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RELIGION

Nashville Ministry Tempts Children to Try Morality

Children Earn \$10 Each by Learning, Reciting Ten Commandments

By Bossy Ross Jr.
Associated Press

NASHVILLE—George Kelley believes the nation has lost its conscience, and he plans to do something about it—one child and \$10 at a time.

The 76-year-old retired flower shop owner has started a ministry out of his home that with the help of donations pays children \$10 each to memorize and recite the Ten Commandments.

Kelley said nearly 7,000 children nationwide have taken advantage of the offer over the past five years. He hopes eventually to persuade 10 million children to participate.

"When I say 10 million, you say that's crazy," Kelley said. "Well, if you have a small dream, nobody pays any attention to it."

Kelley's project was born in 1997 after a part-time cook killed seven workers at three Tennessee restaurants—a string of slayings that shocked the Nashville area. Kelley points to those killings—along with reports of violence by teenagers against teenagers—as evidence that many young people don't understand right from

wrong.

"Kids were running around shooting each other for tennis shoes and jackets," he said.

Kelley and his wife, Marion, started the Ten Commandments Project with help from friends. The Kelleys, both Presbyterians, felt children who memorized the Ten Commandments might think about that ancient moral code when tempted to lie, steal or get involved in other wrongdoing.

At first the Kelleys were concerned about how they would pay for the effort, but supporters started sending donations of \$15 to \$10,000, and a wealthy friend promised to help when needed. Every time the bank account got low, "somebody would send some money in," George Kelley said.

To qualify for the \$10, children must be 16 or younger, live in the United States and recite the commandments to a pastor, rabbi, priest, teacher or other "authorized" adult witness. The witness then must swear to having heard the child's recitation by signing an affidavit form that can be downloaded from the ministry's Web site (www.tencommandmentsproject.org).

ject.org).

"An authorized witness is not a relative," Kelley said. "They would be inclined to fudge a little."

Brian Runge, a Lutheran pastor in Houston, discovered the project while surfing the Web. He brought the idea to St. Mark Lutheran School in Houston, where more than 100 students participated and earned their money during the fall. Many planned to donate the money to needy children in Zimbabwe.

"The Ten Commandments are the basis of moral law for human beings, regardless of what your perspective is," Runge said. "The more kids that know them, the more they'll know how to live."

Angela Gloyna, an 11-year-old fifth-grader at the Lutheran school, called the \$10 payment "a big incentive" and joked that a similar offer on all her studies would make her a millionaire.

About 500 students at David Lipscomb Elementary, a Church of Christ school in Nashville, memorized the commandments last year, then gave their checks to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis.

The Kelleys concede that some children



BY JIM WELLS—ASSOCIATED PRESS

George Kelley poses with one of the many copies of the Ten Commandments that adorn his house in Nashville.

will participate simply for the excitement of receiving a letter and check in the mail. However, they have faith that the young people will remember the lesson well after the money is gone.

"We hope someday that it won't be the \$10 that's important, but that they'll have God's word in their heart," Marion Kelley said.