

8B

RELIGION

Jehovah's Witnesses who claim abuse hold first caucus

By Richard Ostling
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Jehovah's Witnesses who claim they were sexually abused by congregation leaders gathered in their first national caucus Saturday, sharing grievances about the religion's handling of abuse complaints and discussing legal strategy.

William Bowen, former leader of a Kentucky congrega-

tion of Jehovah's Witnesses, said Saturday that more than 6,000 alleged sexual abuse victims have contacted a group he founded in 2001 to express "outrage at being silenced by the bad institutional policies" of the faith.

The religion's procedures "can decimate the lives of the innocent and empower predators to get away with the crime of rape," Bowen said.

Bowen's group, called

silentlambs, was holding the caucus, which runs through Sunday and drew about two dozen participants.

A key participant was Kimberlee Norris, an attorney from Fort Worth, Texas, whose firm represents 47 alleged abuse victims in civil cases against Jehovah's Witnesses organizations and individuals. Since getting involved in 2002, she said, she has spoken with more than 2,000 victims.

J. R. Brown, public affairs spokesman at world headquarters of the Witnesses' Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, in New York City, said the religion agrees with silentlambs' goal "to minimize or eliminate the sexual abuse of children," but disputes the group's specific allegations.

"We do not view them as our enemies," Brown said.

Bowen contends that the Witnesses organization is a

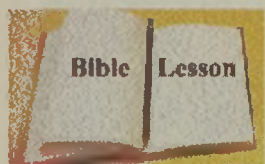
"pedophile paradise" because of the strong authority exercised by local elders and their overseers and the unusual way in which cases are handled.

As members of the faith understand biblical teaching, an accusation of wrongdoing must be supported by two people with direct knowledge, which silentlambs says is impossible in most molestation cases. Without such corroboration, the

accused person is deemed innocent, silentlambs says, and victims and parents can be "disfellowshipped," or excommunicated, for slander if they speak up.

For a Witness, excommunication is a very harsh punishment. It means being cut off from relatives, friends and business associates. Bowen and other whistle-blowers have been excommunicated for raising abuse complaints.

Please see **LESBIAN/5B**



Jesus' crucifixion

John 19:16b-24, 26-30

Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, 'I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it."

This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

"They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots."

And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Spreading Light



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Cheryl Frazier spoke last Saturday at the Hilton for an event sponsored by the Wind of the Spirit International Ministries. The benefit helped to raise proceeds for DayBreak Center and Dominion Housing. DayBreak Center and Dominion Housing is a non-profit organization which provides a structured program for people. The program provides practical living training.

Was Exodus reality, legend or both?

By Richard Ostling
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

There's been unending debate about whether the biblical story of the Exodus from Egypt — which Jews commemorate each year at Passover — was an actual event, a concocted national legend or a blend of both.

Some scholarly doubts about the literal history are reflected in the new Jewish Study Bible (Oxford University Press), the first one-volume commentary on the Hebrew Scriptures comparable with several top-notch Christian study Bibles.

The volume will receive grateful reception from many Jews and Christians — though probably not from Jewish and Christian traditionalists who reject liberal theories.

But one expert has produced another important

work that's more favorable toward the Bible's accounts: "On the Reliability of the Old Testament" (Eerdmans) by K.A. Kitchen, professor emeritus of Egyptology and archaeology at England's University of Liverpool — and a Christian conservative.

The Study Bible's commentary on the Book of Exodus was written by Jeffrey Tigay of the University of Pennsylvania, who agrees with Kitchen that at least the rough outlines fit with what we know from sources outside the Bible.

"If there is a historical kernel" to the Exodus story, Tigay cautiously concludes, the overall situation is "not inherently implausible."

Kitchen is far more affirmative. He grants that the Exodus events can never be proven absolutely from evidence outside the Bible. But

he says they correspond with the "attested realities" and known culture and language of the late second millennium B.C., and that favors "acceptance of their having had a definite historical basis."

Some specifics: Experts agree that ancient Semites from the Holy Land (Canaan) often moved into Egypt for food, water and work. Some reached high office; others were enslaved. There's evidence for the biblical slave cities of Pithom and Rameses built by Pharaoh Rameses II.

