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Should a recruiter help you find your next pastor?

By Marv Knox

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LEWISVILLE, Texas (ABP) – Can a headhunter replace a search committee?

Maybe not completely, but churches would do a better job of selecting ministers if they accepted outside help, David Lyons says.

That's why he founded MinisterSearch, a professional recruitment firm that specializes in helping churches find pastors and staff members who fit their needs.

Lyons, a lifelong Baptist and a corporate executive headhunter, got the idea for MinisterSearch when his brother-in-law, a minister, began talking about changing churches.

"I already understood what churches do to find staff. They ask the seminary for a list of resumes, talk to the staff of their association, ask other ministers for recommendations," he said. "And how does a minister look for a church? He activates his resume [with a seminary] and calls his buddies."

That's a disjointed process for finding God's will – for a church and for a minister, Lyons reasoned. It's also not very successful, he added, citing a couple of problems.

First is the long time required to fill most staff vacancies. "Church growth is inhibited, if not stopped, by a vacant position. A church often sees a decline in souls saved, and the vacancy often impacts the budget," Lyons said. "This particularly is acute if it's the senior pastor, but it also happens with other positions."

Second is the short tenure of many ministers, often as few as two to four years.

"We don't believe God calls a guy and soon 'uncalls' him," he noted. "Our goal is to help the candidate and the church discern the Holy Spirit's calling. We believe we haven't sensed the Spirit's call enough in the traditional search process. ...

"Are we searching most effectively for our ministers? No. We need a process to develop candidates, to find the top candidates and match them with the churches, so they'll minister more effectively and stay longer."

After praying and talking with pastors he respected, Lyons started MinisterSearch, based in Lewisville, Texas, in late 2001, utilizing a process he implemented in corporate executive recruitment.

A staff of eight workers place 1,000 to 1,200 calls each week. They network across the country and across denominational boundaries to maintain a database of ministers who are doing the most effective ministry and who might be interested in moving to another church.

MinisterSearch's recruiters store data in customized computer software, tracking such information as ministers' interests, skills, experience and geographical preferences for service.

They work on behalf of client churches, comparing church needs with candidate abilities. About 30 percent to 40 percent of MinisterSearch's open positions are with Baptist churches, Lyons said, noting Baptists comprise the largest denominational group of clients.

Before a MinisterSearch recruiter starts a candidate search, the recruiter spends time with church leaders.

"We go through a discovery process that can be extensive," Lyons said. "We get to know the pastor, staff and church leaders. We learn about the vacant position and why the previous staff member left. From Day 1, we want to ask the hard questions."

The MinisterSearch consultant works with the church to develop a job description and a candidate profile. Then that data, plus

intangibles such as "chemistry," are processed by the recruitment software to seek suitable candidates.

Typically, MinisterSearch's research compares the church profile with as many as 200 candidate profiles to provide a church with three to five possibilities whose skills and calling match the church's desires.

"A typical church may receive five to 20 resumes for a vacancy, and they pick the best candidate from that small list," Lyons said. "We don't support that concept. Too many candidates are overlooked. What we bring to the table is the ability to look more broadly."

"All too often, a church accepts whatever comes to them through the traditional means," added Greg Allen, MinisterSearch's director of consulting. "That is not the universe of possibilities."

"The top three or four candidates we provide will be better qualified than the church's best candidate," Lyons contended.

After the candidate profiles are provided to the church, MinisterSearch works with candidates and the church – either a staff member conducting the search or a search committee – through recruiting conversations, interviews and the calling process.

The MinisterSearch consultant can help mediate between the church and candidates, making certain all issues are discussed, Allen said. The most sensitive can be compensation, but MinisterSearch doesn't back away, understanding that disagreement over compensation often is a factor in short tenures.

A MinisterSearch consultant even may urge the church and a candidate discontinue discussions if the match doesn't seem right. "We'd rather stop the process than see a staff member get hired and leave in six months," Lyons said. "So if there's a reason to stop the process, let's stop it now."

