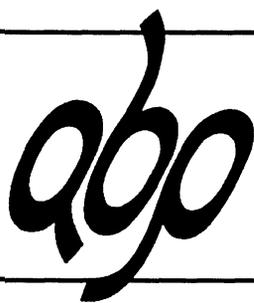


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Southern Baptist messengers pledge to abstain from alcohol

By Jeff Huett

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Messengers attending the Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta were asked to pledge "total abstinence" from alcohol, drugs or "any substance that will have a negative impact" on their behavior or their witness for Christ.

Led by convention officials, the 11,000-plus messengers were asked Tuesday to sign abstinence pledge cards -- one product of a task force initiated last year to address the damage caused by drug abuse. The task force hopes now to take its campaign to all Southern Baptists.

Task force chair Richard Land, in a press conference after the report, said the pledge cards will "give Southern Baptists the opportunity to renew what has been the historic Southern Baptist position when it comes to the consumption of alcoholic beverages, as well as other drugs, which is total abstinence."

"I don't think there is any question that more Southern Baptists are social drinkers than they were 25 years ago," Land acknowledged to reporters. But the vast majority of church-going Southern Baptists don't agree with social drinking, he said.

The task force, composed of 12 SBC agency heads, was created at last year's convention in Salt Lake City. Much of the focus of the anti-drug campaign is on the use of alcohol, which Land, president of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said is the "gateway drug" for all such abuse.

The pledge card notes: "I acknowledge that the alcohol problem is America's No. 1 drug problem and poses a serious threat to all Americans young and old alike."

"Alcohol is the great scourge of our culture," Land told messengers in presenting the task force report and recommendations, which were later approved.

Land cited statistics to support the group's concern:

-- 26 percent of eighth graders, 40 percent of 10th graders, and 51 percent of 12th graders say they have used alcohol in the last month, he said.

-- Children who grow up in homes with a pattern of parental alcohol abuse are twice as likely to drink and nearly four times as likely to use illegal drugs as those who grow up in homes without such a pattern.

-- 77 percent of young people say their parents have a great deal or fair amount of influence over whether they use alcohol and drugs. Indeed, if parents drink, studies show 66 percent of teenagers will experiment with it, Land said. Conversely, in homes where abstinence is practiced, only 16 percent of teenagers experiment with alcohol.

"Who among us would want to be the cause of someone taking a drink that then leads to a lifetime of destructive behavior because they've become addicted to alcohol?" Land asked messengers.

The anti-drug campaign was initiated by Ted Stone, a former drug addict and layman from Grace Baptist Church in Durham, N.C., who made the motion last year to form the task force.

"I feel like America's youth need a new set of heroes," Stone told reporters, "and there's no better hero than someone they see everyday -- like a parent, or grandparent, or a brother, sister or neighbor -- who believes in sobriety and self-control as a road to happiness, success and inner peace. I believe that Southern Baptists today, by signing this commitment card, have become heroes to a lot of people across this land."

Stone emphasized the campaign is not intended demean a certain lifestyle but to affirm the benefits of life without alcohol or drugs.

"This is not a matter of judgment," Stone said. "It is a matter of reaching out with mercy and love, like our Jesus has taught us, to those who have the problem and to those who might experience choices about drug abuse.

The task force -- called the Great Commission Council Anti-Drug Task Force -- included Land, the presidents of each of the six Southern Baptist seminaries, Executive Committee President Morris Chapman, Annuity Board President O.S. Hawkins, the presidents of the SBC's two mission boards, and the president of the Woman's Missionary Union.

In the press conference, Land recalled the success of the True Love Waits campaign -- which called for youth to abstain from sexual activity until marriage -- as evidence the anti-drug effort can work. He said even the harshest critics of abstinence programs are admitting that abstinence programs have made "a significant contribution to the significant decline in the number of teenagers who are sexually active."

