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Home missions offering  
second highest in history

By Martin King

Baptist Press  
1/11/95

TALLADEGA, Ala. (BP)--Gifts to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions last year were the second highest in the history of the special offering, Larry Lewis, Home Mission Board president, announced Jan. 9.

Speaking to the Woman's Missionary Union executive board, Lewis praised WMU members for conducting the annual missions offering which makes up nearly half of HMB funding.

"No organization does more for home missions and home missionaries than Woman's Missionary Union. Thank you for your faithful, fervent support," Lewis said.

According to the year-end unaudited report, 1994 gifts totaled \$37.18 million, 2.4 percent more than 1993 receipts. The largest offering was \$37.6 million in 1992.

Lewis said he is confident "this time next year I will be able to announce to you that the 1995 Annie Armstrong Offering was the largest in history." The 1995 offering goal is \$50 million. "I agree that is an ambitious but reachable goal."

This year marks 100 years that WMU has promoted a special home missions offering. Annie Armstrong as WMU executive director in 1895 led the first offering, called the "Self Denial Offering." The annual emphasis was named for Armstrong in 1934.

All offering receipts are spent on the mission field to support the work of 4,913 missionaries in the United States, the Caribbean, American Samoa, Guam and Canada. The home missions offering accounts for 47 percent of the HMB budget while Cooperative Program receipts are 36 percent of the budget.

Editor warns of postage hike  
from 'Contract with America'

By Keith Hinson

WASHINGTON (BP)--Postal rates have just jumped almost 23 percent for nonprofit mailers, such as churches, state Baptist newspapers and other religious publications.

But if one item in the "Contract with America" -- now being debated in Congress -- is adopted, rates will rise another 22-23 percent, according to Bob Terry, editor of Word & Way, the state Baptist newsjournal of Missouri.

The item of concern in the Contract with America calls for "reform of financing of future federal retiree benefits," said Terry, who serves on the Mailers' Technical Advisory Committee (MTAC), a group of mailers that meets quarterly with the senior management of the United States Postal Service (USPS).

The proposed reform would require the USPS to make advance payments totaling \$11 billion to the federal government to fund the next five years of USPS retiree benefits, Terry said.

Advocates of the reform say it would reduce the federal budget deficit by requiring the USPS to "pre-fund" its retirement benefits, Terry said.

That's quite a contrast to the present arrangement, in which the USPS pays retiree benefits to the federal government on a "pay as you go" basis -- "or as the obligations come due," said Terry, who represents a broad-based coalition of religious publishers, including Southern Baptists, on MTAC.

"The Postmaster General has said if (the reform is enacted), they will immediately file for another postal rate increase," Terry said, because all benefits for USPS retirees are provided by postal revenues -- not from tax revenues.

Routinely, the USPS transfers money for its retirees to the federal government, which acts as a channel for the funds by issuing checks to retirees.

The USPS board of governors is the body responsible for making rate increase requests, which are then referred to the independent Postal Rate Commission (PRC). The PRC has several months to study and accept the governors's request or make its own recommendation.

The PRC has the final say in postal rates, unless overruled by a unanimous vote of the USPS board of governors, Terry noted.

What is Terry's alternative to the reform? "If nothing is done on this (reform), the postal service will continue to pay the retirement and health benefits on these retirees as these costs come due," he said.

A press release from the Washington-based Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers disputes that the reform can actually accomplish federal budget deficit reduction. The release quotes from a letter by Robert Reischauer, director of the Congressional Budget Office: "Over the long run, however, pre-funding would merely shift the timing of certain receipts and would not reduce the deficit."

It's not only nonprofit mailers, but all postal consumers who will likely be impacted by the rate increase, Terry said. He said the cost of a first-class stamp could jump to 35 cents by the end of 1995 if the reform is enacted. (Stamps rose from 29 cents to 32 cents on Jan. 1.)

Terry urges concerned Baptists and others to contact their congressmen and senators in Washington and urge them not to vote for the part of the Contract with America that calls for "reform of financing for future federal retiree benefits."

The steep increase on Jan. 1 in nonprofit postal rates was a surprise, since the USPS board of governors had requested a much smaller increase from the PRC, Terry said.

Although the USPS board of governors had only requested a 16-17 percent increase for second-class mail and 4 percent for third-class mail, the PRC increased the rates 22 percent for second-class and 14 percent for third class, effective Jan. 1.

Terry noted the Jan. 1 increase was in addition to a more modest increase that had already occurred on Oct. 1, 1994.

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The Oct. 1 increase was one of a series of slow and steady increases provided for by the Revenue Foregone Reformation Act, which was enacted two years ago, Terry said. Under RFRA, on Oct. 1 of each year, second-class rates rise by 2-3 percent along with a 4 percent increase for third-class rates. The Oct. 1 increases will continue for the next four years, according to the terms of RFRA, Terry said.

Terry noted RFRA also ensures nonprofit mailers will continue to receive a discount on postal rates. Most postal consumers pay 100 percent of the cost of handling the mail and 100 percent of "institutional costs" (such as overhead, salary, postal utilities and other costs), but RFRA ensures that nonprofits will continue to pay lower postal rates -- 100 percent of the cost of handling the mail, but only 50 percent of institutional costs.