The group also pledges not to provide churches with resumes of incompetent ministers. "We'll love them, but we won't recommend them to a church," Lyons noted.

About one fourth of MinisterSearch's searches are for senior pastors. When other staff members are sought, MinisterSearch encourages the pastor to be involved, even if a search committee is leading the process.

Churches pay for MinisterSearch's services, typically equivalent to 20 percent of a hired minister's first-year compensation.

Lyons and Allen say their method of recruiting ministers is at the front of a trend. "We want to be able to minister to the church, to bless the church," Lyons said. "Ten years from now, this will be a standard process."

That's true, said Todd Rhoades, president of ChurchStaffing.com, an Internet-based ministry-matching firm. "MinisterSearch is an up-and-coming thing," Rhoades said. "It's a huge possibility for churches to consider. Something like that would look very good to a lot of search committees."

MinisterSearch's website is www.ministersearch.com.



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More churches turn to Internet in search for ministers

By Marv Knox

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DALLAS (ABP) – For more and more churches and their ministers, a match made in heaven may have been launched in cyberspace.

Every day thousands of ministers log onto a constellation of Internet websites looking for a new church to serve – especially on Mondays. And with increasing frequency, church representatives also turn to the web, posting ministerial vacancies and sorting through potential candidate resumes.

Although these cybersearches may not totally replace more conventional means of finding ministers – such as tapping ministers' friendship networks and seminary placement services – they're definitely gaining ground.

For example, www.ChurchStaffing.com receives 2,500 to 3,000 unique visitors on weekdays and slightly fewer on weekends, said Todd Rhoades, president of the site, in Bryan, Ohio.

"We normally carry between 400 and 500 current job openings, which we try to keep as current as possible," Rhoades said. "And we currently have a little over 3,000 resumes on file."

That site also has partnered with Dallas-based Leadership Network to offer www.LeadNetChurchStaffing.com, which posts job listings for churches with attendance that averages 1,000 or more.

Even restricted to such large churches, the site relates to about 2,500 to 3,000 congregations nationwide, said Dave Travis, senior vice president for Leadership Network.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas hosts two free Internet-based search programs – www.CPIS.org serves churches of all sizes and ministers of all types, while www.bivocational.com specializes in bivocational ministers and smaller churches.

The www.CPIS.org site receives at least half a million accumulated hits per month. A hit counts every time any page on the website is accessed.

At www.bivocational.com, the link to its church/minister search program, Ministers' Connection, is the busiest place on the website, said Bob Ray, director of bivocational/smaller church development.

The ministers who operate the websites – and almost without exception, the websites are run by people who have served in church or denominational ministry positions – cite several reasons for the popularity of Internet ministry searches:

– Good matches.

"We hope www.CPIS.org will help search committees find ministers who match their church preferences. And we hope they have longer tenures because of it," said Ed Hale, director of the Church and Membership Resourcing Center for the Texas convention.

"As a director of missions, I found very little help for churches who wanted to do their own research and find the right match. The www.CPIS.org website helps get them started in like-mindedness."

The www.CPIS.org website allows a church to complete a form that filters resumes for various preferences and priorities and provides the church confidential profiles of four or five possible matches. Then the church can request resumes on selected candidates. Next, the selected ministers receive automated e-mails that describe the church's profile, including its identity. If the ministers want to proceed, they tell the website to release their resumes to the church. And then the church can contact the ministers it wants to interview.

The process maintains a minister's confidentiality until he or she is ready to be identified, Hale noted. But it allows both the church and minister to gain quite a bit of information about each other so they can begin to determine if they would work well

together.

That's important, added Rhoades. The www.ChurchStaffing.com site enables churches and ministers to sort through variables such as denomination, church size, type of ministry, worship style and other topics that help both parties learn if they're a good match.

"We tell churches to be specific, or they'll get inundated with resumes," he said. The site is not exclusive to any denomination, and ministers can send their resumes to any church listed on the site.

