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Trustees approve Mohler  
as Southern's new president

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
3/29/93

ATLANTA (BP)--R. Albert Mohler Jr., a 33-year-old conservative theologian and Baptist editor, was approved by trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary March 26 as the next president of one of the key institutions in Southern Baptist life.

Mohler, editor of Georgia Baptist's Christian Index newsjournal since 1989, received a 46-5 vote from seminary trustees during a special March 25-26 closed meeting at the Atlanta Airport Marriott hotel.

As successor to Roy L. Honeycutt, Mohler will become the seminary's ninth president since its 1859 founding -- and the fourth to assume its leadership while in his 30s.

Honeycutt, 66, Southern's president since 1982, has now set July 31 for his retirement, with Mohler to assume office Aug. 1, the start of the seminary's new academic and financial year. Trustee chairman Wayne Allen declined to state the terms of Mohler's salary package.

Mohler has earned two degrees from Southern, the master of divinity in 1983 and the doctor of philosophy, specializing in systematic theology, in 1989. He worked under Honeycutt as coordinator of foundation support from 1983-87 and director of capital funding from 1987-89.

Southern has 3,000 students; a full-time faculty of 74; and a full-time staff of 250.

Honeycutt, in a statement released after Mohler's election, said: "Dr. Mohler brings to the presidency the fidelity of an alumnus, a limitless love for the seminary, an exceptional awareness of its heritage, the intellectual excellence of a distinguished doctorate in theology from Southern Seminary, a sensitivity to the changing patterns of denominational life and personal qualities necessary for effective relationships with friends who support the seminary. I wish him well as he incarnates the seminary's distinctives in his vision for the future."

Honeycutt was not present during the trustees' deliberations.

Mohler, in a brief news conference after the vote, said, "The denomination is looking to Southern Seminary as a model institution for the future of the Southern Baptist Convention."

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He said he and the trustees are committed "to see Southern Seminary take the lead in terms of the theological renewal which must come to this people of God" and in "accepting and meeting the incredible mission and ministry challenges God has given us at the threshold of a new century."

"It would be my hope and intention to serve Southern Seminary so long as God gives me strength and length of days until the job is done," Mohler said. Of his age, he said, "I neither regret my age nor apologize for it."

"I would hope for my presidency to be measured by how effectively the seminary has accomplished its task, how consistently the seminary has maintained its witness and how honorably it has conducted its affairs," he said, adding, "That's what I would hope Southern Baptists would expect from Southern Seminary and its president."

Mohler voiced plans for "reaching the constituencies of the seminary and bringing them into the process of nurturing a new vision for the seminary as it anticipates the 21st century. And the most important constituency," he said, "is the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention."

"We will move in a direction that is fully in keeping with the heritage and the stated commitments of the institution to the present," Mohler said, describing it as a direction "I am firmly convinced will be supported by the vast majority of Southern Baptists and their churches."

The academic excellence that has characterized the seminary since its founding "will be extended, expanded and enhanced in the coming years," Mohler pledged. He said Southern graduates will have "a strong background in the core classical disciplines ... theology, biblical studies, church history ... and cutting-edge competence in practical ministry."

"I am one of Southern Seminary's proudest sons," he said. "I owe that institution more than I could ever express or repay in a lifetime of service as president."

Allen, a pastor from suburban Memphis, Tenn., who also chaired the search committee that nominated Mohler, described the trustees' approval of Mohler as "an overwhelming vote."

Anyone who doubts Mohler's abilities, Allen said, "has not interviewed him or met him."

Mohler and his wife, Mary, have a daughter, Mary Katherine, 3, and a son, Christopher Albert, nearly 1.

Mohler's achievements as editor of Georgia Baptists' Christian Index include a comprehensive computerization and desktop publishing transition; new auditing procedures; improvements in the paper's financial health; and a graphic redesign, which won a first-place award from the Baptist Public Relations Association in 1991.

The paper was losing funds when Mohler arrived in 1989 but ended the last fiscal year (1992) with a budget surplus. Its board of directors cited the "excellent leadership" Mohler has given to the paper's financial performance during their January meeting. Steps toward the recovery included various cost reductions and purchasing changes.

As a theologian, Mohler is the general editor of "The Gods of the Age or the God of the Ages?: Essays by Carl F.H. Henry" to be released by Broadman Press and author of "Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth" to be released by Eerdmans, both later this year. He also has penned numerous articles for theological journals.