The 50 percent discount on institutional costs is "revenue foregone by the postal service in behalf of nonprofits," Terry noted.

"That's coming out of the decision by the government that's over 150 years old," he said, "that there is value to the nation for the exchange of ideas to be taking place and for certain philanthropic, educational and charitable causes."

For the 50 percent of institutional costs that nonprofits don't pay, the federal government pays that amount to the USPS.

Before RFRA, the nonprofit mailers in America "would have to go through and ask for an appropriation every year and get into a knockdown, drag-out fight," Terry said.

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Churches can save money  
by link with Baptist papers

By Keith Hinson

Baptist Press  
1/11/95

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--How can local churches cope with shrinking budgets and rising postal rates?

Bob Terry has a suggestion: back pages of state Baptist newspapers. Many newsjournals of state Baptist conventions provide a church newsletter service on their back pages, noted Terry, who is editor of Word and Way, the Baptist newsjournal in Missouri.

Under a typical plan, a participating church sends the state paper to its church members, and the church newsletter is printed on the back page of the paper. Subscribers whose churches don't participate receive a back page prepared by the state newspaper staff -- often feature stories that don't relate to high-profile or critical news stories.

For a church that already subscribes to the state newspaper for its members, the back-page plan saves the church the cost of mailing its newsletters by piggybacking the newsletter on the back page of the paper.

"I think (rising postal rates) ought to increase the partnership between churches, associations and state Baptist papers," Terry said. "When a local church sends a mailout, it pays a per-piece cost and a weight cost. If the church and state paper were working together in partnership, there would only be one per-piece charge.

"You could eliminate the postage being paid by the local church, have more efficient delivery and better Christian stewardship. I do not think we honor the Lord when we adopt structures, when we send more money to the post office, when we could partner with other Baptist entities," Terry said.

The cost for a church to communicate with its members is "going out of sight," he said. "Every time we have to take a dollar and put it toward postal rates, it comes out of the Cooperative Program, ministries, Bibles, Christian literature or social ministry. It's a dollar that's going to postage (instead).

"I think that's a real problem in a society where we're talking about growing personal accountability and responsibility," Terry said.

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**Southeastern trustees meet  
in special called session**

**By Dwayne Hastings**

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees met Jan. 4 in a special called session on the school's Wake Forest, N.C., campus. The board elected Stephen Andrews as assistant professor of Old Testament and John Davis as assistant professor of church music. Both men have been serving on the faculty by presidential appointment.

Trustees also took a first step toward implementing the school's recently adopted land use management plan, accepting an offer from Baita International, Inc., to purchase 45 of the seminary's 300-plus undeveloped acres. The tract, designated for commercial development in the plan, fronts U.S. Highway 1 and is a mile from the school's main campus.

Baita International, Inc., a commercial real estate development and acquisition company based in Atlanta, was one of several firms to make a proposal to acquire and develop the property.

The trustees had approved the concept of the land use plan in their 1994 fall meeting, accepting the report of a land use task force which outlined a plan to develop and market sections of the seminary's property.

In other action, trustees appointed eight people to the seminary's board of visitors. The board of visitors, established by the trustees in March 1994, works with the seminary by providing and securing financial resources and assisting with the recruitment of students.

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**Bill proposed to establish  
commission on gambling**

**By Tom Strode**

**Baptist Press  
1/11/95**

WASHINGTON (BP)--Congress will establish a panel to study the impact of gambling in the United States, if a representative from Virginia has his way.

Rep. Frank Wolf, R.-Va., announced Jan. 10 he will introduce a bill to form the National Gambling Impact and Policy Commission for the purpose of compiling information on gambling's effect on economics, crime, families and individuals.

The nine-member panel Wolf proposes will have three members appointed by the president, three by the Senate majority leader and three by the speaker of the House of Representatives. One of the appointees should be a governor from a state which has legalized gambling, he said.

The United States is on a "gambling binge," Wolf said. "This is an issue of national economic importance, and I believe the new Congress should examine it closely over the coming months."

The commission, he said, should review the cost and effectiveness of federal and state regulations, gambling's impact on other businesses, the influence of gambling promoters on the development of policies regulating gaming, the relationship between gambling and crime, teen-age gambling and the effect of pathological gambling on individuals, families and social institutions.

The commission also should propose whether gaming operations on Indian lands should be regulated by the states, not just the federal government, he said.

The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission applauded Wolf's proposal.

"A congressional commission has the potential of alerting Americans to the dangers of gambling in the same way that the Commission on Pornography formed in 1985 by then-Attorney General Edwin Meese warned of the danger inherent in allowing unbridled proliferation of pornographic material," said Lamar Cooper, the CLC staff member who handles the gambling issue.

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"The gambling industry has convinced large numbers of the public and state legislators that gambling revenue is a 'free lunch' to state budget needs, but there still 'ain't no free lunch,'" Cooper said. "An unbiased commission could point out the discrepancies that exist between what the gambling industry promises to state governments versus what it actually delivers.

"The use of gambling as a source of revenue does not come without a cost. That cost is the negative impact it has on people and communities."