– Speed.

"We've gotten to the point where church staffing takes longer and longer. This shortens the process," Travis reported. That factor is tied to the availability of information, both for the candidates and the churches, so they can find each other more quickly, website operators said.

For example, www.ChurchStaffing.com and its www.LeadNetChurchStaffing.com affiliate send out weekly e-mails of new church postings, Rhoades and Travis said. The paid smaller-church listings reach more than 22,000 pastors.

The quick turn-around of information makes a difference for churches.

"In our own church family, we were looking for a bivocational assistant pastor/youth minister," Ray said. "We put the position on the website on Thursday or Friday and got a call the next Monday. He already had read about our church and driven over to look at our facility. We hired him in two weeks."

That pace is common for website searches, Hale added.

– Internet possibilities.

The web offers many options for both churches and ministers that previously weren't available, Travis noted.

"The ubiquity of the Internet broadens the search across the country" for both candidates and congregations, he explained. For example, classified ads reach only the people who read a newspaper, but the web-based search programs are available to everyone on the Internet.

"Instantaneous communications brings the whole country down to the click" of a computer mouse, Rhoades said.

Also, the Internet allows ministers to explore options anonymously, Travis added. "No one has to know" the minister is looking for another church.

Plus, the Internet is convenient for ministers who don't have the time or resources to conduct a traditional search, several operators said.

That helps explain why bivocational ministers adapted to web-based searches more quickly than others, said Jan Daehnert, director of minister/church relations for the Texas convention, whose office doesn't operate a site but works closely with www.CPIS.org and www.bivocational.com.

"Bivocationals are used to networking, and because of their jobs, they don't have much free time," Daehnert said. "Plus, many of them, through their jobs, quickly became familiar with computers and the possibilities of the Internet. So searching for jobs on the web was a natural."

That makes sense, added Ray, who noted the minister-search feature has been on www.bivocational.com "almost since the website went up – [more than] five years."

– Change.

"We've seen changes in churches and structures the past 10 years," Rhoades said. "Both staff and churches, the way the

trend is going, don't have brand loyalty. So, Nazarene churches are now open to hiring outside their denomination, and Nazarene pastors are open to pastoring outside their conference."

"At large churches in particular, denominational identity is lost or faded," Travis agreed. "Churches are willing to look beyond their traditions for ministers." That's especially true for ministerial staff roles besides senior pastor, he said.

And while the BGCT may not be receiving many ministers who come from other denominations, "I can name plenty of United Methodist and Bible churches whose staff were former Baptists in Texas," he said. "There's more of an open labor market."

– Finances.

"Hard costs," such as salary and moving expenses, and "soft costs," such as morale, lost time and wasted productivity, are incredibly high when a church calls a minister who doesn't work out, Travis said.

"It costs at least \$100,000 to make a bad hire," he estimated. "So, churches are more willing to pay the costs" of fee-based web services, such as www.LeadNetChurchStaffing.com, www.ChurchStaffing.com, www.christianplacements.com and others.

Although the Internet-based services can make minister searches more efficient, "that does not negate the search responsibility," Travis said, noting search committees or church staff assigned to conduct searches must work thoroughly.

Most of the websites offer resources to aid the search, such as compensation studies, sample job descriptions and letters, advice on background checks and workbooks to guide the whole process.

For churches, these websites and the resources they offer could help prevent a match apparently made in heaven from winding up in a very different place.

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Denver Baptist school stirs controversy over participation in voucher program

By Robert Marus

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WASHINGTON (ABP) – A theoretical problem that school-voucher advocates and opponents have argued about for years may have become reality in Denver.

Significant public controversy developed in Denver in late October after a Baptist school with a policy of expelling gay students applied to become part of a new publicly funded voucher program.

The Denver Public Schools and the school district in neighboring Jefferson County initially rejected the application of Silver State Baptist School in Lakewood, Colo., to participate in a new voucher program established by the state legislature. The program provides scholarships to students in poorly performing public schools who want to attend private schools, including religious ones.