Then there's a famous inscription that survived from the reign of Rameses' successor Merneptah (1213-1203 B.C.). It identifies a people called "Israel" living in Canaan just after the Exodus period (though some set an earlier Exodus date). Archaeological remains indicate many new settlers entered

Canaan's highlands in this period. And the Exodus-related lands of Edom and Moab are mentioned in Egyptian records.

If the Israelites had simply invented their origin, Tigay writes, it is likely they would have portrayed themselves as the original inhabitants of the Holy Land "rather than interlopers with a humiliating background as slaves." On that, Kitchen comments, "Nobody else in Near Eastern antiquity descended to that kind of tale of community beginnings."

It's often noted that Egyptian inscriptions which survived didn't mention the Exodus. But Kitchen says the Egyptians never made inscriptions marking defeats or slave rebellions. Virtually everything written on papyrus sheets has been lost.

Please see **EXODUS/7B**



Rev. Clyde V. Owens Sr.
Humor For Ministries



Prayer changes things, but laughter helps us get through those things before the change comes.

That's why God gave everyone the ability to laugh. One look at the state of the world should tell us we need to laugh more. Whenever we stop laughing we start to fight.

Rev. Clyde V. Owens Sr. at Charlotte's First Mount Zion Baptist Church has been preaching for more than 50 years and has probably kept his congregations laughing just as long. He believes a good dose of laughter helps the word come across much better.

Owens has compiled a two CDs worth of his jokes, observations, one-liners and stories on "Humor For Ministries." Owens says he never expected to do such a project but family and friends said it would be a blessing to others.

Maybe I've heard most of these jokes before in some form or fashion. Owens borrows from a little bit of everyone — Richard Pryor, Lenny Bruce, Jack Benny and Bob Hope to name a few. But no joke is new and Owens' dry delivery makes each joke his own.

Most of the jokes deal with church folks, which is about the biggest source of laughter you can find. Owens speaks of pushy deacons, know-it-all members, errant children and irreverent pastors. No one is spared from his wit.

How funny is this? That depends on your sense of humor. In the days of bawdy, "Def Comedy Jam" style delivery, many will find this stuff old. But for those who want to bring back the pleasant days of setting up jokes and delivering a punch line, this may do fine.

Ratings

- Classic; ★★★★★
- Excellent; ★★★★★
- Good ★★★★★
- Fair ★★★★★
- Why? ★
- No stars — A

CHURCH NEWS

Christian Women of Elegance is sponsoring a 100-word essay contest on "Why Your Mother Should Be Considered The Greatest Mom of Charlotte."

The writers' age categories are ages 5-9, 10-17 and 18 and older. All essays should be mailed or faxed to Christ-

ian Women of Elegance, Water Oak, Pineville 281344 or fax to (704) 889-1209.

The winners will present the awards to their mothers at the Gospel Day In The Park. "A Day To Celebrate Women" to be held May 1 at Independence Park located at 300 Hawthorne Lane.

For more information call (704) 493-2536.

April 3
Greater Providence Baptist Church at 2000 Milton Road will hold an appointment service for Rev. Kojo Nantambu of Green Oak Missionary Baptist at 4:45 p.m. White Dove Chapel will

host National recording Gospel group "Provision" in concert at 7 p.m. at 993 Summers Road east of Morgan-ton.

April 3-4
The Pineville Church of Nazarene at 8614 Pineville-Matthews Road will present "The Open Door" Living Pic-

tures of Easter event.

April 4
Greater Mount Moriah Primitive Baptist Church will celebrate its Annual Women's Day Program at 4 p.m.

Greater Mount Moriah Primitive Baptist Church will hold its Annual Women's

Day Program at 4 p.m.

April 7-9
Shepherd's Fold Church will hold Holy Week Worship Celebration at 7:30 p.m. at 5101 Nations Ford road.

April 9-11
The Spiritual Leans Gospel Singers will celebrate their Please see **WOMEN'S/7B**