"It is a small price for me to pay," he added, "even if I did like the taste of alcohol, to abstain from a behavior that would have a negative impact on people who are influenced by my behavior, starting with my children and my grandchildren, should I have them...."

The pledge card signed by messengers notes "that a sober, self-controlled lifestyle is the best road to success, happiness and peace." It points out the dangers of both illegal drugs and prescription drugs. And it pledges to help those who suffer drug-related problems, noting "we are our brothers' keepers."

"I believe that the lifestyle most consistent with a Christian witness, in the day and time in which we live, is total abstinence from any use of alcohol as a beverage and total abstinence from any illegal substance," the card says.

The task force recommendations request that all six SBC seminaries teach students about the issue of alcohol and illegal drug abuse and offer resources to combat the problem, Land said.

In addition, Land said the task force will work this year on putting together a clearinghouse of substance-abuse centers that minister from a Christian perspective. The group is expected to present a second report to the 2000 SBC meeting announcing new tools and resources to aid churches in dealing with the issue.

Stone became addicted to amphetamines in the 1970s, he said. During a robbery he shot someone and served more than four years in prison. After his release, he began a personal crusade to educate people about the dangers of drug abuse.

Stone, who began using the pledge cards more than a year ago, said he is responsible for the wording in the SBC version -- other than "a little preacher language" added by the task force. He said he is optimistic the SBC campaign can make a difference.

"I would say the American people do have the will, but they need the direction. They need leadership. And I believe the Christian church certainly ought to be in the forefront in this battle. If we do not lead, then who will?"

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SBC president argues claim for 'sufficiency' of Bible

By Marv Knox

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Southern Baptists must preach right, counsel right and believe right if they are to reach their nation for Christ, Southern Baptist Convention President Paige Patterson claimed during his address to the SBC annual meeting in Atlanta June 15.

Patterson recommended those commitments under the umbrella of affirming the "sufficiency of Scripture." "For the last 20 years, Southern Baptists have struggled through an exercise of self-definition," said Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

He referred to the two-decade-long theological/political conflict -- which he helped engineer -- that reshaped the SBC. Notably, the convention acted to affirm the inerrancy of the Bible and preserve the missionary and evangelistic impetus of the convention, he said.

But he wondered whether "we have won the battle for the inerrancy of the Bible while we have foundered on the issue of the sufficiency of the Bible."

He suggested three categories of "sufficiency" required by Scripture:

-- "The Bible must be sufficient for preaching," Patterson stressed, advocating "exposition and application of the word of God" as opposed to "narrative preaching."

"Some among us counsel that we should abandon the careful explanation and application of the biblical text, alleging that contemporary audiences are no longer charmed by such tunes," he said. "Twelve-minute sermonettes generated by the 'felt needs' of an assembled cast of post-modern listeners, augmented by drama and multiple repetitions of touchy-touchy, feely-feely music is the call of the hour."

Such trends aren't completely wrong, but preaching that is not expository -- verse-by-verse explanation of the text -- "is an inadvertent challenge to the sufficiency of Scripture," he said. "It is to suggest that human wisdom surpasses God's expression of his will and purpose as recorded in his holy word, and it is further to deny the ability of the Holy Spirit to make the word of God proclaimed from Scripture come alive in the hearts of the listeners.

"Let the rest of Christendom chart its own course, but may Baptists remain forever a people of the book, not merely by confession but by the method of their preaching as well."

-- "The Bible must be sufficient for counseling," he added. While the church once viewed psychology as "the enemy of biblical Christianity," today Christians "sometimes speak the language of psychotherapy more often than we speak the language of Zion," he explained.

"The tragic truth is that most of those who are addicted to drugs, alcohol, pornography and violence will say to the most confident psychotherapy, 'been there, done that, and I am still the same inside,'" he charged.

"Enough of our unsuccessful marriage to psychology," he urged. "Find in Scripture the information we need to assess the nature and problems of humanity and especially spiritual and emotional guidance for triumphant living."

