



Associated Baptist Press

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April 27, 2000

(00-36)

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Florida pastor to be nominated as first vice president of SBC

WINTER PARK, Fla. (ABP) -- A Florida pastor has announced that he will be nominated for first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention when it meets June 13-14 in Orlando.

Brad Hoffman, senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Tusawilla, Fla., announced his candidacy in a press release. The statement said he would be nominated by Richard Behers, pastor of First Baptist Church in Largo, Fla., and Alan Berry, minister of music and youth at Catawba Springs Baptist Church in Brewton, Ala.

First Baptist Church of Tusawilla is a 10-year-old congregation located on the outskirts of Winter Park.

The church has been featured in Growing Churches magazine for its ministry-based approach. It is one of 17 model "refuge" churches for Antioch Affection Ministries, a program for terminated ministers started by former Louisiana Baptist pastor Bob Anderson in 1996. In all it boasts 31 ongoing ministries, including teen pregnancy, preschool and child care and divorce recovery.

The article in the magazine's spring 2000 issue said the church registered more than 100 additions during Hoffman's first year as pastor. The 1998 Florida Baptist Convention annual reported the church's total membership at 241.

The convention's first vice president is a volunteer post that is elected each year.

Two convention vice presidents traditionally assist the president in presiding over the annual meeting. They also have an advisory role in selecting key denominational leaders. SBC bylaws give the convention's president authority to appoint the powerful Committee on Committees, which in turn nominates a Committee on Nominations. That group then recommends individuals to fill vacancies on the various governing boards of SBC board, agencies and institutions.

James Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church in Snellville, Ga., has announced he will be nominated as the convention's president and will likely be unopposed. Merritt would succeed current president Paige

Patterson, who has served two years and is ineligible for re-election. Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas, has said he plans to nominate Merritt, who is past chairman of the SBC Executive Committee.

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-- By ABP staff

Seminary launches distance-learning program

By Robert O'Brien

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond has announced plans to launch a new distance-education program, projecting five courses this fall and at least three more next spring.

The courses -- open to people with or without theological training -- combine online technology with interactive learning between faculty and students, said Jim Peak, who joined the Virginia seminary last year to launch and direct its Center for Distance Education.

Officials say the new program, made possible by a grant of \$806,821 from the Lilly Endowment, will begin Sept. 11. It will offer courses for academic credit or auditing and focus on bringing accredited education to ministers and laity, especially in smaller congregations.

"Distance education technology will allow us to bring our classroom to the church with an immediacy that hasn't been possible before," said Tom Graves, the seminary's president and professor of philosophy of religion. "In the past, theological education has been removed from the church. We want BTSR to be a frontline resource for congregations."

Officials said the new program will serve at least four groups: (1) church staff with little or no theological education; (2) church staff with theological education who need continuing education; (3) upper-level undergraduate students considering graduate-level theological education; and (4) laity who want to enroll for personal enrichment.

Seminary faculty will focus on four ways of teaching regular curriculum courses to students separated by time and location from the Richmond campus. They include courses taught: (1) on location with such partners as churches, associations, colleges and denominational offices; (2) at those locations via the Internet in group settings; (3) via video conferencing; and (4) via the Internet to persons using personal computers and Internet service providers.

"We've based our program on continuing research to determine the characteristics and needs of persons in ministry and how to help them fulfill their calling through spiritual, theological and leadership development," Peak said.

The Center for Distance Education has already established partnerships with a variety of churches, colleges and organizations and will seek more as the program develops, he said.

Partners thus far include at least two Baptist colleges (Averett College in Danville, Va., and Chowan College in Murfreesboro, N.C.); at least three Baptist churches; and the Virginia Baptist Mission Board and its Center for Creative Church Leadership Development.

The Virginia Baptist Mission Board, also based in Richmond, is developing its own distance-education program as well. It will be aimed primarily at continuing education and professional development, said Robert Dale, center director and assistant executive director.

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Woman says faith in Christ helped beat eating disorder

By Stacey Hamby

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Stacy Ousley suffered 15 years from an illness she didn't even know she had.

It wasn't until she was 30 that she sought help for an eating disorder. At times both anorexic and bulimic, Ousley had successfully hidden her disorders from first her parents and then her husband.

