Documentary explores church’s hatred of gays

By BEN NUCKOLS
Associated Press Writer

BALTIMORE (AP) - K. Ryan Jones knew he’d picked an incendiary subject when he decided to make a documentary about Westboro Baptist Church for an undergraduate film class at the University of Kansas. He didn’t know he had good timing, too.

The making of “Fall from Grace” coincided with a surge in attention for the small, fundamentalist church, whose members picket the funerals of soldiers killed overseas. They believe American military casualties are God’s punishment for the nation’s tolerance of homosexuality. (It airs on Showtime Showcase 8:20 p.m. Thursday and 5:45 p.m. Monday, and on Showtime 5:15 p.m. Dec. 13.)

Pastor Fred Phelps and his Topeka, Kan., congregation -- most of them members of his immediate family -- think any publicity is good publicity. They cooperated fully with Jones, who allows them plenty of time to explain their ideology.

Some viewers might think they get just enough rope to hang themselves.

“You can’t hardly imagine a more fitting way to severely punish a people than to begin to blow the cream of their young manhood and womanhood to smithereens in Iraq,” Phelps says, “and the forum, or the venue, to preach that, is the funeral of some soldier, some young American soldier who’s been blown to smithereens by an IED.”

Phelps’ choice of venue has gotten him in trouble. In October, a federal jury in Baltimore levied an $11 million judgment against the church after the father of a fallen soldier sued Phelps and his congregation for invasion of privacy and causing emotional distress. The church plans to appeal and has not paid any damages; meanwhile, its members continue to picket military funerals around the country.

Jones told The Associated Press that he worried it might be irresponsible to give Phelps yet another forum. But he believes the documentary will do more good than harm.

“This is not a problem that’s going to go away simply by ignoring it,” Jones said. “The goal of the film is to educate people about this group -- the way they think, the way that they act and why they do these things, so we can be better equipped to handle it.”

Jones gathered footage for “Fall from Grace” between October 2005 and October 2006, spending time with church members and interviewing those affected by their protests, including Topeka’s mayor and police chief and the widow of a young soldier.

It’s not a polished documentary. (Jones had scant financial resources -- he estimates his budget at $10,000 -- and he relies too heavily on footage of Westboro members protesting and montages of their picket signs.) But the film accomplishes Jones’ goal of explaining the origins of Phelps’ vitriol toward fallen soldiers.

Phelps, a disbarred lawyer, founded the Westboro Baptist Church more than 50 years ago, but he only began protesting against gays in 1991 -- shortly after he was banned from practicing law in both state and federal courts.

The church began picketing outside a Topeka park known for homosexual activity. “It just kind of escalated from there,” says Sara Phelps, the pastor’s granddaughter.

But the decision to protest military funerals brought far more attention to the church than its pickets that targeted gays directly.

Timothy Phelps, the pastor’s son, explains why: “We found
Dortha Phelps characterizes her father as "basically addicted to anger -- a rage-aholic." Says Nate Phelps, who left home at 18 after repeated beatings: "It was just scary to be near him."

Despite the defections, Phelps' ministry appears likely to continue even beyond his death. Jones interviews several children who repeat the church's gay-bashing mantras as they frolic around a swimming pool.

Phelps-Roper said in an interview that she was particularly pleased with the children's contribution to the film. "It's wonderful that these children can know the word of God," she said. "If we didn't believe this is the word of God and it's absolutely essential, we wouldn't be out there doing it. And we're sure not going to be ashamed of it."

The choice of soldiers -- particularly those killed by improvised explosive devices, or IEDs -- was not arbitrary. The church believes IEDs are proof of God's retribution because a pipe bomb exploded outside the home of Phelps' daughter, Shirley Phelps-Roper, in 1995. No one was injured, and the perpetrators received scant punishment.

"It's this narcissistic idea that, 'Of course, an IED was set off at our church, and now IEDs are being used to kill soldiers. It's got to be God's retribution,'" Jones said. "It's narcissism in the extreme."

"Fall from Grace" also suggests that Phelps has a long-standing anger problem. Phelps has 13 children, and nine of them remain his loyal followers. Jones interviews two of the four who have left the church, and they describe beatings and psychological abuse by their father.

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Lawrence — More than 5,400 students at the University of Kansas will receive about $26 million in privately funded scholarship support during the 2007-08 academic year. This is a 10.6 percent increase from the 2006-07 school year, in which KU students received $24.3 million in scholarship support.

This year’s recipients represent 101 of the 105 counties in Kansas, 44 other states and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and 50 other countries.