-- "The Bible must be sufficient for doctrine," Patterson said. He specifically cited charismatic practices, also known as "speaking in tongues," and the debate over Calvinism, which focuses on the sovereignty of God versus human will.

"Widespread charismatic practices have visited the churches, indiscriminate of denomination or doctrine," he observed. "These practices range from the relatively controlled and accountable practices of charismatic evangelicals to the extremes of phenomena clearly novel to the Scriptures."

Patterson urged Southern Baptists not to "allow minor emphases to take the place of the major emphases of Scripture."

"My purpose is to remind Southern Baptists that our focus across the years has been the conversion of men and women to faith in Christ," he said.

"We have devoted our energies to the proclamation of the miraculous incarnation, the atoning death, the vivifying resurrection and the certain return of the Lord. We have steadfastly evaluated all other emphases as unworthy of our mission and as unintentional detours to divert us from our focus on the greatest miracles just enumerated, along with the astounding miracle of the new birth."

Turning to the Calvinism debate, Patterson noted: "Some wring their hands in apparent terror over these discussions. I welcome them."

Sidestepping taking sides in the debate, he pointed out that Southern Baptists history flows from "two distinct tributaries" -- "a strong infusion on the sovereignty of God" along with affirmation of "the freedom and responsibility of man."

"I plead only two considerations," he said. "First, let Southern Baptists forever steer a course between unbridled experientialism and stultifying propositionalism. Second, may we always remember that any and every doctrinal formulation that either purposefully or inadvertently dilutes our passion for the lost or our soul-winning vigor is at odds with the biblical message and mandate. There can be few more profound acts of worship than to introduce a wayfarer to the Savior who bled and died for him."

In his lengthy sermon, Patterson also affirmed the SBC's Cooperative Program unified budget. He warned against indiscriminate ecumenism, "diluting the blood of our martyrs who knew so very well the dangers of popular religious faith."

"I do not herewith propose a revival of denominational isolationism," he said. "Baptists must as never before recognize evangelical believers in churches operating behind diverse names, worship styles and approaches, attempting with hearts like our own to find God and please him in all things." Still, Southern Baptists must preserve Baptist ideals, he stressed.

He concluded with a call for evangelism. Southern Baptists, he said, should "break through to the next level," baptizing 1 million people -- 500,000 in the United States and 500,000 on mission fields -- during the period from Oct. 1, 1999, through Sept. 30, 2000.

Patterson particularly pleaded for evangelization of America's cities, 47 of which have populations of 1 million or more.

"Southern Baptists, will you pray as never before?" he asked. "Southern Baptists, will you go to the great population centers of our nation? Southern Baptists, will you give? Will you get your church to take a city?"

"Southern Baptists, will you weep before God? Will you wet your pillows and discolor the varnish on your church pews until God gives us the souls of our cities? May God grant it."

WMU highlights missions, honors O'Brien at meeting

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Woman's Missionary Union members highlighted both world missions and local participation during their annual meeting, June 13-14 at Atlanta's Wieuca Road Baptist Church. The theme this year was "Strength for Today -- Bright Hope for Tomorrow." Emphasis was placed on reviewing the past century in WMU history and activities, as this is the last national meeting of the WMU during this century.

The meeting was also Dellanna O'Brien's last as executive director. O'Brien, who retires this year, received a standing ovation when introduced at the meeting's opening session.

Another session recognized new programs initiated by O'Brien, who has led the 111-year-old auxiliary 10 years.

A committee reported to WMU's executive board that a search for O'Brien's successor is well underway. As of a June 1 deadline, the committee had received 15 recommendations, said Ann Coffman of Sanford, Fla., the search committee's chairwoman.

Wanda Lee of Columbus, Ga., was re-elected WMU president by acclamation. In her president's report, Lee described how her sensitivity to minister to foreign visitors to the United States increased after she toured a predominantly Muslim Middle Eastern country as an outsider.