However, the legislation creating the program allows school districts to deny participation to any school that "teaches hatred" of any group.

At issue was a school policy that lists "premarital sex, homosexuality and sexual perversion" as grounds for a student's expulsion. Public school officials in Denver were quoted in local news outlets as saying the policy constitutes hatred of gays and lesbians.

School officials cited the policy when denying Silver State the right to participate in the program in late October. However, a few days later, Denver officials accepted the school into the program after the school changed wording on its application and its disciplinary code.

The code now reads, "Premarital sex and sexual perversion, between opposite and/or same sex students, will constitute grounds for disciplinary action, including suspension or expulsion."

The new wording means "the school isn't singling out a group of students – homosexuals – as the first, original application did," said Tanya Caughey, a Denver Public Schools spokesperson.

However, the school's principal said the policy's thrust won't change. "That hasn't changed, nor will it change in the future," Rodolfo Gomez said in a phone interview with Associated Baptist Press. "Our board is in the process of evaluating our policy to make sure that it is strongly, clearly written to present a biblical position."

Gomez declined to say what the school would do if it discovered a student was gay but not necessarily sexually active. He noted the policy is unfinished. He also said the school in nearly 40 years of existence has never had to deal with the issue of an openly gay student.

Opponents of government money for parochial schools and other religious organizations have long argued that government funding would inevitably lead to excessive government regulation of such organizations, thus compromising their religious freedom. "As more voucher money becomes available, more religious schools will come to rely on it," said the Freedom Forum's Charles Haynes in a Nov. 3 column on the Denver controversy. "And as reliance on government aid goes up, religious liberty goes down."

Last year, a closely divided Supreme Court declared that a Cleveland school voucher plan including religious schools did not violate the Constitution's ban on government support for religion. The Cleveland program also contained language banning participating schools from "teaching hatred of any person or group."

In the dissenting opinion to that case, authored by Justice David Souter and joined by three of his colleagues, Souter argued that the "teaching hatred" ban in the program "could be understood (or subsequently broadened) to prohibit religions from teaching traditionally legitimate articles of faith as to the error, sinfulness or ignorance of others, if they want government money for their schools."

Clergy form political group to challenge Right's agenda

By Robert Marus

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WASHINGTON (ABP) – Progressive and moderate religious leaders have formed a new group to challenge what they view as the Religious Right's dominance of public debates about political and social issues.

A group of rabbis and ministers formally launched the Clergy Leadership Network with a Nov. 21 press conference in Washington. The group is constituted as a Section 527 organization under the federal tax code. Such groups – particularly those with Democratic-leaning agendas – have proliferated in recent years as a result of new campaign-finance laws.

As a 527, the Clergy Leadership Network will have more latitude than most political action committees or religious groups. While it cannot directly endorse political candidates, it can receive unlimited donations from individuals, organizations and corporations, and can spend substantial portions of its income on things like political advocacy and "issues ads" in media outlets.

"That category allows us to move beyond non-partisanship," Albert Pennybacker, president of the group's board, told reporters. Pennybacker, a Disciples of Christ minister from Lexington, Ky., is a former public-policy official with the National Council of Churches.

The group will have to report its donors and expenditures to the Internal Revenue Service and the Federal Elections Commission. The group has no formal ties to any political party, although it has leased office space on Capitol Hill across the street from the Democratic National Committee's headquarters.

Pennybacker said he and the other ministers and rabbis who are the group's founding members believe that now is a crucial time for religious moderates and liberals to speak out on public policy issues. "We are deeply concerned about the well-being of our country," he said.

The organization's mission statement also says its members "are committed to sweeping changes – changes in our nation's political leadership and changes in failing public policies."

Pennybacker said the network's three main areas of advocacy and concern will be economic justice, child welfare and the "unilateral foreign policy that we've been pursuing" in the United States. Additionally, the group will advocate for separation of church and state.