The commission should be established in a "fair and balanced" way, Wolf said, in order to centralize data so "governors, state legislators and citizens can have the facts they need to make informed decisions."

He has opposed attempts to legalize riverboat gambling in Virginia and would fight against gambling in the District of Columbia, but he is not taking a position on what the other 49 states should do, Wolf said.

Examples of Wolf's concerns about gambling's impact:

-- "Gambling cannibalizes other business, such as restaurants," he said. The number of restaurants in Atlantic City decreased in 10 years from 243 in 1977, the year after the legalization of casinos, to 146.

-- In the first 16 years of casino gambling in Atlantic City, the police budget tripled to \$24 million while the population fell 20 percent, according to the Wall Street Journal. The crime rate rose 230 percent in the city's first 13 years of legalized casinos, Wolf said.

Only Hawaii and Utah prohibit gambling. There are lotteries in 37 states and casinos in 23 states, Wolf said. By the year 2000, it is predicted 95 percent of Americans will live within a three- or four-hour drive of a casino, he said.

Wolf said he planned to introduce the bill Jan. 11.

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Brotherhood names Kelley  
chief development officer

By Steve Barber

Baptist Press  
1/11/95

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission has named Benjamin "Ben" F. Kelley Jr. to its newly created position of chief development officer.

Kelley, who began his assignment Jan. 3, will be responsible for directing the agency's \$10 million "Opportunity Now" capital campaign. His work will focus on appeals to corporations and individuals, while Resource Development, Inc. (RDI) of Springfield, Mo., will continue to take the lead in reaching foundations.

"I am very pleased that our trustees took steps to move our campaign forward by empowering the president to hire a chief development officer," said James D. Williams, Brotherhood Commission president. "We are ready for seasoned, proven leadership in fund-raising. I thank God that he brought to us a man who is very knowledgeable about the corporate business climate in Memphis and who has been highly effective in raising money for a nonprofit organization similar in mission and scope to the Brotherhood Commission."

Since 1987, Kelley has been vice president, development for Le Bonheur Health Systems, a 225-bed children's medical center in Memphis.

While at Le Bonheur, Kelley managed the planning and implementation of a major gift program that generated more than \$6 million in gifts and pledges the first year. He also designed and implemented a planned gift program that resulted in \$1.1 million in gift annuities and trusts.

For Brotherhood's Opportunity Now program, Kelley said he would "look at building a model for fund-raising here in Memphis and make sure that it works, and then take it to other large metropolitan areas."

The first 60 days will be spent identifying volunteer leadership from the Memphis community, he added.

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"If we don't have good volunteers in fund-raising, then we're not going to have as good a program as we could have. There will be staff involvement, but we have to have the volunteers."

Before his association with Le Bonheur, Kelley was executive vice president of the Baptist Medical System Foundation, Little Rock, Ark., where he directed the development activities of a four-hospital system.

He graduated in 1971 from the University of Nebraska, Omaha, with a bachelor of science degree in marketing. He and his wife, Kathy, have three children and are members of Germantown Baptist Church in suburban Memphis, where he has served as a deacon, Sunday school teacher, youth worker and finance committee chairman.

Williams proudly noted Kelley and his family already have "benefited greatly" from the Brotherhood Commission's ministries and services.

"His son has been active in Baptist Young Men, his youngest daughter has been involved in Senior High World Changers and his oldest daughter has been a counselor at Junior High World Changers for the last three years," Williams said. "And his brother's house in Jackson, Miss., damaged by a tornado three years ago, was repaired by Brotherhood volunteers."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Brotherhood Commission.

EDITORS' NOTE: The following six stories on the Christian book market were prepared by the Missouri Baptist newsjournal Word & Way.

Christian publishing market  
takes off at remarkable speed

By Tim Palmer

Baptist Press  
1/11/95

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Read any good religious books lately? If your answer is no, it's not for lack of titles to choose from and it's probably not for lack of places to buy them. America's \$2-billion-a-year religious publishing industry is growing at the speed of the Millennium Falcon -- Han Solo's spacecraft in the "Star Wars" movies.

"It's one of the hottest genres in publishing," longtime industry observer Phyllis Tickle said recently in "Advertising Age." Tickle, religion editor for "Publishers Weekly," said from August 1993 to August 1994 sales volume for religious books rose by 87.2 percent, according to the Association of American Publishers.

"That kind of growth will get anybody's attention," Tickle noted. She said a conservative estimate is that religion accounts for 8 percent of American publishing.

Broadman & Holman, the trade publishing arm of the Baptist Sunday School Board, has been riding the boom. "September was a record sales month for our company," acquisitions and development editor Vicki Crumpton said.

Why so much interest in books about religion?

Tickle points to a number of factors, one being a breakdown in trust of authority and institutions -- including the church -- following the Vietnam War. Religious seekers turned to what they believed they could trust -- their own experience.

"What we used to take into the pastor's study, we're now taking into the bookstore," said Tickle, who started calling books "the portable pastor" in the 1980s. She offered as her "proof text" James Dobson's "When God Doesn't Make Sense," which won this year's Evangelical Christian Publishers Book of the Year Award and had sold over 600,000 copies by mid-1994.