She encouraged women to view their own overseas travel as a missions opportunity.

"Missionaries sometimes aren't allowed in certain countries, but American tourists sometimes are," she said. "What does God want you to do with what you do, what you know? We are called to understand and take that understanding and do something radical in the world."

Other main speakers included "Sherri," a missionary to an unidentified country, who did not disclose her last name or exact location for safety reasons. She said 1.3 billion people in the least evangelized parts of the world -- termed alternately by missions strategists as the "Final Frontier" or the "10/40 window," have not been reached with the gospel.

"They wait while Christians who have the good news stay at home and choose wallpaper for their kitchen or tomorrow night's menu," Sherri said.

In many remote villages, she related, people are familiar with Coca-Cola products but have never heard about Jesus.

"Does it make you weep," Sherri asked, "that Coca-Cola has made it to places that the name of Jesus hasn't?"

Despite concern by many Christians over governments that suppress or persecute Christians, Sherri encouraged WMU members "that nothing is too difficult for my God. ... Despite what you see with your eyes, God is at work and has been for centuries."

Robert Norris, a director of missions from Littleton, Colo., spoke about his experiences in connection with the Columbine High School shootings. "It's amazing the number of times God's name has been mentioned since April 20," he said.

Just as amazing are the testimonies that have been publicized of the slain Christians. "What Dylan and Eric meant for bad, God used for good," Norris said.

Calvin Miller, a religion professor at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., closed one session with a message titled "Trust His Rich Promises of Grace." Miller reminded WMU members that this time 100 years ago women were fighting for suffrage. Today, women are at the forefront of mission organizations and activities. "WMU was originally founded to support missionaries," Miller said. "Now they exist to be missionaries."

He said most of his mentors are women and that he often quotes women. Miller encouraged WMU members to actively continue missions involvement and outreach.

"Somehow they [women] can handle it better than men," Miller said.

In a business session, WMU members approved bylaw changes to extend full voting rights to executive board members from state and regional fellowships that previously did not meet membership requirements. The change made vice presidents from Iowa, Minnesota-Wisconsin, Dakota, Montana and the Caribbean full, voting members of the executive board.

Lee said WMU is the first Southern Baptist Convention entity to allow full voting rights to new-work fellowships.

Another bylaw change adds three at-large vice presidents to the executive board, a change intended to increase ethnic and cultural diversity.

Rick and Ellen Burnette, who are missionaries in residence at the host church for the WMU meeting, also spoke during a theme interpretation. The couple are missionaries to Thailand sponsored by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. They are the first CBF missionaries to be invited to speak at a national WMU meeting, according to Ellen Burnette.

In addition to general sessions, WMU members fanned out to attend more than two dozen leadership-development conferences on topics ranging from the Y2K problem to multicultural ministry to thinking styles.

Florida WMU President Helen Yates of Apopka, Fla., said she was excited by the wide variety of choices. Another benefit would be allowing WMU members from different states to meet one another and share prayer requests, she said. "I think we're all open to change, and we see that it's necessary at this point."

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--By Russ Dilday, Brittany Jarvis, Tim Palmer and William Perkins. Bob Allen contributed to this report.

'LifeWay' name well received, Draper says during SBC report

By Lacy Thompson

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Changing the name of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board to LifeWay Christian Resources has been received with enthusiasm, Jimmy Draper told messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting June 15.

Draper, president of the Nashville, Tenn.-based publishing house, said the LifeWay name is based on John 14:6, which proclaims Jesus as the way, the truth and the life. "We feel that the very name itself is an opportunity for us to say that our task is to help introduce people to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior."

Draper cited several projects underway at the publishing agency, including the preparation of a new strategy for Sunday school and a new Bible translation. "It is a Bible without compromise," Draper said of the translation. "It is a Bible for the 21st century and beyond. ... It is accurate and literal, yet smooth and readable. It invites memorization and reading aloud and dedicated study. ... Pray for us. We want to preserve the integrity of God's word into the 21st century."