In denominational life, Mohler chaired the SBC Committee on Resolutions in 1992 and was a member of the committee the previous year.

Mohler is a native of Lakeland, Fla., who considers First Baptist Church of Pompano Beach his home church, where he was licensed to preach in 1978 and ordained to the ministry in 1982.

He graduated magna cum laude from Samford in 1980 and, as part of his doctoral work at Southern, studied at Oxford University in England and St. Meinrad School of Theology in Indiana.

He was pastor of Union Grove Baptist Church in Bedford, Ky., during five years of his studies at Southern.

The seven-member search committee announced Mohler's nomination Feb. 22 in a news conference in Nashville, prior to the SBC Executive Committee's February meeting. Allen, committee chairman and trustee chairman, said the committee received "a sense of God's will" sooner than expected after interviewing Mohler the week of Feb. 15. The committee also interviewed Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, and Timothy George, dean of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala. A fourth candidate, Bob R. Agee, president of Oklahoma Baptist University, withdrew from consideration after the four candidates' names were revealed in news media reports.

"We had not planned to reach a decision until early March," Allen recounted at the Feb. 22 news conference, "but we all had such a sense of God's leadership and a peace concerning God's will that we came to a unanimous decision on Friday afternoon."

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Mohler expresses devotion  
to Southern, conservatism

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press  
3/29/93

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--The president-elect of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary described himself as a theological conservative who has an intense love for the school he will lead.

At a news conference at the Louisville, Ky., seminary hours after his election by the school's trustees in Atlanta March 26, R. Albert Mohler Jr. said there is no inconsistency in his affection for the school and his general agreement with those who have led the Southern Baptist Convention on a more conservative course.

"I am at one with the call for change within the institutional life of the Southern Baptist Convention," said Mohler, who will succeed retiring President Roy L. Honeycutt Aug. 1. "That is not incompatible or inconsistent with my love for this institution. In fact, it is nourished by my love for this institution. I know the grandeur of its heritage. I know the excellence it has represented through the years."

The 33-year-old editor of The Christian Index, Georgia Baptists' weekly newsjournal, was elected in a special called meeting of the board by a 46-5 vote.

Mohler told reporters he accepted the presidency with "great awe and humility and absolute wonder, graced by a spirit of thankfulness." He pledged his unfailing devotion to the school, where he earned both the master of divinity and doctor of philosophy degrees.

"Southern Seminary has been for me the nourisher of calling, the equipper of service and the catalyst of dreams," said Mohler, who visited with seminary faculty, staff and students at a reception prior to the news conference. "I will be ever in her debt. A lifetime of service as president would be inadequate to repay the debt I owe this institution. I will serve her gladly and lovingly."

This presidential transition, as with any transition, represents change, Mohler said. "Not change for change sake, but change that will equip and propel Southern Seminary toward the progress and process of the future and its promise. Out of the greatness of her heritage and of her past, I call upon all those who love Southern Seminary to go with us and grow with us."

In response to questions, Mohler presented his views on a variety of subjects including:

-- Biblical inspiration. Mohler fully subscribes to biblical inerrancy. "It isn't the only word I would use of Scripture, but it is a necessary word for me to use of Scripture," he said.

-- Women in ministry. He interprets Scripture as prohibiting women serving as pastors. Yet he affirmed their right to serve in other ministerial roles and enroll in any degree program at the seminary.

-- Questions of prospective faculty. The trustees and the administration have a right to know where potential faculty members stand on abortion, homosexuality and other "issues of concern to the churches," he said.

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-- Experience. Mohler said his lack of teaching experience does not render him unqualified to be president. "If so, a good many people who are presidents of seminaries would not be so," he said. Yet he said he has been involved in academic writing and research and is "fully committed to the academic task."

-- Academic freedom. The Abstract of Principles, the seminary's confessional statement, sets the parameters on theological matters, Mohler said, adding all faculty have signed the document and expect to be evaluated by it. Students, he noted, do not have the same level of accountability as the faculty. "There has been no claim of absolute openness," Mohler said. "This is a pre-committed institution."

Mohler was introduced to reporters by board chairman W. Wayne Allen, a suburban Memphis, Tenn., pastor who also chaired the trustee presidential search committee. He praised Mohler's Christian commitment, his love of the seminary and his intellect. "I think he's the most brilliant man I've ever met," he said.