Christian authors such as Dobson, Chuck Swindoll, Max Lucado and Charles Colson can take on a pastoral/counseling role through the "soft" medium of books, Tickle noted. "A 'hard' medium like the Internet (computer network) is never going to do that."

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As baby boomers have returned to the church in the 1990s, they have continued to read religious books. "Often the pastors are handing them to them," Tickle pointed out, and many evangelical pastors are writing them.

Crumpton said the portability of books is part of their appeal. "Books are an extremely convenient way of carrying information," she said. "And the price still makes them very accessible."

Rapid growth in religious publishing has meant heightened competition among publishers and retailers. "There's a healthy tension and an awareness that the Christian consumer is more and more sophisticated," Crumpton said. Readers expect quality in writing and packaging.

Broadman & Holman publishes about 50 general interest titles a year. It also produces about 15 academic textbooks and one or two reference books, plus five volumes a year of the New American Commentary.

The company releases four titles a year in its Professional Development line, whose authors include Calvin Miller and Ken Hemphill. "What we want to say to ministers and church staff is that they are high-quality professionals," Crumpton explained. "We want them to hone skills, stay up to date and have personal growth."

Textbooks is another area where Broadman & Holman has placed increasing emphasis, Crumpton noted. "We had several titles that were very successful for us." One of those was Leon McBeth's 'The Baptist Heritage.' Since then B&H has released Old Testament and New Testament survey texts that are used in Baptist colleges and seminaries as well as institutions of other denominations.

"We're aiming for the broader Christian, the broader evangelical market," Crumpton said. "Southern Baptists obviously make up a large part of that market because there are so many. We see the Southern Baptist Convention as a launchpad for Broadman & Holman's efforts."

The Baptist Sunday School Board's missile silos are its 65 Baptist Book Stores in 22 states. Director of marketing Jim Gilliland said the same social and political trends that upended Congress in the recent election are influencing customers, who are seeking out resources consistent with Christian values.

Baptist Book Stores and other Christian retailers are having to adjust to marketplace trends Gilliland called "growth pains." Formerly, he noted, a Christian bookstore could set up shop and attract and keep a loyal base of customers. Today that store faces competition from Wal-Mart and other mainstream retailers, from catalogs and from home shopping networks.

"Our challenge is to make sure we have relevant products in our stores," Gilliland said.

He pointed out Baptist Book Stores started in 1912 as an outlet for Southern Baptists to buy products that met the needs of Southern Baptists. A "strong sense of entitlement" remains, he added. But today individuals and churches are looking for resources that may not be Baptist Sunday School Board-produced.

Baptist Book Stores continue to stock BSSB products, Gilliland said, "but we're also trying to have materials for people sitting in pews and hearing the pastor say, 'You need to get you a good Daily Walk Bible.'"

This doesn't mean the chain sells books or other materials that Baptists might find objectionable. For example, Baptist Book Stores do not carry Betty J. Eadie's "Embraced by the Light," the best-selling religion book of 1993, because of its Mormon-flavored theology.

"We're very careful about what's in the stores," Gilliland said. "There's a delicate balance between having relevant product and being faithful to our Southern Baptist heritage."

The chain struck a compromise on Alan Medders' controversial book, "The Golfer's Good News," deciding not to stock it in stores but offering to order it for customers who asked.

Stan Wilkins, manager of the Baptist Book Store in St. Louis, said customer service is what sets Baptist Book Stores apart. "This is not an off-the-shelf world," he pointed out. "Everyone's needs are not the same. We try to figure out where you are and where you're headed and the things you need to get there, and then get them for you."

Wilkins has noticed increases in sales and activity in the year and a half he has managed the store. "There are people from all denominations and evangelical groups that are looking for things," he said. "They come in and ask us, 'I've got a brother-in-law that's this and his wife is undergoing that."

"There are just all kinds of ministry opportunities open to us every day."

Wilkins, a graduate of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., sometimes refers people to a minister after they come to the store for help with a personal crisis. "They see a religious connection and they're searching."

Tickle believes people are searchers by nature. "We are spiritual animals," she said. "We have to have a religious life. Most of us do, anyway."

Future prospects look bright for Christian publishing. Religious fervor historically increases near the turn of a century, Tickle noted, and now the turn of the millennium is approaching. She cited a 1992 Gallup poll that predicted religion as the second-largest growth area in publishing over the next 15 years, behind computers/economics.

Crumpton said men's books might represent the greatest opportunity and the greatest challenge for Christian publishers. "We've been watching the Promise Keepers movement very closely," she said.

Most of the market for Christian books now is women, she explained. If men become serious shoppers, publishers and booksellers will have to accommodate their needs.

Tickle noted a continuing interest in "finding the sacred in the ordinary" through "agencies of the subjective world" such as angels and near-death experiences.

Historical saints may march in and bump angels from the pinnacle of popular culture. "St. Augustine is big right now," Tickle said.

So is Pope John Paul II, whose book "Crossing the Threshold of Hope," is an international best-seller. Tickle, an Episcopalian, said she believes many Protestants are buying the book. "It has to do with the need for religious heroes and the pastoral nature of this man -- his public persona."

Fiction is another growth area for religious publishers, she noted. Some, including Thomas Nelson, offer readers alternatives in fiction genres such as romance, mystery and western with books that "give the story minus the sex, violence and profanity."