So far, 7,603 scholarships have been awarded for the current academic year. Many students receive more than one scholarship. KU divides many scholarship awards between the fall and spring semesters, and there are some students who receive scholarship support for the summer term as well.

Virtually all scholarships, awards and fellowships awarded by KU come from private contributions to KU Endowment.

“Donors understand that without financial support, some deserving students would not be able to attend KU,” said Dale Seuferling, president of KU Endowment. “KU students are benefiting from the financial support provided recently and many generations ago by loyal alumni and friends.”

Though KU Endowment raises support for scholarships and other student aid, KU determines the distribution of available support. The figure fluctuates each year based on several factors, such as the number of students who apply for and receive them, the investment performance of endowed scholarship funds and new gifts for scholarships.

Scholarship funds are managed by KU Endowment, the independent, nonprofit organization serving as the official fundraising and fund-management organization for KU. Founded in 1891, KU Endowment is the first foundation of its kind at a U.S. public university.

Ellinwood area students and the scholarships awarded include:

Daywa Ahmadi, Edward H. Isern Scholarship; Tara Nicole Haddon, Edward H. Isern Scholarship; Scott G Komarek, Ritchie Corporation/NAPA Research & Education Foundation Scholarship and Wayne T. Wyatt Scholarship; Christopher Robl, Edward H. Isern Scholarship; Travis Alan Schneweis, Edward H. Isern Scholarship; and Mary Tudor, William A. and Monte L. Murphy Social Welfare Scholarship.
KU scholarships

More than 5,400 students at the University of Kansas will receive about $26 million in privately funded scholarship support during the 2007-08 academic year. This is a 10.6 percent increase from the 2006-07 school year, in which KU students received $24.3 million in scholarship support. From Emporia are:

- Zahra Crystal Nasr Azadani, daughter of Grace and Mehdi Nasr-Azadani, pre-pharmacy, junior, KU scholarships;
- Megan Ann Bollinger, daughter of Timothy and Lynnette Bollinger, pre-medicine, sophomore, Frank G. Crowell scholarship;
- Bethany Joanne Christiansen, daughter of Dwight and Jeanine Christiansen, pre-medicine, freshman, KU scholarships;
- Jesse Esparza, son of Gerardo and Rosa Esparza, pre-physical therapy, sophomore, Anschutz scholarship;
- Garett Stephen Frank, son of Diana Wilhite, medicine, Dr. Theodore A. Coffin scholarship;
- Andrea Lynn Garratino Freeze, musical arts, graduate, Bernadette Robinson scholarship, Frances Robinson scholarship in fine arts;
- Amanda Michelle Glass, daughter of Robert and Kenna Reeves, chemistry, graduate, George Corbin Bailey memorial chemistry scholarship;
- Samuel David Heim, son of John Heim and Sherry Heim, chemical engineering, freshman, KU scholarships;
- James Schull Combs and Catherine C. Combs memorial scholarship, Robert A. Buchanan Class of 1927 scholarship;
- Glenda Hernandez, daughter of Horacio and Marcia Hernandez, French, senior, Nunemaker College of Liberal Arts & Sciences scholarship;
- David Andrew Kitchens, son of Robert and Kenna Reeves, accounting, senior, John W. Rader scholarship;
- Todd Michael Kitchens, son of Jim and Lynn Kitchens, accounting and info systems, graduate, Norman L. Cochran Family scholarship;
- Anne Catherine Kretsinger, daughter of W. Brock and Mary Kretsinger, communication studies, senior, Harley S. Nelson Family scholarship;
- Alison Michelle Lindsay, nursing, senior, Arthur S. and Leora J. Peck Loan and/or scholarship;
- Noah Andrew Lock, son of Tony Lock, atmospheric science, sophomore, Ellis D. Bever Undergraduate scholarship;
- Jennifer Marroquin, daughter of Blanca and Guilmar Marroquin, business, sophomore, Frederic B. Parkes Memorial scholarship;
- Lucas P McCormick, chemistry, graduate, Emily V. Berger Scholarship in chemistry;
- Justina Marie Mollach, daughter of Tamara and Steven Mollach, speech-language-hearing, freshman, KU scholarships;
- Katherine Ann Moneymaker, daughter of Richard and Cynthia Moneymaker, pre-social welfare, freshman, KU scholarships;
- Nidhi Patel, Microbiology, senior, Birrer Family scholarship;
- Melissa Dale Reed, education, graduate, Ruth M. Anderson Memorial;
- Thomas R Resch, medicine, Laurian A. Ballantyne Medical scholarship;
- Erik J Runge, son of Mark and Cathy Runge, aerospace engineering, senior, Daryl J. Schueler scholarship;
- Scott Matthew Shank, son of Robert Shank, pharmacy, Albertson's/Osco Drug scholarship;
- Vivica Yvonne Snape-Stewart, social work, graduate, Family Funding-Peers/Success Program scholarship;
- Brianna Raye Sosa, daughter of Robert and Jo Sosa, applied behavioral science, senior, KU scholarships, Minority scholarships, Louis and Ruthann Pozez Scholarship, James L. and Edna Faye Lauver Scholarship, Eunice Harvey Melik scholarship;
- Sasha D Sosa, daughter of Maria Sosa, pharmacy, senior, Giobatta & Mary Stella and Joseph & Mary Roeder scholarship, William Erwin Henry Scholarship, Birrer Family Scholarship, Pharmacy Multicultural Scholars Program, Plough Pharmacy Student scholarship;
- Jonathan Edward Starr, son of James and Bonnie Starr, pharmacy, George L. and Margaret Varnes Pharmaceutical scholarship;
- Tyler John Thompson, son of Kenneth and Deborah Thompson, chemical engineering, freshman, Emporia Alumni scholarship, James Schull Combs and Catherine C. Combs Memorial Scholarship, KU Scholarships, Paul and Virginia Bassett Miller Engineering scholarship;
- Stephanie Jay Yeager, medicine, R. M. Gouldner Medical scholarship, Dr. Samuel Murdock Jr. medical scholarship.
KU chancellor coming to Great Bend