He described the process that led to Mohler's selection as "one of the deepest spiritual experiences of God's leadership and God's intervention that I ever experienced."

Near the conclusion of the news conference, Allen was asked why trustees went to the expense of calling a meeting just three weeks prior to its regularly scheduled board meeting and why the meeting was held in Atlanta instead of Louisville. The board needed sufficient time to thoroughly interview the next president, Allen said, noting that Mohler was interviewed for nearly nine hours over two days. The board could not possibly devote that much time to an interview during a regular board meeting, he said.

The election was held in Atlanta due to convenience of air travel to that city and so that trustees could do their work without interference, Allen said. The election of a president "is a trustee responsibility solely," he noted.

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Mohler's love for Southern  
evident at home, office

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press  
3/29/93

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--R. Albert Mohler Jr. left Southern Baptist Theological Seminary four years ago, but he never lost sight of his alma mater.

At his Atlanta home and office, water color paintings and pen-and-ink drawings of buildings at the Louisville, Ky., school dot the walls. On his office door at The Christian Index is a seminary poster. Outside his study at home hang portraits of the seminary's four founding professors. Inside, where most of his 4,500-volume library is kept, hangs a stained-glass depiction of the seminary logo. Portraits of Baptist heroes and prominent preachers and theologians line the walls.

Mohler, who will become the seminary's ninth president Aug. 1, traces his love affair with the school to his first visit to campus as a prospective student more than a dozen years ago. "I never had been there before, but it was like walking in a place and knowing instantly this is home," he said.

"As I considered my calling to the ministry nothing was more important to me than where I could receive the right preparation to be the kind of minister of the gospel that I believed God wanted and desired and called me to be."

At Southern, the magna cum laude graduate of Samford University excelled academically while earning the master of divinity and doctor of philosophy degrees. During his student career, he also served as a pastor and an assistant to the president as development staff member.

At Southern, Mohler found "the greatest opportunity I ever had in my life or ever expect to have to study the gospel, to study issues of Christian theology, to come to understand something more than I had ever understood about God's wisdom and God's revelation." He said he also developed many close friendships and learned to appreciate his denominational heritage.

In the 1980s, while Mohler was studying at Southern, the Southern Baptist Convention began its steady turn rightward on the theological spectrum. The SBC elected more conservative trustees who began to demand a more conservative course for the seminary. Mohler, self-described conservative evangelical, comes to his post with a mandate to move the seminary in a more conservative direction.

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Does he hope to balance his unabashed love for the seminary with the mandate for change? "A mandate to change the seminary must be rooted in love for the seminary, an appreciation for the seminary and a concern for the seminary," Mohler said. "This isn't the first time Southern Seminary has faced a mandate for change. It is one of those critical transitional moments in the life of the seminary." He sees three critical issues facing the school: 1) its ongoing effectiveness in training ministers; 2) its faithfulness "in handling and teaching the faith once delivered to all the saints"; and 3) its relationship to the life and work of the SBC.

A sense of calling motivates Mohler to take the helm of Southern Baptists' oldest institution in this transitional time, he said. "I can look back at my life and see how God has put me through a certain set of experiences that no human mind could have planned and given me those experiences as background and training." Moreover, he said God has given him a vision that the seminary "be all that it can be for the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention and the cause of Christ."

Mohler believes the school must be dually committed to its confessional stance and academic excellence. "First of all, the seminary's academic programs must be faithful to the gospel," he said. "We are not a neutral seminary. We are a confessional seminary." Secondly, the seminary "must have the very finest academic programs found anywhere in academia."

Yet the seminary must not pursue academic prestige "at the expense of evangelical faith," Mohler insisted. "That's not what Southern Baptists would expect. I trust that's not what students would expect. Southern Seminary's academic life will be nothing but enriched in the years to come. The commitment to academic excellence which formed Southern Seminary's heritage in 1859 will be nurtured, affirmed, embraced and strengthened in the years to come."

At 33, Mohler will be the fourth person to assume the presidency in his 30s. The others, James P. Boyce, E.Y. Mullins, and Duke K. McCall, had an "awesome opportunity" to guide the seminary over long tenures and through transitional times, Mohler said.

Youthfulness can also be an advantage in relating to students, Mohler said. "It hasn't been too many years since I lived in Whitsitt Hall and Mary (his wife) and I lived in Fuller Hall and Springdale Apartments. We know what life is like there. It gives me a sense of connectedness with the students that I hope will enable me to understand them better and for them to understand me more fully."

