

# Tattoo shop is part business, part ministry

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Billy Joe's Tattoos is part business, part ministry. But it all points to God, according to one of the shop's owners.

"When Lynn and I got married, on our honeymoon a little over seven years ago, she said God laid it on her heart to open a ministry involving tattoos," said Billy Henry, 37, a former Methodist lay preacher and co-owner of the 2-year-old downtown Nashville shop he operates with his wife.

"This is a Christian ministry in the form of a tattoo shop," said Henry, a member of the Christian Tattoo Association, an international association of Christian tattooists. He said he sees the shop as a way to communicate with people who may not feel comfortable visiting a church.

Henry, who learned tattooing in the Air Force, says he fell into a life of drug use, hanging out with "some unsavory types," after leav-

ing the military. He ended up in jail, and it was there he said that he found God.

"When I first got involved with it (tattooing), I also associated it with a certain lifestyle that I no longer wanted to embrace," he said. "As a ministry, we do not force anything down anyone's throats. As our ministry, we hang out with a lot of people that a lot of Christians may feel uncomfortable to associate with."

Henry says he tries to live by this message: Preach the gospel as often as you can and, when necessary, use words.

"As a Christian, I believe you should be living your life in such a way that shows, regardless of whether you're praying in a church or having a conversation while I tattoo."

He wants people to come in and "see us for who we are. Jesus loved everybody and he looked in the inside of people, he didn't look at their outer appearance."

The Henrys live in Pleasant View, about 30 miles north of Nashville, and attend Cornerstone Church in Madison. They also own Artistic Skin Expressions in Terre Haute, Ind., where they lived before moving to Middle Tennessee two years ago.

They enjoy showing that "Christians are not the stick-in-the-muds of years ago."

While all shop employees are Christians, that isn't true of all its customers. Artists create tattoos with Christian themes but are open to other varieties, except those featuring Satanic references, hate or racially offensive designs.

The most-requested designs are butterflies, Japanese letters known as kanji and designs reminiscent of Pacific Island cultures.

Clients include secular and Christian musicians, tourists and professionals, as well as some young ministers.

Recently, more than 18,000 Christian college students

attended a conference near the tattoo shop and it had more requests for designs featuring crosses, Hebrew lettering and ichthus, the fish-shape symbol for Jesus.

Henry, who has several Christian-themed tattoos on different parts of his body, acknowledges that it's something you don't hear about every day: a Christian tattooist.

He chuckles when asked about the history of tattoos, the types of designs he makes and whether it is appropriate to link the faith with the art form.

He said some in the tattoo industry question how he operates a Christian shop. A few other critics challenge his understanding of what the Bible says about tattoos.

He points to Revelation

19:16, which reads in the King James version of the Bible that Christ, on his return "hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords."

Some translations say the words would be engraved or inscribed.

"I am sure that won't happen with a Sharpie marker," Lynn Henry joked.

## Is multiplication mandatory for couples? Pastor says yes

By Richard N. Ostling

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Does God care whether couples have kids?

The Rev. R. Albert Mohler Jr., ever-controversial president of Kentucky's Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has stirred debate by asserting that it's "an absolute revolt against God's design" if husbands and wives purposely avoid bearing children.

American Jewish thinkers have expressed alarm about their community's shrinkage and conservative Roman Catholics hold pro-birth attitudes.

Secular columnist Mark Steyn predicts that much of what we call the West "will effectively disappear within our lifetimes" due to declining birth rates. Other analysts

worry that declining births mean that eventually there won't be enough younger Americans to pay into the Social Security system.

Likewise, Mohler warned about "huge social problems" that lie ahead in commentaries for his Web site and his denomination's Baptist Press, and in subsequent media interviews. But his major concerns lie elsewhere.

To him, raising children is both a God-given duty and "one of the most crucial opportunities for the making of saints."

Following Southern Baptist style, Mohler based his case on the Bible, saying it teaches that "marriage, sex and children are part of one package. To deny any part of this wholeness is to reject God's intention in creation — and his

mandate revealed in the Bible."

"Couples are not given the option of chosen childlessness in the biblical revelation," he contended. "To the contrary, we are commanded to receive children with joy as God's gifts."

A favored Mohler proof text: "Children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them" (Psalm 127:3-5).

A bitter response was written for ethicsdaily.com by Miguel De La Torre, a fellow Southern Baptist minister.

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