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March 23, 1994

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ST. LOUIS -- Church helped Haitians build a spiritual home in St. Louis; photo.

Ministers sometimes must get help before helping others, leaders say By Chip Alford

EULESS, Texas (BP)--Before he began dealing with the problems from his past, Texas pastor Tim Sledge said he sometimes used his weekly sermons as an opportunity to "dump" his own shame on his congregation.

"The surprising thing is, people would come up to me afterward and thank me. It was if they were saying, 'Thank you, I haven't had a good dose of shame all week. I was about to run out,'" Sledge, pastor of Kingsland Baptist Church in Katy and author of the LIFE Support Group Series course "Making Peace With Your Past," recalled with more than a little irony is his voice.

The son of an alcoholic father, Sledge grew up in a dysfunctional family where the expression of emotions and feelings were squelched. Discussing the sometimes-embarrassing actions of his father was not an option and, as a result, Sledge developed an unhealthy sense of shame which impacted his own feelings of self-worth and his relationships with others.

It also impacted his ministry.

"I started preaching when I was 16," Sledge told participants in a March 18 seminar held during the Recovery and Spiritual Awakening national conference at First Baptist Church in Euless, Texas. "I was the 'hero' and everybody told me how mature I was for my age.

"But my maturity was premature and it wasn't healthy," he said, adding one of the signs of dysfunction in families is when children begin acting like adults and adults begin acting like children.

As an adult, Sledge began to have panic attacks. He then reached out for help and began a lifelong journey toward recovery.

When it comes to pain caused by traumatic events from the past, Sledge knows he is not alone in the ministry.

"I believe a very high percentage of ministers come from dysfunctional families," he said, adding many suffer from a "repetition compulsion."

"They say to themselves, 'I couldn't fix my family but I can help fix yours.' They carry their (emotional baggage) into their vocation," Sledge explained.

"The church gave me a place to be a hero, but that's not my job," he said. "My job is to be a minister, a shepherd."

Failing to face issues from the past, whether they relate to a minister's own actions or addictions or those of one or more his or her family members, can wreak havoc on a ministry, Sledge said.

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On manifestation of unresolved anger or hurt from the past is an unhealthy need for control, Sledge said.

"This is often expressed by a pastor's refusal to release lay people to do all they can do. The minister has to be in charge of everything himself," he said.

Another common problem, Sledge said, is perfectionism and its frequently visiting "cousin" procrastination.

"There is often a connection between the two," he said, "because people don't want to invest the energy to do something perfectly so they just decide to wait and do it later."

Other common problems resulting from unresolved conflict from the past include a preoccupation with job security caused by feelings of low self-worth, the development of a shame-based identity which robs the joy that comes from helping others and a tendency toward defensiveness and overreacting to criticism.

"In a church business or committee meeting, sometimes it would feel to me that people were dropping bombs, when in fact they were only throwing darts. I tended to overreact and be confrontational when it wasn't necessary," Sledge admitted.

Recovery came, he said, after he admitted the problem, recognized God as the ultimate source for healing and reached out for help.

That first step of admitting a problem exists is often the hardest, author, counselor and lecturer Robert S. McGee told participants in another seminar during the recovery conference. But McGee, author of the best-selling book "The Search for Significance," said the biggest help in the journey is learning to take hold of one's new identity in Christ.

Ministers often focus on leading church members to take hold of it but fail to do so themselves, he said.

"As Christians, we have been justified," he explained. "Our sins were placed on Christ and his righteousness was placed on us. ... Most of what we struggle with is caused by believing a lie about who we are. We hang on to a false identity that keeps us from feeling that we have the righteousness of Christ."

Many ministers also find themselves caught in a "performance trap," feeling they must succeed in every facet of ministry to be accepted by their congregation. But no one can find contentment through success, even in ministry, McGee said.

"You'll never achieve enough to feel good about yourself. ... We are running around trying to fill a need that only God can fill," he said.

What are the benefits for ministers who have the courage to make peace with their past?

"It's taught me to be more open about the struggles in my life. God has used that to help our church connect with hurting people," said Sledge, whose church is described in promotional materials as "A Healing Place for Hurting People."

"I'm also more relaxed about who I am and more sensitive about the issue of needing to be in control. It's made me a better husband and father and I think, ultimately, a better leader.

"The bottom line is, anything that helps me grow in my character makes me a better pastor."

While reaching out for help and dealing with a hurtful past is vital, Sledge said ministers must use caution in sharing the process with members of their congregation.

"I don't get up every Sunday and talk about my cutting-edge issues," he said. "It's not what they've come for. They come to be fed spiritually."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the BSSB bureau of Baptist Press.

**Her eating disorder battle
ended with prayer, learning**

By Terri Lackey

EULESS, Texas (BP)--Nancy Huebner faced death four times during her 26-year front-line battle against eating disorders. In fact, twice she solicited it.

A manuscript assistant in the Baptist Sunday School Board's discipleship and family development division, Huebner said death would have been a welcomed relief.

But the mother of four believes God had other plans in mind for her, part of which include telling her story in hopes of helping others who are anorexic or bulimic.

Huebner spoke to participants in the national conference on recovery and spiritual awakening, held at First Baptist Church in Euless, Texas, in mid-March. Huebner led a workshop on the LIFE Support Group Series course, "Conquering Eating Disorders."

