in 1989. That search culminated with conversion in a Baptist church in 1990.

Parush's pilgrimage began in 1980, when he visited Poland to deliver a lecture. His visit coincided with a festival sponsored by the theological faculty at Kracow that drew thousands of Roman Catholics to that city.

"I thought Christianity and all other religions were the opiate of the people and were used to manipulate people and to warp their minds," says Parush, whose grandfather was a founder of Bulgarian socialism. "This is what our communist system taught us. But I saw faith that moved people so strongly that they came to celebrate with other people."

The scene strongly impressed Parush. "I had been isolated from the Christian influence," he explains. "In our country to share the Bible or to share religious influence was viewed by the government like sharing drugs or pornography. They could put you in jail for 13 years."

Over the next few years, Parush returned to Poland at every opportunity. He learned to speak Polish so he could follow the masses in Catholic parishes and talk about the Christian faith with Polish friends.

Parush's desire to know more about Christianity prompted him in 1984 to sign a contract to teach and do research in The Netherlands. There Parush read a book that convinced him Marxism was itself a religion. "I struggled with that idea," he says. "I couldn't sleep nights, because it turned completely my understanding of what is valuable in life."

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Parush was not yet convinced of Christianity's truth. Nevertheless, he returned to Bulgaria equally unconvinced of the claims of the communist system. His open expression of these doubts resulted in his ouster as Communist Party secretary for the Union of Mathematicians in Bulgaria in 1987.

That same year he married Nina who also was seeking answers to life's ultimate questions. As a child, Nina had first encountered God in the form of an unexplained comforting presence that came to her in the midst of deep depression. Her melancholy stemmed from the death of a friend who died when Nina was 5.

One night when she was 7 or 8 Nina "just felt a warm feeling," she says. "Now, I can say it was God who came to comfort me. I received a warm feeling of peace. It was my guiding light."

At the time, Nina lacked the religious background to offer any explanation for that event. Yet the presence remained with her. In the fifth grade, she read a story that told of a woman who prayed to God. "I just started to pray," she says. "That was God leading me."

Nina's own experience with God was so real that she categorically dismissed the atheism advocated in Bulgarian schools. She says her abiding prayer was: "God guide me and let your hand be on me and show me the right way."

The couple eventually began searching together for spiritual answers. They investigated Islam and Eastern religions and found no satisfaction. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions also failed to quench their spiritual thirst.

In 1989, a friend invited them to the Baptist church. They went reluctantly, thinking Baptists were a strange sect.

"When I heard about Jesus from the pulpit in the Baptist church, I realized he had led me and he had been there all through the years," says Nina. "It was great joy."

"For me, it was different," notes Parush. "I was not prepared like her. She had spiritual meaning somehow, but I had only reason."

In the Baptist church, however, he sensed a "spirit of faith" among believers and for the first time experienced a personal encounter with God. "It was a new feeling for me," he says. "It was at this moment that Jesus touched me, not as a mind, but as a person."

As the Parushevs matured in faith, they were heavily influenced by Southern Baptist missionaries who encouraged them to pursue theological training.

At Southern Seminary, the Parushevs are preparing for leadership roles among Bulgarian Christians. Nina is studying social work and hopes to help Bulgarians address the nation's social problems from a Christian perspective.

Parush plans to teach at the Baptist Theological School, the only Protestant school in the nation. Bulgarian Baptist leader Teo Angeloff founded the school in 1991 with the advice of then Southern President Roy L. Honeycutt.

"We need people to be prepared for ministry, but the school is for more than theological education," says Parush. "The school is called to be a place for cultural demonstration of evangelical faith."

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(BP) photo available upon request from Southern Seminary.

Argentine president declares  
love of Bible to Baptist leaders By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press  
6/24/94

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (BP)--Baptist leaders were pleased to see how well Argentine President Carlos Menem knew the Bible when they paid an official visit to him at his presidential office.

Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance who led the delegation that met with Menem June 9, presented the Argentine president with a Bible with his name engraved on it.