Founding member James Dunn, who also spoke at the conference, said one of his goals for the group would be to provide a religious view to the media that differs from the voices of extremists on the left and right, which he described as a kind of "Manichean dualism."

Dunn, the retired executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, also decried the Bush administration's agenda on public funding for religious charities and schools. "Our religious freedom is denied when we are compelled to pay taxes for religious institutions," he said.

Besides Dunn, the organization's committee of founders includes at least six other Baptists: Jimmy Allen, the Southern Baptist Convention's last moderate president and former pastor of the First Baptist Church of San Antonio; Charles Adams, pastor of Detroit's Hartford Memorial Baptist Church; Jesse Jackson of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition; Joan Brown Campbell, former general secretary of the National Council of Churches; Bob Maddox, pastor of Briggs Memorial Baptist Church in Bethesda, Md., and editor of the Capital Baptist, the District of Columbia Baptist Convention's newspaper; and Otis Moss, pastor of Olivet Institutional Baptist Church in Cleveland.

Several religious groups in Washington – such as the Interfaith Alliance – already support progressive causes. Others, such as the Baptist Joint Committee, advocate for religious freedom and church-state separation. But Pennybacker said the Clergy Leadership Network's unique tax status, as well as the fact that it is composed of individual clergy members rather than denominational groups, sets it apart.

Pennybacker said the network is aiming for a budget of between \$300,000 and \$400,000 in the first year. He declined to say if

any individuals or groups had provided large start-up gifts to the group, but Pennybacker later said he had spoken to some potential large donors. "If we're going to be successful, then we're going to have to have more funding," he said.

Pennybacker also said the network would avoid being "drawn into" debates on divisive issues such as abortion and homosexuality.

But Marjorie Signer, director of communications for the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, questioned that policy. "How can they truly address what the Bush administration has so successfully used to rally the extreme right?" she asked. "Can they be effective, or are they undermining themselves?" asked Signer, who attended the press conference.

Interfaith Alliance President Welton Gaddy, a Baptist pastor, criticized the council's aim to get more involved in partisan politics. "I am always troubled when religious organizations – whether from the right, the left, or the center – jump directly into the partisan political fray," Gaddy said in a statement released shortly after the press conference. "With such involvement inevitably comes the serious risk of compromising the integrity of religion and the vitality of the democratic process."

Gaddy also said the use of 527 organizations for religious purposes is troubling, because many campaign-law experts view the groups as "not-so-subtle means of bypassing recent campaign finance regulations." Gaddy's organization has strongly opposed recent attempts by conservative legislators and religious groups to change federal tax laws so that churches and other religious groups may endorse political parties and candidates while retaining their tax-exempt status.

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Rankin, trustees answer charges IMB not conservative enough

By Mark Wingfield

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LEXINGTON, Ky. (ABP) – In response to criticism from a seminary missions professor, the president and trustees of the International Mission Board defended the agency's actions and insisted its mission will not be "compromised."

A paper written by Keith Eitel of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and mailed to IMB trustees by Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, drew a strong response from IMB President Jerry Rankin.

Although Rankin and his critics all support the conservative movement that has risen to power in the Southern Baptist Convention, Rankin has found himself defending the IMB against charges it is not conservative enough.

In the paper, Eitel accuses Rankin and other IMB administrators of failing to be doctrinally stringent enough. He specifically cites concerns about partnerships with other Great Commission Christian groups that require lesser doctrinal adherence and the role of women in missions leadership.

During a Nov. 10-12 meeting in Lexington, Ky., IMB trustees adopted two statements in response to the Eitel paper.

The first statement, which was adopted without discussion or dissent, affirmed "the strategies and leadership" of the board and resolved "to review the concerns and the issues raised and take appropriate action to guarantee that the vision to lead Southern Baptists to reach the world for Christ is not compromised."