Crumpton thinks books will be around for a while. "There's something about curling up with a good book that meets a very basic need we have for spending time with something, and reflecting and enjoying rather than driving through McDonald's and having all of our needs met in three seconds."

She pointed out that in the recent "Star Trek: The Next Generation" television series, Capt. Picard often was seen reading a book on his 24th century starship. "He treats them as prized possessions," she said.

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Children's books and media:

What's good? What's not?

By Shari Schubert

Baptist Press

1/11/95

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Christian and secular bookstores, along with church, school and public libraries, offer children today an unprecedented variety of books, videos and other media. Some are desirable, some aren't -- and determining which is which takes more than just a glance at the cover.

Baptist librarians and educators emphasize the importance of evaluating each book on its individual merit rather than making blanket judgments based on genre (category), topic, author, publisher or where the book is distributed.

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Jacquelyn Anderson, media library director at First Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn., pointed out just because a book is sold in a Christian bookstore doesn't guarantee its quality or its suitability for a church or Christian home library.

Some of the most innocent things, on closer examination, may prove inconsistent with concepts parents and teachers want their children to be learning.

Toddlers' picture Bibles -- which aren't really Bibles, but just picture books with Bible verses -- "are intended to be cute," said Barbara Freese, lead consultant with the Baptist Sunday School Board's church media library program. But they may give small children the wrong impression of what the Bible actually is, she said.

Evaluation of children's literature -- religious or secular -- calls for paying attention to illustrations, as well as text.

Anderson, author of the forthcoming Baptist Sunday School Board Convention Press book "Selecting Media," said one of the first illustrations she looks at in Bible story books is the baptism of Jesus -- "to see whether John is doing it with a shell."

Cartoon illustrations of Bible stories concern many religious educators, who fear these may lead children to form inaccurate ideas of Bible people, places and events.

Freese added a word of caution about grotesque art. She explained that when children are exposed to bizarre art styles -- perhaps in an otherwise innocuous context -- it tends to break down sensitivities and make satanic imagery seem "not so strange."

At the same time, sometimes things adults are concerned about are things children don't notice, said Jane Schafer, assistant professor of education at Hannibal-LaGrange College, Hannibal, Mo. She gave the example of the 1969 book "Sylvester and the Magic Pebble" by William Steig.

All the characters in the story are animals. Sylvester and his parents are donkeys; the children in the neighborhood are puppies, kittens, colts and piglets; the policemen in the story happen to be pigs. That didn't sit well with some adults who saw a double meaning in the illustrations. But Schafer, a former first-grade teacher, has read the story to children many times. They don't pick up on that aspect, she said.

Books, videos and other resources for children should use language and concepts that are appropriate to the child's developmental level, said Barbara Tucker, minister of education at First Baptist Church, Greenwood, S.C.

"Children think very literally," she explained. To a young child, a phrase such as "I stand alone on the Word of God" -- from the familiar song "The B-I-B-L-E" -- could take on an entirely different meaning from what was intended.

Mixing of realism with fantasy can be confusing to children, added Eve Keene, director of Greene County (Mo.) Baptist Association's church media organization. For that reason, she does not recommend materials like the children's video "The Super Book," in which two children travel back into biblical times with a robot.

The appropriateness of fantasy and science fiction literature for children depends a lot on how it is handled, said elementary school librarian Karen Serby, a member of First Baptist Church, North Kansas City. "Some of the fantasy and science fiction is wonderful."

She said she reads C.S. Lewis's "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" to second graders each year "and they love it." However, she noted, some fantasy and science fiction literature is excessively violent.

Concerns about violence aren't limited to secular books and videos. Freese and Tucker cautioned about Bible-story videos currently on the market that dramatize stories many Christian educators would not tell to children in the first place and that play up violent aspects of the stories.

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Well-written, realistic fiction can be a useful teaching tool as well as a source of entertainment, educators and librarians said. Anderson pointed out that a child who needs to know about an issue such as death, divorce or a disability can identify with a child in a story who is dealing with that same issue more easily than he can relate to information given about the issue by an adult.

Ghost, horror and monster stories are popular with kids, and some -- particularly those involving dark witchcraft, satanic themes and gruesome violence -- are inappropriate, librarians and educators said. But opinions vary on the degree to which reading in this genre should be discouraged.

Janet Hill, a member of Northgate Baptist Church in Kansas City and former minister of education for First Baptist Church, Independence, Mo., said she does not see harm in allowing children to read something like the Goosebumps series by R.L. Stine, aimed at readers in about second or third through fifth grade. "It's not the Freddie Krueger kind of scary," she explained. It's the "old-fashioned kind of scary" that entertains -- and it does give kids some reading practice.

Messages about family and sexuality also concern Christian parents, and portrayal of non-traditional families in children's literature is more common than it once was.

Anderson noted in the popular "Baby-Sitters Club" series by Ann M. Martin, aimed at girls about age 8-11, six of the eight girls who make up the club come from homes where there has been a divorce. The books never mention families going to church.

The Baby-Sitters Club books are "not wonderful literature," Schafer acknowledged. But anytime kids are reading, their minds are actively engaged, she pointed out, and there is some benefit in that.