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The Baptists sought the meeting to tell the Argentine president about and ask his support for the 17th Baptist World Congress to be held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Aug. 1-6, 1995.

"As I gave the Bible to him," Lotz said, "I reminded him of God's command to all leaders and Christians from the prophet Micah (6.8): 'What does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'"

Lotz said when Menem received the Bible, he said, "I also want to read a passage of Scripture to you" and he read and even explained passages in Spanish from Psalm 139, with an interpreter translating.

Imprisoned for eight years under the military dictatorship which ruled Argentina from 1976 until elections in 1983, Menem said he read the Bible often during his imprisonment and even today reads it for guidance.

Lotz said Menem, a Catholic, talked about how important his faith in Christ is to him and spoke of his "good meeting" in 1991 with Billy Graham whom he called "a wonderful man."

Baptists in Argentina are concerned a constitution that still mandates a Catholic president. Under Menem's proposed constitutional changes, this could change.

Argentine Baptist leaders said it is because they believe they have a government that appreciates their contribution that they sought the meeting with Menem to seek his support for the Baptist World Congress.

"I was impressed with the way the president listened to the BWA concerns for human rights, justice and evangelism," Lotz said.

When the president spoke about churches working together and not competing in evangelism, Lotz said he emphasized the difference between evangelism and proselytism.

Evangelism is a major emphasis for the 1995 Baptist event and Baptists in Argentina are planning a major evangelistic outreach during the congress.

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Faith needed for creativity  
church music leaders told

By Keith Hinson

Baptist Press  
6/24/94

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--The key to creativity is a relationship with God, according to Terry York of the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn.

Speaking to children's choir workers at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center during Church Music Leadership Week June 18-24, York said, "Baptist Christians are taught a lot about how to use their hearts and talents. But there is one area of our life and giftedness where we often don't exercise faith -- the fear of running out of ideas."

Church workers who are out of ideas may wonder if God wants them to resign or transfer to another area of work in the church, he observed.

"But when you've run out of ideas, you can say 'good', because God can move in, and we can see what God can do.

"God has a whole storehouse of things we haven't seen yet or heard yet," said York, who is manager of the field services section of the BSSB's church music ministries department.

"These things are revealed by God's Spirit, not in books. If no one has seen or heard them, where can we go to find them? You can't find them in the library. They haven't been thought of yet."

York urged the group to stay close to God by spending time with him daily in prayer.

"These things that no one has seen or heard are there for the asking -- not demanding or grabbing," he said, suggesting to the conferees they each carry a notebook to record ideas.

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"Creativity is from God, and we have to be stewards of it, capturing the ideas when they come," York said. "When God decides to give us an idea, we should be ready for it.

"I like old books that have evidence of use," he said, "stained with tears and sweat. When I look at an old hymnal, I look to see which pages are the most yellowed, stained, and tattered. That tells me which songs have been sung the most."

Likewise, York said he believes God wants us to put "stains of usage" on the creativity he gives to us.

"This access to God is somewhat like having a library card," he suggested. "There are books we haven't seen and others we have. We see them, check them out and use them. After we check them out, we return them."

In the same way, creativity should be returned to God after usage, York continued. "When someone gives you a compliment on your creativity, don't say, 'Well, it wasn't much, but I did it.' Return the creativity to God by acknowledging where you got it."

York said he wasn't suggesting people shouldn't say, "thank you," when given a compliment, but they should remember to credit God for providing them with creativity.

"Now and then the Lord sees past the sin and through the junk and says, 'I want to use you to touch the life of a child. Will you check out some creativity and return it to me with the stains of usage?'" York said.

York challenged the group to exercise "creativity faith," that God can supply them with creative ideas for ministry.

He noted Christians have concepts of salvation faith, referring to one's acceptance of Jesus as Savior and Lord; vocational faith, that God has a will for where and how a Christian should serve him; financial faith, that God can provide for our needs; and prayer faith, that God exists and cares about us and listens to us.

"Creativity faith should not be any more of a surprise to us than any other kind of faith," York said. "Don't be any more surprised about creativity than any other miracle of God in your life."