The second statement, also adopted unanimously, affirmed an initiative by Rankin to arrange for a meeting of IMB staff and trustees with Eitel and Patterson "to resolve misunderstandings and perceptions communicated in Eitel's assessment of the International Mission Board vision and strategy."

Rankin said he would write Patterson "to seek an explanation as to why he would cast aspersion on our board relative to the conservative resurgence." Trustees of the IMB are "God-fearing, Bible-believing men and women, products of the conservative resurgence within our convention," Rankin declared. Yet, "our staunch embracing of and adherence to the Baptist Faith and Message is not considered adequate from your perspective."

A letter from Rankin to Eitel countered the criticisms as "unfounded" and questioned why they were circulated without first coming to the board's leadership for a response.

Rankin acknowledged in the letter, however, that he was pleased finally to learn "the source of rumors that have plagued the IMB in recent years."

He said "myths" about the IMB have been perpetuated by the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Mainstream Baptists, Texan David Currie and employees of Southeastern Seminary.

"I had wondered why so much criticism of our program and policies, disrespect of leadership and even threatened litigation was being generated by students from Southeastern," Rankin told Eitel. Another memo written by Eitel to an IMB staff member "clearly indicates that they were being programmed to hear certain distortions out of context and encouraged to engage in a subversive response."

Eitel's criticisms have endangered collaborative efforts between Southeastern Seminary and the IMB, Rankin said. "It is hard to see how we can continue such a partnership when disrespect for leadership and policies is being nurtured, non-biblical subversive behavior is encouraged and blatant disregard for truth is propagated."

In the seven-page letter, Rankin countered point-by-point each of Eitel's criticisms.

He denied the IMB is placing less emphasis on theological training for mission workers, as Eitel suggested. He insisted on the importance of using short-term volunteers in contemporary missions work. He defended the training techniques and staff of the Missionary Learning Center. And he defended partnerships with other Great Commission Christians as a paradigm shift

"that has been blessed of God to enhance unprecedented impact on a lost world."

"The reality is that many of these Great Commission Christians are far more conservative in their doctrine than Southern Baptists have been and would not have accepted us into partnership with them until recent years."

Rankin also defended the role of women in mission leadership.

"We fully recognize the biblical limitation of women holding a church office, such as pastor, that clearly represents spiritual authority in a local congregation," Rankin said. "However, to extrapolate that limited application to deny women the freedom to practice their giftedness and calling as a part of a team seeking to reach a segment of the lost world goes beyond biblical teaching."

In other action, IMB trustees adopted a trimmed-back \$258.9 million budget for 2004, elected a new executive vice president and appointed 67 new workers for service in 29 countries.

They also heard a five-year evaluation of the "New Directions" emphasis that shifted the board's missions focus from geographical countries to ethno-linguistic people groups. A trustee committee compiled the information from a survey of overseas personnel.

Now called "Strategic Directions for the 21st Century," or SD-21 for short, the emphasis organized missionaries into teams focused on specific people groups, with a goal of sparking church-starting movements and taking the gospel to those previously neglected by Christian missions efforts.

The survey found:

- The number of people groups engaged by IMB personnel has more than doubled to 1,371.
- Seven church-starting movements have been confirmed and 42 others reported.
- A 29 percent growth in the IMB missionary force over the past five years is the greatest in board history.
- The focus on multiplying churches within people groups has resulted in an increase of almost 71 percent in the number of churches worldwide, a 95 percent increase in the number of outreach groups and the baptism of more than 1.8 million believers.

The research also identified concerns about supervision and training of strategy coordinators.

The IMB's 2004 budget cuts almost \$20 million in operating expenses from the current year's spending plan. Additional budget funds are allocated to capital needs that will not be spent unless funds are received. The financial plan also sets a Lottie Moon Challenge budget of \$17 million.

The plan anticipates receiving \$96.2 million through the Cooperative Program unified budget and \$133 million through the 2003 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. It also projects \$16.4 million from investment income.