The Mohler presidency also will bring a lively new element to the president's home -- two pre-school children, Mary Katherine, 4, and Christopher Albert, 11 months. "There is nothing more precious to me on earth than my family," Mohler said.

As he looks to the future, Mohler sees challenges facing the seminary unrelated to its theological posture or denominational relationship. The seminary, he said, must adapt programs to meet the needs of an older student body, adjust academic programs to prepare ministers for service in today's churches and cope with financial limitations. These challenges are "not daunting, but they are significant," he said. He expressed confidence that Southern has the "tradition, resources and the will to deal with those challenges as they come."

Mohler looks toward the upcoming years with optimism: "My greatest hope for Southern Seminary is that it would be the most outstanding institution of theological education for the training of God-called ministers that the world has ever seen.

"I believe there is the opportunity at Southern Seminary to take an institution of internationally established greatness and to see it develop in ways the founders could never have dreamed in terms of breadth of opportunity." Yet the seminary's future must be rooted in the founders' vision for superb ministerial preparation in the context of the seminary's confessional statement, Mohler said. "In one sense it is back to the future, and in another sense it is onward to unparalleled opportunity."

HMB's Larry Lewis disagrees  
with Masonic critic's charges

By Martin King

ATLANTA (BP)--Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis has vehemently denied charges a study of Freemasonry conducted by the HMB interfaith witness department contradicts a report on Masonry approved by the mission agency's board of directors.

The allegation was made by Masonic critic Larry Holly, a Baptist layman and physician in Beaumont, Texas. In a letter addressed to HMB directors but faxed to the news media, Holly called for the board to "disclaim the study ... before the Southern Baptist Convention."

The Home Mission Board was directed at last summer's SBC to bring a "report with recommendation" concerning Masonry to the 1993 annual meeting in Houston, June 15-17. HMB directors approved such a report March 17 and received broad support from Masons and critics including Holly.

The six-page report documents numerous areas of both incompatibility and compatibility between Freemasonry and Christian and Southern Baptist doctrine, and it recommends: "... consistent with the doctrine of priesthood of the believer and the autonomy of the local church, membership in a Masonic Order be a matter of personal conscience."

The HMB interfaith witness department was directed to conduct a separate investigation of Freemasonry. The resulting 75-page study was completed and shared as information with HMB directors prior to finalization of their report.

Lewis said he is confused by Holly's most recent letter. "Dr. Holly expressed support for our report last week calling for it to be approved overwhelmingly and pledging to 'spend no more time on the matter.' Now, less than a week later, he is apparently calling for additional action by our board," Lewis said.

"Dr. Holly has applied his own interpretations to the two documents and then declared them to be contradictory. Although I disagree with his interpretations, that is not the issue ... the director's report is the issue. We have had nearly universal support for the report and continue to pray that Southern Baptists will approve it overwhelmingly.

"I think it is healthy for Southern Baptists to study and discuss this issue between now and the Southern Baptist Convention. But it does not serve any fruitful purpose for me to respond every time someone publicizes their own special interpretation of these documents. We provided Southern Baptists with what they asked for. I for one am willing to let them decide."

Holly, in his letter to HMB directors, said, "I had no intention of writing you again," but he noted some state Baptist newspapers had used a Baptist Press story summarizing the study and not a companion story on the directors' report.

Holly also charged the staff, by making the study available, is "driving for" its softer conclusions on Freemasonry than those in the report adopted by HMB directors.

Holly cited three options to the directors:

- 1) "Do nothing ..."
- 2) Add a disclaimer to the study that "it is not the Southern Baptist position, and it is not the position of the trustees of the HMB."
- 3) Stop the circulation of the study "and archive it as an interesting, but inaccurate and unacceptable, staff report."

Holly said either of the latter two matters could be handled by a mail ballot among HMB trustees.

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Art Toalston contributed to this report.

Worship, tears, laughter  
flow at missionary's funeral

By Ferrell Foster

HENDERSON, Ky. (BP)--There were both tears and laughter during the funeral of Kathy Lloyd at First Baptist Church in Henderson, Ky., March 27. But more than anything else, there was worship, with an evangelistic appeal given at the end.

Lloyd, a 37-year-old former Southern Baptist missionary to South Korea who died of cancer March 24, planned much of the service herself about a year ago.