Craig Ballard, pastor of First Baptist Church, Appleton City, Mo., said his fifth-grade daughter has read some of the Baby-Sitters Club books. The ones he has seen seemed clean and appropriate, he said.

But some books that are popular with junior high girls deal with sex-related topics, Anderson cautioned.

Tony Cherry, pastor of First Baptist Church, Campbell, Mo., and a father of children in second and third grade, said he is concerned when a phrase like "Ms. So-and-so and her female friend" appears in a children's book and there is no mention of "Ms. So-and-so" having a husband.

Hill and Cherry voiced dissatisfaction with the way environmental issues are being handled in some books and periodicals. Both emphasized they believe in teaching youngsters to be good stewards of God's earth.

But some materials go beyond that, Cherry said, by encouraging "worship of the creation rather than the Creator." Hill said the idea animals should have the same rights as humans conflicts with her understanding of what the Bible teaches -- that animals were created for man's use and enjoyment.

Even though she has some concerns, Hill, who works as a PTA volunteer in the library at Briarcliff Elementary School in North Kansas City, offered a word of encouragement. The "solid, good books that we've been comfortable with" -- such as Laura Ingalls Wilder's "Little House on the Prairie," Dr. Seuss books and the Berenstain Bears -- are still popular with kids, she affirmed.

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Parents urged to pay attention  
to what their kids are reading By Shari Schubert

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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--"There is no frigate like a book," wrote poet Emily Dickinson. But if parents want their children's reading to take them sailing in a constructive direction, the parents should pay attention to what their children are reading, Baptist librarians and educators advised.

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Parents should begin reading to their children long before the children are old enough to read by themselves, said Jane Schafer, assistant professor of education at Hannibal-LaGrange College, Hannibal, Mo. She said the literature parents make available in the home has a strong influence during those years from birth to about third-grade age as children's values are being shaped.

As children grow older and can choose and read books without assistance, they may read books at school or at the library their parents never see. But as much as possible, parents need to note what their children are reading, read some of the books their children are reading and help them evaluate what they read, educators say.

No two families are alike. For that reason, religious educator Barbara Tucker stresses the need for parents to examine a book and "see if it is in line with your personal theology."

Sometimes it's a matter of subtle nuances. Eve Keene, director of Greene County (Mo.) Baptist Association's church media organization, found she was uncomfortable with a book about a child praying that her sick grandmother would get well. The child's prayers were answered; the grandmother did get well.

The problem, Keene said, was the book's implication that the grandmother -- who was portrayed in the illustrations as an aging, gray-haired lady -- got well because the child had faith. What kind of impression would the story make on a real child whose aging grandparent isn't going to get well? The book didn't address that possibility.

How much control should parents have over what their children read?

"We're pretty strict," said Tony Cherry, pastor of First Baptist Church, Cambell, Mo. The books the family buys for their children, who are in second and third grade, include a lot of Bible stories. The Cherrys encourage their children to read out of the church library and not to check out "just anything" at school.

Pastor Craig Ballard, whose children are in the fifth, eighth and 11th grades, said, "We generally let them make the decision themselves." Ballard, pastor of First Baptist Church, Appleton City, Mo., added his children seem to be doing a reasonably good job.

The pastor said he has tried to discourage "weird-type" reading -- "I tell them it's not something they should be filling their minds with."

Tucker, minister of education at First Baptist Church, Greenwood, S.C., said she would tend to be particular about books she selected for children, but would exercise "very little censorship" of library books.

If a child brought home something like the controversial "Daddy's Roommate," which deals with homosexuality, it "would provide a perfect opportunity for the family to sit down and say, 'This is how our family feels about this,'" and discuss the reasons for their views, she said.

Janet Hill, a member of Northgate Baptist Church, Kansas City, and a former minister of education, observed if children always are shielded from ideas that conflict with their family's Christian values, "you're not teaching values; you're expecting your kids to be robots." Young people who have not been given an opportunity to examine other views and consider the reasons for their Christian stance may find themselves unprepared to handle the arguments when these issues come up in daily life, Hill pointed out.

"You can't read everything that your kid's going to read," Hill said. "As kids grow, you have to trust your kids enough to live up to the values you've taught them all along."

"If we spent more time shutting off the television and reading with our children," she added, "we wouldn't have to worry a minute about what was in our libraries and what they were bringing home."

Stirred by 'The Rob ' as a youth,  
he hopes his novel stirs others By Brian Smith

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Many pastors have written books dealing with theological or church issues. Gary Parker, pastor of First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Mo., has had four books published dealing with such topics.

But Parker also writes about crooked senators, dishonest cops, enterprising news reporters and a pastor accused of murdering prostitutes. Parker writes mystery novels.

"He has a tendency to have a bizarre twist in his books," said Lonnie Hull DuPont, senior editor at Thomas Nelson Publishers, which has released Parker's "Beyond a Reasonable Doubt."

Said DuPont of Parker, "He's not afraid to look at a certain amount of darkness within the context of reality."