University of Kansas Chancellor Robert Hemenway will be coming to Great Bend on Wednesday. He has been traveling around the state over the past several months, talking about the various ways KU works for Kansas, meeting with community groups and KU alumni.

Hemenway will be the guest speaker at the Great Bend Noon Kiwanis meeting, which starts with lunch at noon at the Highland Hotel. The meeting is open to the public.

He will be visiting with KU alumni at a 1 p.m. reception, also at the hotel.
KU professor, students hope to reuse material to help rebuild Greensburg

Lawrence (AP) — A University of Kansas professor and his architecture class are hoping to recycle some building materials from an abandoned ammunition plant for an environmentally friendly house they want to build for tornado-ravaged Greensburg.

For now, the biggest hurdle to the Studio 804 class building in Greensburg is the need to move quickly. The students want to have the house built, transported and hooked up in Greensburg by the first anniversary of the tornado that demolished the town — May 4, 2008.

But they also have to be done in time for graduation. The Studio 804 class is made up of architecture graduate students in their final semester before graduation.

“We operate at warp speed. People cannot understand how hard it is to construct a building in the time we do,” said Dan Rockhill, architecture professor.

Rockhill says they would like to take the building they make to Greensburg and show how others could use the same materials for other buildings there. They’re planning on using materials from the former Sunflower Army Ammunition plant southeast of Lawrence.

Rockhill said that if the studio can work through some political obstacles in Greensburg, the house they create will incorporate certain sustainable technologies that will make the house more environmentally efficient. Greensburg has set a goal to be a “green town” when it is rebuilt.

“This could conceivably be something that leads to a whole lot of material that can be used to rebuild Greensburg,” said Rockhill. “We’ve spent three months with lawyers and negotiations. We’re working hard to push through that and get in there.”

He said the house will be passively solar and will use green materials throughout the interior and exterior.

“We’re experimenting with a roof design that will cut the cooling costs measurably,” he said.

The studio is looking for sponsors or donors who might be willing to underwrite some of the costs of the house. Though the studio is affiliated with the university, most of the costs of building the house must be generated either by selling the house or by donations. In an area like Greensburg, where housing prices are low, it can be difficult to recoup the investment.

Rockhill said the governor’s office had made available a $50,000 loan for the project, if it’s done in Greensburg.

Mike Gurnee, Greensburg city planner, said the town hopes the students in Studio 804 will be able to create a model home that those rebuilding in Greensburg can use to get ideas about how to build a sustainable new home.

“I think it’s fantastic,” Gurnee said. “We’re interested in any and all proposals such as this to provide a model on what the future of housing will be.”
V GUEST COLUMN

Kansas needs to prepare its children

As the Kansas economy becomes increasingly global and highly competitive, we must prepare the children of Kansas with the training they need for the economy of the future.

Key to Kansas' ability to succeed in the new technology-driven marketplace will be workers who excel in math, science, technology and engineering; and right now, our students are underperforming compared to their peers around the world.