Creative ideas are revealed by God's Spirit to people who will spend time with him and obey him, York said.

"If it's been a while since I've written a poem, it's probably been a while since I've shared Jesus with anyone," York said. "If it's been a while since I've written a poem, it's probably been a while since I showed love to someone."

"The grace to reach out comes from the same source as the grace to make words rhyme," York said.

Often creativity involves risk, York noted. "You have to risk fizzles and flops," he said. "Creativity comes from the creator, but creativity comes with no guarantee it will be successful."

"Sometimes we will mess up, because we are human and so are those kids you work with (in children's choir)," he said. "The same place the love comes from, the same place creativity comes from is the same place forgiveness comes from."

"Creativity will go through the hands of dirty sinners to touch the lives of dirty sinners. Creativity shouldn't be any more shocking to us than forgiveness," he said.

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Disciplined adults can lead  
undisciplined children

By Keith Hinson

Baptist Press  
6/24/94

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--A lack of discipline in today's children frustrates many people who work with children in church, a preschool choir director told children's choir workers at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center during Church Music Leadership Week, June 18-24.

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But sometimes a child's lack of discipline is rooted in fatigue, observed Janet Williamson, preschool choir director at First Baptist Church of Lebanon, Tenn.

"If the kids are restless during a Wednesday evening choir rehearsal, just remember they've probably been picked up at day care, rushed home, fed a quick supper, and then brought to church," she said.

In a class entitled "And They Don't Even Know It's Discipline," Williamson presented several ideas from "Discipline: Who Needs It?", by Susan Cauley and Barry McCarty (Convention Press, 1992).

Williamson suggested workers empathize with children.

"Tell them you know they're tired and restless," she said. "You might use a body energizer of some kind, such as an FYOB (flat on your back) break.' All the children lie flat on their backs with eyes closed, giving them a few seconds to rejuvenate."

Sometimes adult workers may influence children to misbehave.

"The most important thing to remember about discipline is that it begins with you," said Williamson.

She urged workers to be prepared before they go to class, adding when a director waits until class to do final preparation, the children don't feel appreciated.

"When they come in and you're too busy to greet them, they feel they're not important," she said. "You haven't had the time to say hello to them."

With older children, Williamson said, "Don't go into choir giddy and smiling. Let them know, I'm here to be about business, and I want you to be about business'."

Some conference participants raised the problem of discipline lacking among adult workers who talk while the director is trying to lead the children in singing.

Williamson suggested the director ask the adult worker to sit next to a child and help the child sit up straight, thus distracting the adult from their conversation.

At the beginning of each church year, Williamson tells workers in her church neither children nor adults are allowed to sit on tables in the room.

Williamson emphasized the importance of a neat, orderly classroom.

"When I taught in public school, I straightened up the chairs between classes," she said. "It made a big difference in the behavior of the students."

Another strategy that makes a difference with children is the director's body language. She suggested good posture and lots of eye contact.

"When you listen to them, do your eyes light up?" Williamson asked. "When they're talking, lean forward a bit to show them you're interested. If you treat the children like they're special, you'll become important to them."

Williamson said a choir director should not talk too much to the children who are there for the purpose of singing -- not to be talked to.

"We go to adult choir to sing. Orchestra members come to their rehearsals to play their instruments. Talking is negative reinforcement," she said, "and adults are supposed to have longer attention spans than children.

"Use the least number of words to get your point across, or use hand signals," Williamson said.

For children who talk too much, perhaps with other children, Williamson said a seating chart can be helpful. She tells the children from the beginning that she may move them on the basis of what will sound best.

"I never tell a child they're a discipline problem," she said.

Some children in choir constantly ask questions. When possible, ignore the behavior, Williamson said, recalling a six-year-old in one of her choirs who was the middle child in a family of six children.

He obviously wanted attention, Williamson said, so responding to his questions in class would have encouraged more questions.

Williamson suggested rewarding older children who do not talk. "Tell them, I'm so proud of you for listening'," said Williamson, who said she often wears a skirt with pockets to church to keep candy to use as rewards.