Now 37, the Baptist woman who works as a personal trainer in Jefferson City, Mo., credits counseling and her faith with helping her control her condition.

"At age 15, I made a decision I was fat," Ousley, recalled in an interview. "I wanted to look as attractive as I thought other girls were."

She weighed 125 pounds then, but by the time she graduated from high school, she was down to 100.

"Being a sports person, I started running and continuing in sports to lose weight," she said. "From about 15 to 18, I basically starved myself, which is anorexia. I ate very little. I was 18 when I started bulimia - eating but purging my food."

Ousley said she realized at age 20 that she had an eating problem. But it wasn't until 10 years later, while she was in counseling and going through a divorce, that she talked about it for the first time.

"It was later that I learned that anorexia and bulimia are emotional disorders," she said. "The actions of not eating -- or purging -- are physical manifestations of an emotional disorder."

That realization alone, however, didn't produce any change. Ousley attributes her gradual progress against the chronic disease to her faith in Jesus Christ. Though she grew up in church and was baptized at 9, she said she didn't fully understand what it meant to be a Christian until she was an adult.

"I had gotten baptized because I believed in God, but that didn't save me," she said. "At age 27, I walked the aisle and got saved and baptized for real." Ousley is a member of Concord Baptist Church in Jefferson City.

Her salvation experience marked the turning point for her eating disorder. "I finally told my counselor about my problem because I was growing as a Christian, and I started to understand I didn't have to beat myself up for having a disorder," she said. "As I grew spiritually, [God] was able to convict me of it. I could get help."

"Probably the most difficult thing I've ever done in my life is to say, 'I've got this problem,'" Ousley said. "I was afraid if people found out I had an eating disorder, they would reject me. They didn't."

Once Ousley admitted to her problem, her counselor helped her learn to control it. "I still struggle with having an eating disorder," she confessed. "Just like I have to do things to stay fit physically, I have to do things to stay fit emotionally to keep the disorder from manifesting itself again."

Ousley said she continues to stay fit because for years, she has suffered chronic pain in her body, though doctors are puzzled as to the cause.

While undergoing physical therapy, she became interested in strength training. Today, as a certified health-fitness instructor through the American College of Sports Medicine, she is a personal trainer for the

YMCA in Jefferson City.

"I still have to manage my physical health and emotional health," she said. "I may be successful in coping every day, but I'm always in recovery.

"If I don't take care of myself emotionally, physically and spiritually, I'll be back where I was in 1992 - all broken down."

Ousley admitted she still has bad days in her efforts to control her disorder.

"I still have tendencies to binge eat," she said. "I have to stay strong spiritually through my prayer life. No. 1, God has to be my priority; I have to renew my heart and mind every day with truth. It's the deceit -- 'I'm not worthy, no one could love me, I'm inadequate' -- lies straight from hell -- that fuel this and other disorders."

Love and encouragement from Christian family and friends are key to helping her overcome her disorder, she said.

"Any doubt or difficulty I have, I can remember they're going to love me anyway. That's how God loves. Regardless of anything -- emotional problems, eating disorders, physical pain -- God loves me anyway. That's my hope. That's the best therapeutic advice I can give anybody."

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-- Photo available by request to Word and Way.

Sufferer offers warning signs of possible eating disorder

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Stacy Ousley offered the following signs that could mean a loved one has an eating disorder.

1. Isolation -- more frequent depressed moods.
2. Grades slip.
3. Eating habits change -- "Finicky, picky eating or moving the food around the plate instead of eating."
4. Obsessive about being fat when clearly he/she is not.
5. Obsessive about exercise.

What should you do if you suspect a loved one of having an eating disorder?

"Lovingly confront the child or spouse," Ousley said. "If somebody would have looked me straight in the eye and said their concerns, plus 'I love you too much to allow you to go through this and I want to help,' then I don't know if I would have jumped on the recovery bandwagon right then, but maybe sooner than I did. My whole fear was rejection, and if somebody said, 'I know you have this and I love you anyway,' it might have made a difference."

Places to call for help include:

Remuda Ranch Programs for Anorexia and Bulimia, 800-445-1900, www.remuda-ranch.com

Eating Disorders Awareness and Prevention, 800-931-2237, www.edap.org

National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, 847-831-3438, www.anad.org

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