Encouraging more students to focus on these fields and continue their education in math and science will help to ensure that we have the workforce for a prosperous future.

Quality teachers are essential to the success of our students; however, Kansas faces a shortage of math and science teachers.

The Kansas State Department of Education recently reported that next year Kansas schools are likely to have over 680 vacancies for math and science teachers, but only 228 new math and science teachers are expected to graduate from Kansas schools.

Teachers have always had significant impact on the lives of their students, but now more so than ever, teachers dictate the future success of our economy as well.

Given the importance of these educators, it is essential the state produce not just more math and science teachers, but more effective math and science teachers.

We can do this by encouraging math and science majors to enter the teaching profession and by supporting the development of highly qualified teachers in math and science fields.

A new program at the University of Kansas will accomplish those goals.

UKanTeach is an innovative new program that allows students to earn degrees in math or science as well as a teaching license.

The program, a collaboration between the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the School of Education, aims to double the number of math and science teachers graduating from KU each year, resulting in an additional 50 new teachers in Kansas classrooms.

Last week the University of Kansas was one of 12 universities nationwide to receive a National Math and Science Initiative grant.

The $2.4 million grant funded by the ExxonMobil Corporation will be used to fund the UKanTeach program.

We know it works, because this program has been in place at the University of Texas and the results are encouraging.

We are pleased that KU was able to secure one of these competitive grants, and I am confident the UKanTeach program will produce more of the teachers our state needs to help our students thrive in the subjects of math and science.

With programs like this and a continued focus on math and science, success in the classroom will no doubt extend to economic success in the future.

— Gov. Kathleen Sebelius
Pageants return to Lawrence

SPECIAL TO THE HAYS DAILY NEWS

The Miss Kansas USA and Miss Kansas Teen USA pageants return this year to Lawrence for the 2008 competitions Saturday and Sunday. This year’s event will again be at the Lied Center on the campus of the University of Kansas.

The 60 contestants will first compete in the presentation show at 7 p.m. Saturday. This is where the judges get their first look at each contestant in the evening gown and swimsuit competitions. Personal interviews are done the following morning, and these three categories are scored equally to narrow the field down to 10 to 15 semifinalists in the two age divisions.

The coronation show is at 7 p.m. Sunday. To purchase tickets for these events, call (785) 864-2787. If the event is not sold out, tickets will be sold at the box office of the immediately preceding each night’s show.

The winners in the “Miss” and “Teen” competitions will advance to the NBC-televised Miss USA Pageant in the spring and the Miss Teen USA Pageant in the summer, respectively. Each contestant is offered a scholarship at Lindenwood University in St. Louis ($57,600 for winners, $48,000 for runners-up, $37,600 for semifinalists, and $33,600 for other contestants).

Miss Kansas USA 2007 is 20-year-old Cara Gorges. The Clearwater native earned second runner up honors at last spring’s Miss USA pageant in Los Angeles.

Miss Kansas Teen USA 2007 is Jaymie Stokes. She’s a 16-year-old junior at Shawnee Mission West High School in the Kansas City area.

Area competitors are Amber Griffin, 18, WaKeeney; Emily Younger, 16, Hays; Ashton Archer, 17, Lucas; and Brooke Lennington, 16, Goodland.

For a complete list of this year’s contestants, visit www.misskansasusa.com.
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University of Kansas
Rachel Barnes, Hutchinson, is the recipient of a Judy L. Reudlinger scholarship award for the spring of 2008 at the University of Kansas, Lawrence. The award honors the first Student Alumni Association advisor who was known by her students as “Judy Rudy.” Barnes is majoring in history and biology at KU.
KU Announces Scholarship Recipients for 2007-08

University of Kansas

LAWRENCE — More than 5,400 students at the University of Kansas will receive about $26 million in privately funded scholarship support during the 2007-08 academic year. This year’s recipients represent 101 of the 105 counties in Kansas, 44 other states and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and 50 other countries.

Local students receiving scholarships include:

From Chapman — Joanna Linn Hamel, daughter of Greg and Julie Hamel, Pre-Journalism, Freshman, KU Scholarships, Chapman High School; Emily Elizabeth Markley, daughter of Joe and Sheila Markley, Voice, BM, Sophomore, Joseph M. and Emma B. Ketchum Scholarship in Music, Jellison Fund, Chapman High School.