Glen Flowers, Lloyd's cousin, preached from Philippians 2:5-11, which refers to the mind of Christ. "Kathy had that kind of mind," said Flowers, pastor of Oak Hill Baptist Church in Evansville, Ind., and a Foreign Mission Board trustee.

"She chose Jesus as Lord of her life," Flowers said, noting Lloyd wanted Jesus to be the Lord of everyone else's life as well.

"I beg to differ with those who say our prayers were not answered because she died," he said. "I think other people were more concerned about her death than Kathy was." For, he added, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

During her life, Lloyd apparently touched many other lives. More than 300 people attended the funeral, including five missionaries to South Korea, two former missionaries, a Foreign Mission Board administrator, two FMB trustees and a state Woman's Missionary Union director.

The effort people made to attend the funeral "gives added understanding of how important the life of Kathy Lloyd was to many of us," said Bill Patterson, Lloyd's pastor at First Baptist in Henderson. Her husband, Skip, is the church's minister of education and administration.

Lloyd's casket remained open throughout the service, but mourners were reminded that her body was only a "shell," that her spirit was now with the Lord. As a reminder of the life she had lived, a photograph showing her bright eyes and broad smile sat beside the casket, and a scrapbook was placed on the platform to be viewed by those who arrived early.

Patterson described Lloyd as an "extraordinary person, educated and articulate."

"She had a heart for missions," he continued. And that was expressed less than two weeks before her death, when she went to Virginia to give a missions speech even though she knew it might shorten her life.

"She flew to Virginia and back bound by a wheelchair but her heart unbound by the Lord Jesus," Patterson said.

Ellie Coursey, preschool director at the Henderson church, described Lloyd as a "magnificent lady."

Lloyd hoped "through her life and through her death God would be glorified," Coursey said. Then she added, using the "simple, yet sincere" words of a preschooler, "Thank you, God, for sending Kathy Lloyd our way."

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Peru's former vice president wants  
to train evangelicals for politics

Baptist Press  
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By Mary E. Speidel

LIMA, Peru (BP)--Carlos Garcia wants to use what he learned as Peru's second vice president to prepare other Peruvian evangelicals for future political service.

However, Garcia, a Peruvian Baptist, says he won't return to politics after his 20-month experience as one of the country's two elected vice presidents. "I'm totally out of politics now and am back in Christian ministry," Garcia told Baptist Press in a telephone interview from his home in Lima, Peru's capital.

Garcia, a former Baptist pastor in Peru and Colombia, will begin training for an evangelistic ministry to Peruvian executives he will start through Campus Crusade for Christ International. Also, Garcia and about a half dozen evangelical politicians in Peru are trying to organize an informal institute for training Peruvian Christians interested in political service.

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His brief political stint convinced him Peruvian evangelicals need more preparation for political service. "We (evangelicals) need more than enthusiasm (for politics). We need preparation, training and organization."

Garcia, also a lawyer, became interested in entering politics while working for eight years as a Peruvian national director of World Vision, a Christian relief organization.

He was elected Peru's second vice president in June 1990 on a ticket with presidential winner Alberto Fujimori, a Roman Catholic. About one-third of the congressional candidates on Fujimori's slate were evangelicals, who make up about 5 percent of Peru's population.

Garcia's five-year term was cut short after Fujimori dissolved Peru's constitution and disbanded Congress on April 5, 1992. Fujimori claimed that legislative and judicial corruption was hampering his efforts to revive Peru's economy and curb guerrilla violence. The president's action drew international criticism and prompted the United States to cut aid to Peru.

Garcia and First Vice President Maximo San Roman, who both publicly opposed Fujimori's decision, were forced to leave office early. In the days immediately after the president's self-imposed coup, more than half of the disbanded Congress named Garcia president of an opposition government since San Roman was out of the country.

For personal safety, Garcia sought political asylum at the Argentine embassy in Lima at the advice of legislators. When San Roman returned to Peru April 18, 1992, Garcia turned the resistance government over to him.

San Roman has remained a public critic of Fujimori, who continues to enjoy popular support in Peru despite international condemnation of his actions. But Garcia quietly returned to civilian life; he preaches regularly in Baptist and other evangelical churches in Peru and remains active in Peruvian Baptist work. He is a former president of the Evangelical Baptist Convention of Peru and of Peru's National Evangelical Council.

"It was good experience, but there was some frustration," said Garcia of his political service.