Parker's interest in writing goes back to his childhood, when a novel played a significant role in his life. "As a boy in the fifth or sixth grade, I read 'The Robe' by Lloyd Douglas, which is the fictionalized account of what happened to the robe of Christ after the soldiers gambled for it." The book described how the Roman centurion who ended up with the robe was drawn to Christ and became a Christian believer. "Having read that as a boy, even though I wasn't a Christian then, I remember it being something that really touched me."

His desire to write was further sparked in college, when he worked for the Greenville (S.C.) News. "Writing has been something I've always enjoyed doing," Parker said, "and I always wanted to try to write a book."

After his first four non-fiction books were published, he decided to try his hand at something else. "One of the old sayings about writing is 'write what you know or write what you enjoy reading,'" Parker said. "I enjoy reading mystery/suspense books. If I want pure entertainment I buy Dean Koontz, Tom Clancy, John Grisham -- any of the popular writers of that kind of thing."

Parker combined what he knows and what he enjoys reading into "Beyond a Reasonable Doubt." The novel is the story of Burke Anderson, a young single pastor of a rural church in Georgia who becomes the primary suspect in the murder of an Atlanta high-society call girl.

The idea came from the scandals of many well-known ministers in recent years, he said. "It seemed like every day you turned around you saw where some preacher was entangled with some woman in some situation that was not honorable to the gospel, to the Christian faith and to the church."

Yet he wondered what implications such scandals would have if the facts were different. "Everybody just assumed that if it was said of someone that they did that, then obviously they must have done it. So I started thinking, 'What would happen if there was someone who didn't do it, but everyone thought they did?'"

So young Burke Anderson finds himself in trouble not only with the police, but with his church and the general public -- all assuming he must be guilty.

Parker's next novel also will feature Anderson in a story about a serial killer during the Advent season. And while the violence of Advent murders may not sound very Christmasy, "a cross doesn't sound very Christmasy or Easterish, either," Parker said.

"The Bible does not sugar-coat life -- it tells it pretty plainly and there's plenty of violence in the Bible. But within the violence in the Bible and the violence of life, there has to be a redemption in it. And my stories are redemptive stories within the context of real-life situations that are very possible and a biblical background that is realistic to life."

Because of that redemptive factor, he sees his writing as part of his ministry and not simply a hobby.

DuPont remarked, "Gary is not just writing a 'whodunit,' he's writing about the kind of darkness of human nature that's redeemable. I find that very provocative."

Parker's enjoyment from writing mystery novels is the potential audience he can reach. "The thing about fiction is that a non-Christian can read it as well as a Christian," Parker said. "I go back to my experience as a boy having read 'The Robe.'"

And his desire is for one of his books to have the same effect on someone that "The Robe" did. "In many ways, I think my first religious inclinations came out of reading 'The Robe,'" he said.

"So there's always been in my mind this hope and prayer that if I could write a book a person would read, not because it is a religious book, but because it is a good story -- because it's exciting, because it's got a good plot, because the characters are somebody you care about -- then that non-Christian will have to think about their faith, or their lack of faith."

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Judy Baer shares insights  
for teens through novels

By Tim Palmer

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CANDO, N.D. (BP)--One mark of a successful author would be that she can't remember how many books she has published. "Forty-plus" was the best estimate Judy Baer could come up with. With the myriad demands on her time -- as wife, mother, public speaker, writer and confidant to hundreds of letter-writers each month -- she can be forgiven.

Half or more of the Cando, N.D., resident's titles are in Baer's "Cedar River Daydreams" series for young adults. Through 24 books, protagonist Lexi Leighton and her young friends have encountered everything from eating disorders to environmentalism to Down's syndrome to suicide.

"Publishers Weekly" said the series is considered the "Christian alternative" to the secular marketplace's popular "Sweet Valley High" books.

Baer, a Lutheran, is comfortable with the Christian label but doesn't view herself as an alternative. "It's a biblical directive that we reach out," she noted. She tries to write books with "take-away" value -- "to plant seeds in people's minds that there are other ways of thinking about things."

Bethany House, Baer's publisher, asked her to start a new series for young adults while continuing "Cedar River Daydreams." The result is "Live from Brentwood High," which chronicles the lives of a group of big-city teen-agers who are members of a television production class.

Their assignments become books that so far have touched on emergency medical care, sexual harassment in the work place and danger and violence in schools. Unlike the "Cedar River" bunch, the "a little more savvy" "Brentwood" group includes just one Christian, a girl in a wheelchair.

Baer gets ideas for stories by watching television, reading newspapers and reading magazines that teen-agers read. She also spends time talking to and listening to young people, including her 18- and 15-year-old daughters. "I'm always trying to understand them and where they're coming from and how they differ from an adult in thinking."

Finally, the author draws from her own memories of youth. She figures a lot about being young has changed, but emotions never do. "When a boy doesn't like you, it's that punch-in-the-stomach feeling."

Barb Lillund, Baer's editor at Bethany House, said Baer's success stems from her ability to speak directly to young adults. "She doesn't speak down to them -- she speaks at their level. They really view her as a best friend."

Lillund added Baer's stories give a realistic portrayal of young adults' lives. "She has her heartbeat where theirs is."

In "Cedar River Daydreams" No. 25 due out this year, Lexi will learn her mother has been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. "How does that affect a teen?" Baer wondered. "Does it make them pity themselves, rebel, feel anger at the parent? It's a personal, introspective sort of topic."