From Fort Riley — Tiffany Renee Fields, daughter of Tong Ye and Eddie Fields, Biology, BA, Freshman, Eunice Harkey Melik Scholarship, Junction City High School; Brandy Raylene Fogg, daughter of Randall and Jenette Fogg Biology, BS, Freshman, Anschutz Scholarship, Junction City High School; Jasmine Patrice Walthall, daughter of Edwin and Laura Walthall, Pre-Journalism, Sophomore, Roger N. Wooldridge Journalism Scholarship, Junction City High School; Avniben Nitinbhai Bhakta, daughter of Nitin and Bhavna Bhakta, Pre-Physical Therapy, Freshman, Targeted Scholarships, Junction City High School.

From Junction City — Michael Edward Dill, Juris Doctor, JD, Prof 2 Evelyn, Richard, and Blanche Thompson Fund, Prof 2 Kenton Mai Memorial Scholarship; Victoria Inez Faulkner, daughter of Richard and Peggy Faulkner, Sport Science, BSE, Senior, Ruth M. Anderson Memorial, National Advisory Board Scholarship, Junction City High School; City Curtis Brock Glessner, son of Rod and Kathy Glessner, Accounting, BSB, Senior, Jellison Fund, Junction City High School; Emily Christena Heldstab, daughter of Randy and Chris Heldstab, Pre-Physical Therapy, Targeted Scholarships, Junction City High School.

From Republic County — Sharon Maria Ramos, daughter of Sergio and Debra Ramos, Human Biology, BA, Senior, Frank G. Crowell Scholarship, Republic County High School, Belleville, Kan.; Megan Christine Zumbrunn, daughter of Daryl and Carolyn Zumbrunn, Pharmacy, PD, Junior, Anschutz Scholarship, Junction City High School.
Quick turnaround?

No need to worry about Shawnee County District Judge Charles Andrews holding on long to a challenge of a state law authorizing state-owned casinos.

At a Tuesday hearing, Andrews said that he plans to rule on a suit challenging the constitutionality of the expanded gambling law by late January.

“If I don’t get it done during the next two months, I may not get it done during my career,” joked Andrews, who is due to begin overseeing several civil cases in February.

The state attorney general’s office has filed a “friendly” lawsuit asking the court to strike down a law permitting four destination casinos and slot machines at a pair of race tracks. The challenge contends that the state would not truly own and operate the gaming operations as required under the state constitution.

But Andrews’ decision likely won’t be the final say on the matter.

The case is expected to reach the Kansas Supreme Court on appeal. If Andrews rules early next year, the high court could potentially take it up by next fall, unless the case is expedited, court spokesman Ron Keefover said.

Using the NAFTA Accountability Act, which would request that the president re-negotiate the agreement.

The bill calls for U.S. withdrawal from NAFTA unless it sees gains in jobs, living standards and manufacturing, along with new health and environmental standards for imports, reductions in the illegal drug trade and Democratic reforms in Mexico.

“Practically every politician in Washington has said that NAFTA has its share of problems,” Boyd said in a news release. “Even supporters admit that NAFTA is deeply flawed, but nobody has had the guts to fix the problem.”

Boosting connections

Each year, a summit on electric transmission in Kansas gains a little bigger charge.

This year’s event, the state’s fifth, is scheduled for Friday at the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics at the University of Kansas. Expected to attend are officials from power and transmission companies, wind energy developers and others looking at the state’s potential to expand power production and the lines necessary to move it.

“If we’re going to develop our state’s wind capacity we’ve got to be able to build new transmission,” said summit organizer Rep. Tom Sloan, R-Lawrence.

The U.S. electrical grid is behind the times, he noted, thanks to “our congressional waffling” on developing renewables such as wind energy as well as the nation’s lack of response to climate change.

However several states are starting to act. Kansas has a few new transmission lines in the works and more on the drawing board for the next few years.

But Lt. Gov. Mark Parkinson recently said the state ideally could be part of a transmission “super highway” to sell Kansas wind energy to the southeast United States, which has less wind power potential.

Officials from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, regional transmission planners as well as legislators will be on hand Friday to answer questions.

“I really encourage folks to raise issues,” Sloan said.

Parking perks

The Kansas Corporation Commission, which regulates energy companies, is starting to show a little green outside its building in west Topeka.

A handful of parking space outside the commission’s west Topeka office building are now reserved for hybrid vehicles. A few other slots are set aside for carpool vehicles.

KCC Chairman Tom Wright, who drives a Toyota hybrid Prius, instituted the parking policy to encourage efficiency, said spokeswoman Rosemary Foreman.

“It’s just to promote awareness in an ongoing, educational way,” she said, noting the agency also has a Prius for staff to drive on work trips.