He has advice for other Peruvian evangelicals who aspire to be politicians: "First, be clear and strong in your Christian position, in your faith. Second, remember political position should be used to serve the people. Political power can be very dangerous; it can be used for good or for bad, depending on the values of the person (in power). Finally, a leader needs to understand the reality of the problems of his people."

As second vice president, Garcia wasn't given a specific job assignment and was "quietly left alone," according to some observers. Peru's second vice presidency is a "symbolic position" with no salary, Garcia explained. To make a difference, Garcia carved out his own niche in social services. Besides using government programs, he worked with international relief organizations, including church-related groups, to help Peru's poor citizens.

Garcia formed a nonprofit organization to undergird that work and to carry on its programs after he left office. The organization is called the Center for Cooperation, Action and Development, with a stateside counterpart called Cooperative Development for Latin America. It has helped to provide clothes, food, medicine, Bibles and other aid to Peruvians.

Peruvians face "a very difficult economic situation," Garcia noted. "The people are very patient. They wait and wait, thinking that maybe next month the economic situation will get better. They continue to wait," he said. He urged prayer for Peru's "economic and political situation."

A government austerity program has curbed inflation from an annual rate of about 8,000 percent in 1990 to 78 percent, according to news reports. Yet austerity measures have pushed about 5 million Peruvians into poverty; more than half of Peru's 22 million people reportedly live in poverty.

Meanwhile, Fujimori continues to govern alone with military support. In November he allowed election of an assembly charged with rewriting the constitution and serving as a temporary legislature. He has promised voters may approve constitutional amendments.

The president "is still very popular with the majority of Peruvians and enjoys the support of the newly elected congress. He seems to be very much in favor with the people," observed Larry Phillips of Central, S.C., Southern Baptist missionary in Peru.

However, Garcia said recent polls show while 61 percent of Peruvians support Fujimori, only about 30 percent support his economic program.

Fujimori has been praised for the work of his National Intelligence Service in the capture last fall of Abimael Guzman, founder of the Maoist guerrilla group "Shining Path." Still, rebel violence continues to rock Peru, although some observers say guerrilla activity has subsided in recent weeks.

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(BP) photo (vertical) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Outline available on SBCNet Newsroom.

Recovering alcoholic uses  
experience to help churches

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press  
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NASHVILLE (BP)--Johnny Jones is a recovering alcoholic.

That's the first thing he'll tell you when he comes to your church to train members in starting support group ministries.

Jones is project coordinator of LIFE Support resources produced by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's adult discipleship and family development department. LIFE Support resources provide group support ministry to people suffering from difficulties such as codependency, chemical dependency, abuse recovery, eating disorders, divorce recovery and grief.

While Jones acknowledges he hasn't had a drink in more than 15 years, he believes he'll be in recovery the rest of his life.

"I don't think you ever get out of recovery," said Jones, who was drinking from two to five fifths of bourbon a week when he prayed to God to take drinking out of his life.

"Because of 16 years of drinking and the emotional and spiritual damage I have done to my life, there are a lot of other issues God started working on then and is still working on today, and I have been in recovery the last 16 years," he said. "You can't drink as long as I did and not do damage spiritually and emotionally."

Jones tells his story because he believes empathy goes a long way in reaching others who are hurting.

Growing up in Thomasville, Ga., Jones said his life was no different than many others who were raised in a Christian home.

"I was raised in a Southern Baptist home," Jones said, noting he attended church regularly with his family. "My family was dysfunctional from the standpoint that there was no emotional nurture. I don't blame my parents. My mother's mother died when she was 4, so she never had a model of how a mother was suppose to be.

"And my father was out of that old era where you shake hands and that's it. They provided for all my physical and material needs; they just didn't know how to meet my emotional needs," he said.

So, while in high school, Jones said he began to look for emotional nurture in other places.

"When we have needs, we are going to go somewhere and get them met. I got them met in my peer group, and my peer group drank."

Jones said he began drinking to ease his emotional pain.

"Alcohol relieves the pain for a short while, but the problem is it takes more and more to ease the emotional pain. When you begin to sober up you have double pain," he said. "One is the emotional aspect begins to come back, and then you've also torn away at your self-esteem because of the drunkenness."

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Jones continued to drink through college and after he married.

"In the first four years of my marriage my drinking began to get steadily worse. Finally my wife came to me and said, 'Johnny, I think we need to get in the church.'

"And I agreed just to get her off my back."

As a school teacher, Jones was free during the summers, and a new youth minister at the church he was attending asked him to drive the church bus on youth trips. "He didn't know about my drinking problem."

