



New Baylor exec backs Planned Parenthood youth program

By Art Toalston

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Baylor University's new interim president, William (Bill) Underwood, stated reasons May 2 why he has been a financial supporter of a Planned Parenthood sexuality program for youth entering the fifth through ninth grade.

In an interview requested by Baptist Press, Underwood stated that he and his wife have enrolled their daughter and son in the half-day program in recent years.

Planned Parenthood in Waco, Texas, where Baylor is located and in numerous cities across the country provides abortion and other sexual-related services and is known as the nation's largest provider of elective abortions.

Controversy over Nobody's Fool, a summertime session launched by Planned Parenthood of Waco/Central Texas in 1990, spiked last year with a brief boycott of, oddly, Girl Scout cookies. The regional Girl Scouts organization, in addition to having been a Nobody's Fool sponsor, had named Planned Parenthood's local executive director as a "Woman of Distinction" in mid-2003. In February 2004, during the Girl Scouts' cookie-selling season, leaders of a local pro-life group, Pro-Life Waco, called for the boycott. In late February, the 14-county Bluebonnet Girl Scout Council's board of directors voted to end its ties with Planned Parenthood.

Controversy continued as the Nobody's Fool session July 15 approached, with numerous articles and opinion pieces appearing in the local paper. In one article, the bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Austin called Nobody's Fool "devoid of Christian morality regarding sexuality." In one opinion piece, a woman recounted how a minister at a session in the mid-'90s had taught the 12-year-old boys at Nobody's Fool how to give and receive oral sex.

Underwood, a professor of law at Baylor who was named the university's interim president April 29, stated to Baptist Press that his 16-year-old daughter had attended Nobody's Fool two or three times and his son attended last year for the first time as an 11-year-old.

Problematic instruction on sexuality, he said, "has not been my children's experience nor the experience of any of the people who I talked with before my wife and I made the decision to have our children attend."

Underwood and his wife, Lesli, were among about 100 individuals listed as "underwriters" on a Planned Parenthood promotional flyer for last summer's Nobody's Fool program.

Seventh & James Baptist Church where the Underwoods are members was one of 10 co-sponsoring churches. The others included Metropolitan Community Church, which is part of a predominantly homosexual denomination; Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Waco; Temple Rodef Sholom, a Reform Jewish congregation; Lake Shore Baptist Church; First Presbyterian Waco; and First Lutheran Church. Sponsoring churches do not provide money for Nobody's Fool but volunteers and promotional assistance.

"Each year that I have sent a child I have made a financial contribution to the program," Underwood said in the

interview with Baptist Press.

Underwood said he doesn't hold the same opinion as those who believe they should disassociate themselves from other Planned Parenthood programs because of its abortion services.

"My children are the most important thing in the world to me," said Underwood, the son of a Baptist minister. "And like every parent, you worry about the influences of our culture on the kids and you do everything you can at home to teach them the kinds of moral values that you want to instill in them. And my wife and I do that. And the same thing occurs at church....

"But I want as much reinforcement of the themes that I'm trying to communicate to my children as possible. And sometimes it's helpful to have people who aren't parents and who aren't friends from church saying the same things that we're telling them. And that's why I've sent them to Nobody's Fool," Underwood said.

Underwood acknowledged that "some of my closest friends are opposed to the Nobody's Fool program. I understand where they're coming from and I understand their concerns. But in looking at what was right for my children and then talking with people who had sent their children to the program, I thought it would be beneficial for my children, because I thought the themes that they would be exposed to at the program would be consistent with the themes that I was trying to communicate to them in my home."

The Waco-area Planned Parenthood's website describes Nobody's Fool as providing "factual information about growing up, puberty, dating, relationships, sexual issues and sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS," with instruction done in gender and age groups. Interested parents cannot attend Nobody's Fool but an informational session is held for them the night before the event to foster "better communication between teens and their parents," according to the website.

One point of contention with the local Planned Parenthood has been its distribution of a book, "It's Perfectly Normal," to the youth and their families in conjunction with the Nobody's Fool program. The 2004 promotional flyer for Nobody's Fool stated that the seventh-, eighth- and ninth-graders would receive the book, while the fifth- and sixth-graders would receive a companion book, "It's So Amazing."

Underwood said he is aware of the book but hadn't examined it or used it with his children.

It's Perfectly Normal spans nearly 100 pages and contains numerous cartoon-like pencil-and-watercolor drawings, including one or more with a naked couple engaging in sexual intercourse and various depictions of male and female anatomy.

It states: "It makes sense to wait to have sexual intercourse until you are old enough and responsible enough to make healthy decisions about sex."

But the book is devoid of any counsel to wait until marriage.

On abortion, It's Perfectly Normal lists nine reasons why abortions are sought.

On homosexuality, the book states: "Some people disapprove of gay men and lesbian women. Some even hate homosexuals only because they are homosexual. People may feel this way toward homosexuals because they think homosexuals are different from them or that gay relationships are wrong. Usually these people know little or

nothing about homosexuals, and their views are often based on fears or misinformation, not on facts. People are often afraid of things they know little or nothing about."

But nothing is stated about a Christian worldview as being a plausible reason for opposing the homosexual agenda.

It's Perfectly Normal also asserts regarding homosexuality: "The ancient Greeks thought that love between two men was the highest form of love. In the ancient Greek city-state of Sparta, in about 1000 B.C., it was hoped that male lovers would be in the same army regiment. People thought that if a warrior was in the same regiment as his lover, he would fight harder in order to impress him. The Spartan army was one of the most powerful and feared armies in ancient Greece."

Greg Wills, professor of church history at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., responding to a Baptist Press request to examine the historical assertion in It's Perfectly Normal, noted: "Many in ancient Greece saw the love between men as the highest form of love, but this was a matter of true friendship, affection and respect -- it was not a reference to the gratification of sexual desires.

"Homosexuality of all kinds was generally against the law and generally considered shameful, but it gained popularity and a measure of toleration among certain classes -- the aristocracy, the elite. But it was not the egalitarian homosexuality that gay partisans advocate now," Wills continued. "The homosexuality that existed among the Greeks was almost always that of a man and a boy. It was pederasty. The man was the active one ... and the boy was the passive one, the female. Although contrary to law, the man generally paid the family and offered to help the boy make his way in the world, and thus prevented them from bringing the matter to the courts."

Underwood, in the interview with Baptist Press, commented on sexual abstinence until marriage by stating, "Obviously, the message that I think any Christian would want to convey to their children is that sex outside of marriage is not appropriate."

On homosexuality, he stated, "I think all of us would agree that it is not an appropriate Christian response to homosexuality to hate the homosexual. There are lots of other reasons to be opposed to homosexuality, including the view that it's a sin."

Underwood, in the interview, stated that he supports another Planned Parenthood program, the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, in which participating runners raise funds for breast cancer screening for underprivileged women.

The program also has become controversial, Underwood said. "It's the same kind of situation, where there are some people who are understandably opposed to Planned Parenthood's activities and don't believe that you should participate in any program that has any connection to Planned Parenthood regardless of the nature of the program.

"I consider myself to be not just pro-life," Underwood continued, "but aggressively pro-life ... to the point where not only am I opposed to abortion but I'm opposed to the death penalty.

"To me, the Nobody's Fool program, when I look at it, is about preventing unwanted teen pregnancy," which accounts for nearly one in five abortions. "If there's a program out there that will reduce the number of unwanted teen pregnancies, I'm in favor of it," Underwood said.

Supporting the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure for the early detection of breast cancer likewise is "an aggressively pro-life position for me," he said. "And I probably ought to give more money to it than I have in the past."

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