To protect missionary outreach from budget cuts, the financial plan reduces stateside spending by 14 percent and overseas spending by 2.12 percent. The budget includes no salary increases for missionary personnel or stateside employees.

Trustees elected veteran missionary and administrator Clyde Meador to fill the executive vice president's position vacated by the resignation of John White in June.

Meador, an Arkansas native who grew up in New Mexico, and his wife, Elaine, were appointed to missionary service in 1974. He served as a general evangelist, theological teacher and mission administrator in Indonesia before accepting leadership of a team of itinerant missionaries that looked for opportunities to share the gospel in countries closed to traditional missionary presence.

- With additional reporting by Mark Kelly of the IMB

Gregory says preachers need to hear 'quiet desperation' of listeners' lives

By Trennis Henderson

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) – He once was considered by many the best preacher in the country. But it wasn't until he fell from that pinnacle and began selling funeral services door to door that Joel Gregory says he learned "that most people are living a life of quiet desperation and marginal existence."

"I found out what I didn't know, and that is most people are barely making it. It has changed my preaching and my life."

"It's a pitiful thing to confess that I spent 25 years preaching not really understanding that I was preaching into people's battles," said Gregory, former pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas. "I'd like to go back and undo and redo some preaching in that regard."

"I used to look at people as the same kind of driven overachievers that I was," Gregory said during a one-day preaching seminar at Broadway Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky. "I came to find out that most people are barely making it and life is a daily battle for basics."

Urging pastors to "blow the trumpet" in the pulpit, Gregory cited Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 14:8: "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare for battle?"

Noting that he began preaching at age 16, Gregory said that over the years he has viewed preaching as everything from an intellectual exercise in exegesis to an esthetic art form to an oratorical performance.

"We preach in the middle of a battle," he declared, "and if we don't understand that, it diminishes our understanding and it turns us into homiletical dwarfs, ministerial midgets, Lilliputians of the library. Preaching blows the trumpet in the middle of the battle."

Gregory abruptly walked away from his high-profile position as pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas more than a decade ago. In recent years, he gradually has returned to the pulpit from his self-imposed exile. During the Oct. 27 preaching workshop, sponsored by Georgetown College, Gregory recounted both the public prominence and private pain he experienced.

Recalling his acclaimed sermon at the 1988 Southern Baptist Convention and his 1990 call as pastor of the Dallas church – both while he was in his early 40s – Gregory noted: "Very few people in Baptist life ever got more promoted or over-promoted than I was until I walked out of what had once been the strongest Protestant church in American history after resigning on a Wednesday night."

In news reports at the time, Gregory cited a power conflict with longtime and legendary senior pastor W. A. Criswell. "The ultimate agenda is the prolonging of the incumbent's ministry rather than the enabling of the new pastor's," Gregory told the congregation at the time. "In light of these circumstances, I immediately and irrevocably submit my resignation."

"I had been elevated from one level to the next but suddenly, by my own volition, I went from notoriety to anonymity," he told workshop participants. "I went from a national television presence to hiding in a little apartment in Fort Worth. I went from preaching in George Truett's pulpit to selling funerals door to door."

Gregory, who also went through a divorce the next year, chronicled the ups and downs of his life and ministry in the 1994 book, "Too Great a Temptation: The Seductive Power of America's Super Church." During the past few years, he has been involved in magazine publishing and has begun leading preaching seminars throughout the nation.

In addition to addressing individuals' battles, Gregory said, "we are preaching today in the battle for the soul of the church."

"What is the church going to be?" he asked. "Are we simply going to pander to the most popular way to give people whatever they want just as long as we can get a crowd? ... Somewhere in between the church that simply reflects the norms of contemporary culture and the church that reacts by entrenching in a denomination that is gone and will never come back, we

need to blow the trumpet with an authentic canonical word."

