



The Birmingham News

Math teacher recording Bible books for all to share

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News staff writer

Banks Middle School math teacher Susan Bates has a mellifluous voice and a recording studio in the basement of her Roebuck home where she records books of the Bible.

So far she has produced recordings of Galatians, Acts, Romans, the Gospel of John, Daniel, Esther, Ruth and Revelation, Paul's letters to Timothy, and the letters of John.

She plans to eventually record all 66 books of the Bible. "I feel like I was led by God to do this," Bates said.

On Saturday at 3:30 p.m., she will be reading the King James Version of the Book of Revelation aloud at New Bethlehem Baptist Church, 1730 Eleventh Ave. in Bessemer. "It invites people to read along," she said. "In many cases it will be the first time ever they've read a book of the Bible front to back."

She plans to do more readings at churches, an effort she calls the Nehemiah Project.

In chapter eight of the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, the priest and teacher Ezra reads aloud to the people from the law of Moses.

She hopes to bring the Scripture alive in the same way, she said.

"God's word is central to the church," Bates said. "It should be more than dressing on a table or a book under an arm."

As the daughter of a pastor, Bates became familiar with the Scriptures at an early age.

Her father, the Rev. Willie Sargent, was pastor of Friendship Baptist Church in Birmingham in the early 1960s, in a neighborhood now occupied by the UAB campus.

She attended Parker High School and was a classmate of Carole Robertson, one of four girls killed in the Sept. 15, 1963 Sunday morning bombing at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.

Bates recalls talking to Robertson on the Friday before her death; their lockers were near each other.

"She had just made the band and shared the exciting news with me," Bates said. "She had her band uniform jacket; she had it over her arm. She talked about how she had to have the tennis shoes and white pants to match so she would be able to march at the next football game. I was able to rejoice with her. But she didn't get the opportunity."

Bates earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in education from the University of Alabama.

She taught in Homewood schools, Hall Kent Elementary and Homewood Junior High, from 1971 to 1974.

She then worked on the national staff of Girl Scouts, spent time with the Birmingham police as a social worker, taught in Los Angeles public schools, worked for Pacific Bell in California; worked for Americorps in Washington, D.C., and returned to Birmingham as a math teacher.

All along, though, she has wanted to put that smooth voice to use.

"I've found the Bible is entirely different to me now," she said. "My understanding of the Bible has increased so much. I have discovered attributes of God that I had missed altogether."

She believes having someone read it aloud to them gives encouragement.

"It will help people feel more comfortable with the Bible," Bates said. "They can listen to an audio version in the car. They can gain more understanding, as the Bible says, to let the word dwell in us more richly."

Bates sells single CDs for \$5 per book through her Web site, yourworkingcopy.com, and they will be available at New Bethlehem Baptist on Saturday.

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