Although special rewards are given to children who behave well, "Try to have some kind of treat for every child in the choir," she said.

But Williamson cautioned against using the strategy with preschool groups. "It's hard to reinforce their good behavior by giving them stickers or candy," she said, "because they will all have to have one."

Sometimes a fun song can distract children from their misbehavior and restore order, such as "Two little sausages, frying in a pan. One went pop, and the other went bam," Williamson said.

Another strategy for getting children's attention is to grab someone from the hallway and have the children sing for them. "They love to sing for other people," Williamson said.

If a director knows a child with special needs will be attending choir, Williamson suggested talking with the other children first.

"After the children know of special needs, they will be helpful," she said. "Their heart is big and loving. Help the children to realize that (special needs children) are not that much different from other children."

Sometimes, in times of persistent disorder, Williamson will give children the silent treatment. "I give them the teacher look," she said, as several in the room chuckled knowingly.

The key strategy for discipline is love, Williamson said. "At the beginning of the year, I tell them, I am here because I want to be here. I love God, and I love working with children'," she said.

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Centrifuge director returns to camp  
where she first accepted ministry call

Baptist Press  
6/24/94

By Keith Beene

TIGERSVILLE, S.C. (BP)--Missi Stewart's alliance with Centrifuge has come full circle. In 1984 as a high school sophomore, she answered a call to the ministry at the North Greenville College Centrifuge camp location.

Ten years later, she is serving as director of the series of week-long camps being held through Aug. 5 on the Tigersville, S.C., campus. Centrifuge camps are sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Since 1983, the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary student has taken part in nine Centrifuge camps either as a teen participant, a counselor or a staff member.

She said she still remembers writing in her diary how much she wanted to be a Centrifuge staffer after attending her first Centrifuge camp as a ninth grader.

"There was nothing like being at Centrifuge around other teenagers who claimed to be (Christians,)" she said. "Even now I remember having deep spiritual talks in my ninth-grade Bible study."

As a child, Stewart said all her friends were Christians, but they never really talked about it. At Centrifuge camps, however, youth were encouraged to talk about their religious beliefs, she said.

Throughout her junior high years, Stewart said she entertained ideas about becoming a politician or public servant -- someone who had the power to change the world. When she committed her life to the ministry at Centrifuge, she had no idea she could combine politics with her love for the Lord.

But one of her Sunday school teachers who counseled her that night suggested there was room in the law profession for a Christian lawyer, potentially a person who had the power to change the world for God.

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So after graduating from college, Stewart entered law school and later served an internship with a law firm in Columbia, S.C. But she said she soon became disillusioned with the bureaucracy and the isolation of her particular job.

On seeing her unhappiness with her work, a former fellow Centrifuge staffer suggested she enroll in seminary. She did.

Now, she said her hope is to one day be a Christian educator at a Baptist college.

"I've always done well in school and I think I'm gifted in teaching," said Stewart, 26, who, with her straight, blonde hair, looks more like a tanned model than a graduate student of theology. "I want to be one of those mentor-type professors who spends a lot of time with the students."

Stewart's teaching abilities benefit her greatly in her role as a Centrifuge camp director. She said much of her time is spent encouraging and listening to the concerns of youth workers during daily Bible study and recreational times.

Stewart said she tries to explain to the youth workers they cannot be spiritual cure-all for the teen participants in the one week they are given with them. "We can only be a support," she acknowledged. "We are by no means the end all for their spiritual needs."

For one week, the young people are able to focus on spiritual truths and ask valid questions they might not feel comfortable asking at home, she said.

If Centrifuge youth workers can corral this spiritual curiosity and help turn it into a commitment, the young people might find it easier to get back on the right path if peer pressure leads them astray, she noted.

The high level of spirituality can translate into a life-changing experience for youth, Stewart said.

"I am living proof of the influence Centrifuge can have. I have seen it affect lives. It has affected my life," she said.

For more information about the location of this summer's Centrifuge camps, call the Sunday School Board at (615) 251-2713.

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(Keith Beene is a freelance writer in Nashville.)

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