In response to the report, a messenger voiced a concern that LifeWay's mission seems to have changed from the service of Southern Baptist churches to one of making profits. The messenger cited the decision not to allow non-LifeWay stores to sell Sunday school material, the publication of the new Bible translation and

the markup on materials published by other Southern Baptist agencies.

Draper responded that LifeWay seeks to provide materials at the lowest-possible cost to churches. Providing materials to non-LifeWay stores would affect the agency's ability to make such prices available to churches, he said.

Also, the new Bible translation is designed simply to preserve the integrity of the Bible and actually will be completed at quite a cost to the agency, he said.

Finally, Draper responded, LifeWay simply charges what other agencies tell them to charge for their materials.

Another messenger expressed a concern that the new Bible translation would push aside the King James Version.

Draper said LifeWay will continue to make the King James and New King James versions available. However, he said, both versions are losing readership to translations that may not be adequate. "We will still have a place in our materials for the King James. We have no desire to replace that," he said. "But we really prefer to replace some of the more recent translations that are becoming more interested in political correctness than biblical accuracy."

A third messenger asked why radio advertisements for new LifeWay stores referred to them as owned by a non-profit organization instead of by the Southern Baptist Convention. Draper said he could not answer the question but would get an answer if the messenger would write to him.

Also during LifeWay's presentation, Draper presented leatherbound copies of "A Hill on Which to Die" to Paul Pressler and Paige Patterson. The book, written by Pressler, is an account of the organized movement to turn the convention in a more conservative direction beginning in 1979. Pressler and Patterson are credited as architects of that shift.

"This is not a tract for victory, but it's rather an explanation of what occurred," Pressler said in response. "I had to wait until the battle was over to write this because I did not want to write it in such a way that people would think that I was arguing for victory. "The greatest joy that ... I have is to see the young people who are now in our Southern Baptist seminaries and to realize the instruction that they are receiving," Pressler said. "God has brought our convention a long way. And I have tried in this book to explain the pitfalls and the dangers I see ahead.

"It has been well said that the only thing we learn from history is that we don't learn from history," Pressler continued. "If Southern Baptists fail to learn from history, we are in real trouble. And it is in the hope that Southern Baptists learn from history that this book has been written."

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California pastor describes qualities for new churches

By Russ Dilday

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Starting new churches in the 21st century will require pastors and church planters who have a vision for reproduction, Rick Warren told Southern Baptist directors of missions during their annual meeting.

"You have to have a vision to plant churches that plant new churches. That has to be built into the DNA of your churches," said Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church in Mission Viejo, Calif. -- a church that has started 30 new congregations in 20 years.

Warren was one of several speakers addressing the future of ministry during the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Conference of Directors of Associational Missions June 13-14 in Atlanta. About 160 members attended the conference, built on the theme of "Leading Your Association into a New Century."

Successfully starting new churches also requires "focused prayer, knowing your target audience and a purpose-driven strategy," Warren said. "Churches are living organisms, and all living organisms grow. If you're not growing, something's wrong. Remove the barriers to growth. Once you remove the barriers, churches begin to grow. The purpose-driven strategy is not about making a big church, but a healthy church."

Further requirements include "culturally relevant worship styles," a "simple and rapid assimilation process" for new members and the use of new technology to attract seekers, he said.

"They also need to be self-governing," Warren noted. "They need the freedom to grow. The mother churches don't know best what the daughter church needs, the daughter church does."

He also advocated that new churches not begin in a "building-dependent" state. "Our church was running 10,000 before we built the first building. When you don't put money into buildings, you have more money for staff and programs, which are what grow your church anyway." Finally, Warren said, new churches need what he termed "the faith factor."

"You need leadership that is not afraid to be used by God," he explained. "When I look for a church planter, I look for someone not afraid to fail."