At a Panama City Beach youth conference where he drove the young people one summer, Jones lingered at the door of the worship services "and God began to speak to me."

"On a Thursday night, I walked out of that chapel by myself and I said, 'God, if you'll take drinking out of my life, I'll go anywhere you want me to go, and I'll do anything you want me to do.'

"And I have not had a desire to drink since."

The difference between that night and the other times Jones promised God, church leaders and himself he would quit drinking is that "that youth minister said, 'Johnny, if you are going to walk with the Lord, you're going to have to be disciplined.'

"He took it upon himself to disciple me and to teach me how to get into God's Word, how to have quiet time and how to grow as a Christian."

Jones then went to seminary, became a pastor for 12 years and then moved to the Sunday School Board where he could use his experience with alcoholism and growing up in a dysfunctional family to help others like him.

"As I go out into conferences, the one thing I emphasize is that if you are going to enlist people in support group ministries, they need to have at least some experience with an addictive or compulsive background."

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Support group ministry  
a challenge to launch

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press  
3/29/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Beginning support group ministries in churches is not a simple and easy task, a project coordinator for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board said.

"You need to be sure in your church that this is the ministry God has called you to," Johnny Jones told a group attending an orientation in March of the board's LIFE Support materials. LIFE Support resources provide group support ministry to people suffering from difficulties such as codependency, chemical dependency, abuse recover, eating disorders, divorce recovery and grief.

Church leaders who take on the task of beginning support groups enter into a complicated ministry, said Jones, LIFE Support project coordinator in the board's adult discipleship and family development department. "When your church enters such a ministry, you create liability problems."

Jones said he was not referring to legal liabilities, but to problems that might be created in the social structure of the church.

"For example, a lady enters a support group for those who have been sexually abused. She acknowledges to the group she has been sexually abused by her father. And her father is a deacon of that church.

"That's what I'm talking about when I say (complicated) ministry," he said.

Consequently, pastors must lend full support to any type of support group ministry, Jones said. "You can't start this ministry without the pastor being for it."

Jones suggested if a person wants to start the ministry in their church, they should take a copy of the LIFE Support Leader's Handbook, which details how to start support group ministries, and a couple of the LIFE Support courses to the pastor "and lay it out in front of him."

Among the first LIFE Support courses to be offered are helps for low self-esteem, chemical abuse, dysfunctional families, codependency, sexual abuse and divorce recovery, he said.

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Reader feedback reshapes  
Church Recreation magazine

By Charles Willis

NASHVILLE (BP)--Both informal and formal research among users of "Church Recreation Magazine" has led to a total redesign of the only periodical of its kind in the publishing industry.

While the dramatically different cosmetic appearance of the July-August-September 1993 premiere issue may be the first indication to readers a change has been made, the content and format changes also are significant responses to user requests.

The redesigned product will be 60 pages each quarter with four-color design throughout, using what Lisa Wilson, Church Recreation editor, describes as "a flexible, creative format that will lead readers through the magazine."

Content will provide more emphasis on games, social recreation and administration topics. Other articles will cover family recreation, sports, wellness and fitness, retreats, camping, drama, puppetry, clowning, hobbies and crafts. Wilson said emphasis will be given to resources for the smaller membership church.

In a January 1992 report on the formal research project, Lewis Wingo, a research associate for the Baptist Sunday School Board, reported survey respondents were most interested in games, family recreation and social recreation.

Three sample groups of 100 persons each indicated a need for more detailed help in program planning in the areas of games, social recreation and family recreation. They also asked for more program and activity ideas for use with both senior adults and youth.

"Our goal is to provide Christians the opportunity to be involved in recreation and to bring their friends into the church body through recreation," Wilson said. "Our involvement in that is to bring recreation with a goal of outreach. We want to win more than games."

Among article titles in the first issue are "The best of indoor games," "Field of Screams (Wet, messy, dirty games from across the country)," "Swinging door relay and steppin' out," "Does anyone train youth ministers to take youth on trips?" "Things the perfect recreation minister never does" and "Reaching out to the serious athlete."

Other first-issue topics deal with wellness and fitness for seniors, starting a puppet ministry, family recreation, drama, camping, crafts and a section of material to clip and copy. Wilson said the issue will provide more than 250 ideas for readers.

Church Recreation may be obtained by calling the Sunday School Board at 1-800-458-BSSB.

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