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Baer said she enjoys writing about emotion. "I think that's the common denominator, because a reader can say, 'Oh, yeah, I can identify with that, that's something I've felt.'

"If I can get it to that level, usually the stories work better."

Researching and writing about some topics can be painful, as Baer realized after finishing two novels that dealt with Alzheimer's. "Truly I spent months after that almost fighting a depression," she recalled. "It's not a happy ending disease."

Her young readers share their hurts and feelings with the author in some 200 letters a month. Two of her books -- "What's It Like at Your House?" and "Did You Ever Like a Boy (Who Didn't Like You)" -- are compilations of letters and Baer's replies.

She reads and answers every letter -- most with a newsletter and a brief note; some with a longer message. She often includes verses of Scripture in the advice she gives.

Young people today face life-and-death issues that were absent a generation ago, Baer noted. She said Christ offers sanity, a sense of peace that is lacking in today's world.

"When you get right down to it, we're not much in control of what's going on around us," she said. "It's pretty comforting to know someone's in control. If you don't have that in your life, you're missing something important and wonderful."

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Multi-faceted author  
pens one book at a time

By Tamera Heitz-Peek

Baptist Press  
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BOLIVAR, Mo. (BP)--As a young mother of three, Pat Baker drew from 15 years of personal journals to turn her first writing into a published book, "Mom, Take Time." Since starting more than 20 years ago, Baker has published eight books varying on topics from parenting to inspirational devotionals.

Baker, a member of First Baptist Church, Bolivar, Mo., begins every book with a personal experience. "I don't write about the big problems that can arise in a family," she says. "I can write more freely when I write on lighter, day-to-day situations that relate to my readers."

As she is writing a book, ideas for other books come to mind. "After I had finished my first book, I had enough material to write a second book," she recalls.

Her journals also provide suggestions for new books. "I write down thoughts, Scriptures and prayers." Baker says she will never retire -- she has too many book ideas.

She once tried to write two books at once but soon discovered it didn't work. "I give my full attention to one book at a time and write down thoughts for other books and place them on my idea shelf until I can get to them later."

Believing laughter is cheaper than professional counseling sessions, Baker uses her experiences as a parent and observer to motivate and encourage other parents. A book she is working on now is a humorous approach to grandparenting.

Like most Christian writers, Baker views her work as a ministry. "I may never meet the people who read my books, but I try to visualize them. I have so many people who come up to me after a seminar or who write me letters and tell me that they have enjoyed what I have shared. They encourage me to continue writing more books."

The majority of her books are in the Christian realm, although the book she is working on now and a fiction book she plans to write in the future do not necessarily have strong Christian overtones. "This new book gives me a recess from what I have been doing," Baker says.

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When starting a new book, Baker spends four hours a day for about three months writing her first draft in longhand. Toward the end, she works about six hours a day.

"About six to eight years ago, my husband, Don, encouraged me to type my manuscripts on a computer instead of pounding it out on an old portable electric typewriter. I tried typing the first chapter of my book on a computer and I was hooked and have been using it ever since."

Baker has tried writing in cabins and other places but she discovered she couldn't concentrate very well. "The surroundings were unfamiliar and I found it very difficult to work on my books," Baker explains. "My husband designed an office for me in our home and I have found that working at home is the best."

Although she starts her work at 8 every morning, visitors probably won't see or talk to her until much later in the day. "Writing is a very concentrated effort so I don't answer the telephone or the door," Baker says. "I usually work from 8 a.m. until noon."

She has branched out into public speaking. Since 1980, Baker has conducted seminars and conferences based on topics she writes about. "Through my speaking experience, I have had the opportunity to meet people I never would have met before," she notes.

The eight books she has published are "Mom, Take Time;" "Help! I've Just Given Birth to a Teen-ager;" "A Minute in the Morning;" "When a Woman Takes God at His Word;" "A Frazzled Mother's Guide to Inner Peace;" "Dear Diary (The Secret Feelings of a Junior High Girl);" "I Now Pronounce You a Parent;" and "Giving God What You Are."

Tyndale House and Baker Book House are her two publishers. Her books are available in most Christian bookstores.

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New video series  
features Blackaby

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ATLANTA (BP)--A new video series titled "Awakening" features author Henry Blackaby sharing recent experiences of spiritual awakening and revival.

Blackaby is co-author of the popular workbook, "Experiencing God." He is director of prayer and spiritual awakening for the Home Mission Board, Foreign Mission Board and Sunday School Board.

Ron Owens, HMB associate director of prayer and spiritual awakening, hosts the video series. Without using a script, Blackaby and Owens informally discuss their observations of spiritual awakening around the world.

The video series includes six issues per year, with each issue including two programs and lasting about 30 minutes. Annual cost for the video series is \$59.95. To subscribe to the video newsletter, call HMB customer services, 1-800-634-2462, and request product AW-101P.

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Salvadoran Baptist jailed, then released in Morocco," dated 1/10/95, please change the first sentence of the 9th paragraph to read:

He was escorted by police on the day of his release to Ceuta, the Spanish seaport on Morocco's northern coast, where he presented himself to Spanish authorities.

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