He closed his message with words of encouragement for ministers who feel like they labor in obscurity.

"One of the important things I've learned is that there's a difference between significance and prominence," he said. "We live in a celebrity-driven world. One of the biggest problems in this celebrity-driven world is that people who are serving in relative obscurity think, 'My ministry doesn't matter.' "But you are dead wrong," he concluded. "Your ministry does matter. What does matter is that you live for an audience of One."

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Founders Conference breakfast focuses on 'extreme' measures

By Lacy Thompson

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Extreme times call for extreme measures -- most notably, a return to "biblical" preaching and church discipline, a pair of Southern Baptist Founders Conference speakers emphasized June 15.

Evangelicals have made very little impact on the culture, Tom Ascol stressed during a Founders Conference breakfast just prior to the 1999 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Atlanta. About 120 people attended the pre-convention meeting organized by those who identify with the Reformed theological tradition, often referred to as Calvinists.

"The world has made more of an impact on the church in our day than the church has made on the world," said Ascol, pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Fla. "We live in very desperate days. We live in days when people are unabashedly selfish and self-centered, when they're greedy and prideful in an open way. ... We glory in immorality in our culture. ... People hate what is good. They deny the very existence of truth, and they live for pleasure."

Such people also are found in the churches, Ascol continued. Indeed, studies show that there is little difference between Christians and non-Christians when it comes to moral behavior, he said.

"What's a church to do in such days? What's a pastor to do? How are we to respond as those who know Christ and love the gospel of the Lord Jesus? What does this world in desperate days?

"The Bible does not leave us wondering," he said. "Extreme times call for extreme measures. And the extreme measure which the Bible calls for in desperate days can be summarized in one word -- preaching."

Referring to 2 Timothy 3, Ascol emphasized the need for a return to biblical preaching.

"Preaching is God's ordained means for accomplishing his ordained purposes of spreading the gospel throughout the world," Ascol said. "Whatever else may be done, this one thing always must be done."

In this passage, Paul urged Timothy to remember the nature, power and usefulness of the word of God in his personal life, he said. In addition, the apostle emphasized the need for Timothy to remain faithful in preaching the word publicly, Ascol said.

That means preaching sound doctrine and allowing Scripture to interpret itself, the Florida Baptist pastor insisted. "The pastor must be a sound theologian. He must be committed to the task of drawing out from the word of God the truths which God has revealed to us there, reflecting on them and helping people understand and apply them. That is the work of the pastor."

Ascol said the charge to Timothy is primarily to preach in an expository manner. "There's more to preaching the word than merely taking the Bible as your starting point. Many people take their texts from the Bible but then take their sermons from the newspapers. Paul says preach the word; not preach from the word but preach the word itself."

Expository preaching is a necessary corollary to the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture, Ascol insisted. "The absence of such preaching always betrays a lack of conviction of the Bible's authority and sufficiency, no matter how loudly a man may profess his allegiance to our God."

Likewise, churches must return to the practice of church discipline, asserted Don Whitney, professor of spiritual formation at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

The modern church faces a three-part problem, Whitney said. First, for generations, churches have practiced a methodology that has brought unconverted people into the church. Second, churches have failed to preach the word of God and bring these unconverted people to faith in Christ. Third, churches have failed to discipline these people when they act like unconverted people.

When that scenario is played out over a couple of generations, it creates a problem for the church, Whitney suggested. Deacons and teachers begin to be drawn from that pool, making it more and more difficult to return to the practice of discipline, he pointed out. "Will those people want to tighten up the membership requirements? Will those people want to call a preacher who preaches the word of God? Will those people want to begin instituting and implementing church discipline? A church that follows that pattern over a long enough period of time is on the path to apostasy," Whitney warned.

An answer to the problem is a recovery of church discipline -- both formative discipline (preaching the word) and corrective discipline, Whitney continued.