The nation also is in a battle, Gregory emphasized. "I think that preaching post-9/11 cannot be the same," he said. "I believe a day will come when people will not want to know the pabulum of the talking heads on CNN or the fiction of Fox network or the latest insight of Dr. Phil. We may be in a world where they will turn back in a last gasp of secularism and say, 'Is there a word from God?'"

Noting that the trumpet has changed little as a musical instrument over the centuries, Gregory said, "There also is a changeless quality in authentic preaching. ... Don't trade your trumpet in for the kazoo of pop culture or for the tin whistle of pulpit entertainment or for the turkey call of mere human observations."

Other qualities of a trumpet – and authentic preaching – are that it is a solo instrument, a penetrating instrument and a wind instrument, Gregory said.

"Trumpets make no sounds by themselves," he pointed out. "It's only a piece of metal silent, mute, unmusical. It is only the blowing of wind through a trumpet that makes its sound."

"So also is preaching," he explained. "There is an element of mystery in preaching that is deeper to me than it's ever been. Absent the breath of the Spirit, I am nothing but a trumpet on the table. ... I wish I had known that so much earlier in my own ministerial life and career."

Citing his increasing opportunities to preach, teach and lead preaching seminars, Gregory said, "Once you really take up the trumpet, you can't put it down."

"I tried to put it down. I wanted to put it down. In fact, others have even tried to take it away from me and have said, 'Don't pick it up again.'

"I am painfully aware that I have stumbled with the trumpet," he concluded, "but I still haven't put it down until the day is done and the race is run."



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In this Souper Bowl, the hungry are winners

By Marv Knox

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HOUSTON (ABP) – No matter who competes in the next Super Bowl, youth from across the country are drawing up a game plan to make sure hungry people win on Super Bowl Sunday.

They're preparing to participate in the Souper Bowl of Caring. On Super Bowl Sunday, Feb. 1, they'll stand outside their sanctuaries collecting money in soup pots. The donations will support food pantries, soup kitchens and other charities in the communities where they live.

The Souper Bowl of Caring started in 1990 as a "grassroots faith-based crusade against hunger," explained Brad Smith, the organization's founder and executive director.

"The Souper Bowl is the fruit of a single line of a prayer, 'Lord, even as we enjoy the Super Bowl football game, help us be mindful of those who are without a bowl of soup to eat,'" Smith recalled.

The prayer resonated with senior high students at Spring Valley Presbyterian Church in Columbia, S.C., where Smith was youth minister. They decided to collect money for a local hunger-relief ministry. Later they recruited other youth groups to join them.

Since the Souper Bowl began, youth have raised more than \$20 million. Last season, when the Tampa Bay Buccaneers defeated the Oakland Raiders, more than 12,000 youth groups – from churches, schools and other organizations – in all 50 states and some other countries raised \$3.5 million.

This season, Souper Bowl organizers hope to involve more than 15,000 youth groups.

Participating youth groups ask members of their churches to contribute one dollar to the Souper Bowl as they leave church on Super Sunday, Smith explained.

The young people hold soup pots at church exits and receive donations from worshipers. Then they send all the money directly to a local soup kitchen, food pantry or other charity they choose.

Souper Bowl leaders tabulate national totals as all the groups report their receipts by calling (800) 358-7687 or via www.souperbowl.org on Super Bowl Sunday.

In addition to the collections, many youth groups participate in a "service blitz" by working directly in a local charity on the Saturday before the big game, Smith added. Last season, 10,000 young people from 650 groups participated in the service project.

The Souper Bowl of Caring kicked off this season's campaign prior to a Houston Texans home game at Reliant Stadium, site of Super Bowl XXXVIII.

Bob and Janice McNair, owners of the Texans and honorary chairs for the 2004 Souper Bowl, dropped the first dollars into a soup pot to encourage youth throughout the country to join the effort.

Former President George Bush and his wife, Barbara, joined the McNairs on the field for the official kickoff.

Outside the stadium, young people from Southeast Texas collected almost \$1,200 for the Houston Food Bank.



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