Corrective discipline is practiced to honor Christ, to maintain the purity of the church, to restore people, to release people from sin and to reconcile believers, he said. "One of the misunderstandings is that it's punitive, but the goal is restorative. ... The goal is to win someone back, not to kick someone out."

Any persistent, unrepentant sin is a disciplinable offense -- and every pastor and church will be tested in this area, Whitney said. He cautioned them to act biblically and carefully and always to seek reconciliation with the person. He stressed the need to make sure one is dealing with a violation of Scripture and not judging self-righteously. He also emphasized the need to keep matters as private as possible for as long as possible.

Withdrawing of fellowship should come only after a period of time of repeated, loving appeals in which a person consistently refuses to repent, Whitney said.

Such a move should involve a vote of the church body, he continued. "The church decides. ... If it's going to be church discipline, the church has to be involved."

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Wounded Heroes passed on to purview of SBC agency

By Marv Knox and Tony Cartledge

ATLANTA (ABP) -- A "qualified stone-thrower" symbolically passed the care and nurture of hurting ministers to the Southern Baptist Convention's LifeWay Christian Resources in Atlanta June 14.

Freddie Gage, a vocational evangelist who emerged from years of battling depression with a burden for suffering ministers and their wives, expressed gratitude and hope for LifeWay's assumption of his Wounded Heroes program.

Gage founded Wounded Heroes in 1997 as a ministry to pastors and families who have suffered problems in their personal or professional lives. LifeWay recently assumed responsibility for the program under its LeaderCare umbrella of ministries to ministers.

Gage entered a hospital for depression in 1978, after preaching 1,000 revivals and 3,000 high school youth rallies, he told a massive ballroom filled with ministers and their spouses.

He described his paranoia about his treatment being discovered, for he was certain "that would be the end of my ministry."

"If I had suffered a heart attack or cancer, God's people would have rallied around me," asserted Gage, who bases his ministry in Euless, Texas. "But in churches, we throw stones" at the spiritually, emotionally and mentally wounded.

"I thought I was a qualified stone-thrower, but those stones came back to hit me in the face" during the dark days of depression, he added.

"We are legalistic, judgmental and critical," Gage said of the church. "We do not practice what we preach regarding restoration. The Christian army is the only army in the world to bury its wounded."

Gage founded Wounded Heroes to restore ministers who have been abused by churches, suffered personal failure or fallen victim to other traumas, he explained. He expressed appreciation to LifeWay for taking up the cause a few months ago and said he hopes some day Southern Baptists' Cooperative Program budget will underwrite ministers' participation in the ministry.

LifeWay presented Gage with its James T. Draper Jr. LeaderLife Award in honor of his longtime evangelistic ministry and the work he has done through Wounded Heroes.

"I have known Freddie Gage almost 50 years," said Draper, president of LifeWay. "I doubt there's been a Southern Baptist evangelist who has spoken to more people about Jesus than Freddie Gage."

LifeWay will "carry out Freddie's dream" by continuing the Wounded Heroes ministry, Draper said. "No one will be turned away for financial reasons" from the ministry's counseling retreats, he pledged.

And the Wounded Heroes not only will focus on ministerial crisis but also prevention of problems and restoration of ministers, Draper added.

James Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church in Snellville, Ga., encouraged Southern Baptists to overcome bitterness through forgiveness. Bitterness saturates the mind, saddens the spirit and sickens the body, Merritt said, and can only be overcome by forgiveness that is free, full, and final.

LeaderCare will sponsor four Wounded Heroes retreats in the next year -- Sept. 20-24, 1999, and Feb. 14-18, 2000, at LifeWay Conference Center at Ridgecrest, N.C., and Nov. 15-19, 1999, and April 3-7, 2000, at LifeWay's Glorieta, N.M., conference center.

A 24-hour LeaderCare hotline has been established, staffed by counselors who are trained to assist pastors and families. The number is (888) 789-1911.

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