Huebner's anorexia began when she was 12, the result of a violent rape from an unknown assailant. Huebner buried the incident deep within, never telling anyone. She said she did not recall it until years later while in a treatment hospital for her eating disorders.

According to Huebner, "80 percent of those with eating disorders have sexual abuse in their backgrounds, and all have some sort of abuse. Some have over-controlling parents or over-religious parents."

Anorexia stems from an unyielding need to control at least one aspect of one's life, she said. "You can't control what happens on the outside, so you at least try to control what food you put in your body. You feel in control of your life because you can control your food."

In the late 1960s when Huebner's anorexia first hit hard, no one in her family really noticed.

"I had always been a skinny kid, and in those days, nobody knew about anorexia or bulimia," she said.

Huebner was an active teen, spending a lot of time at school and church, so her parents weren't aware of her eating habits. In her sophomore and senior years of high school, she survived on one orange a day. At five foot eight, she weighed 95 pounds.

To test if she was an "adequate" size, Huebner said she made a circle of her thumb and forefinger. If it slipped up and down her arm easily, she was OK. On her legs, she was more lenient. She made a circle using both hands. If any part of her hand brushed against her thigh during the test, she would eat less or nothing.

Eventually, Huebner married a man in the ministry. She became a "staff wife." Huebner's husband, David, is now marriage enrichment events specialist for the board.

As her illness grew worse, she learned to survive on 200 calories a day. "That is six McDonald's french fries a day -- not that I would have ever touched McDonald's french fries," she said.

That is, until her anorexia U-turned into bulimia. At that time of her life, she would go on binges that included drives to five consecutive fast food restaurants. She would order enough for two people and eat it all before she arrived at the next restaurant.

"Then when I would get home, I would have a pizza waiting for me."

After she finished eating all she could possibly put into her body, she vomited it all up.

Huebner and her family finally began to realize she had a serious problem. She began intensive treatment for her disorder, and in a two-year period was hospitalized for more than 10 months.

"Eating disorders are terribly hard to get over because food is a necessary part of life. You can't live without food. You're confronted with it everywhere you go."

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After the second stay in a treatment hospital, Huebner began to realize her disorder was tearing her family apart.

"My life meant nothing to me, but my family was dying. They had been watching me die, and now I was watching them die," said Huebner, who noted her husband's commitment to her and their family was a source of intense encouragement.

Finally, Huebner prayed a prayer that stuck.

"In December 1990, I prayed to God that I would get well for my family. At that point, God showed me that my family was more important than my eating disorder."

Huebner said she has never skipped a meal or binged or purged since the prayer.

While Huebner acknowledged God was the source of her healing, she said she was able to beat her dependency because of the knowledge she had gathered through the treatment hospitals.

"I went through a long journey and everything I learned went into play (after that prayer) to keep me in recovery," she said. "I had not gone through all those years of counseling and study for nothing. God had his process."

"Even if someone believes in instantaneous healing, they must have the tools to go through the process of healing. Recovery is ongoing. It is never over."

The LIFE Support Group Series course, "Conquering Eating Disorders: A Christ-Centered 12-Step Process," is a support group program for anyone who uses food as a relief from emotional pain or suffers from anorexia, bulimia or compulsive overeating and their compulsive-addictive patterns. The workbook is available in Baptist and Lifeway Christian stores or by calling the BSSB's toll-free customer service number at 1-800-458-2772.

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Symptoms listed of
anorexia, bulimia

Baptist Press
3/23/94

EULESS, Texas (BP)--Anorexia and bulimia, two types of eating disorders, have specific characteristics which are listed below, along with the types of families most likely to cause a child to encounter an eating disorder.

Symptoms of eating disorders include:

- Bizarre eating habits or change in eating habits.
- Preoccupation with food, weight, exercise or body image.
- Isolation from friends and family.
- Eating alone.
- Change or fluctuations in weight.

Symptoms of anorexia include:

- Obvious loss of weight.
- Lower body temperature (always cold).
- Stops having menstrual periods.
- Lanugo (fine downy body hair).
- Loss of hair.
- Obsessed with food, but eats little or nothing; plans menus, reads cookbooks, gourmet cook, knows calorie count of every food item down to the bit.
- Won't eat in front of people or uncomfortable doing so.
- Strange eating habits -- have "safe" and "fear" foods, plays with food on the plate, cuts into tiny bites, rituals, won't let food or silverware touch lips, won't touch food with fingers.
- Married to the scale.
- Excessive exercising, running, etc.
- Perfectionist.
- Overly organized.
- Depressed.
- Low self-esteem.

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Symptoms of bulimia include:

- Secret eating.
- Weight fluctuations (may appear normal weight).
- Menstrual periods stop.
- Abdominal pain.
- Fatigue, weakness.
- Headaches.
- Heart palpitations.
- Depressed.
- Excessive exercise.
- Low self-esteem.
- Eat when stressed.
- Puffy eyes, "chipmunk" cheeks.
- Spends a lot of time in the bathroom after meals.

Characteristics of anorexics include:

- Tend to be introverted, conscientious, well-behaved.
- Often intelligent, shy.
- Struggle with anxiety.
- Stubborn, selfish, dependent.
- Sensitive, depressed.
- Compulsive exerciser, organizer, worker.
- Obsessed with food, cooking, calories.
- Deny fatigue, trouble sleeping.

Characteristics of bulimics include:

- Performance-oriented over-achievers.
- Look secure on the outside.
- Look decisive on the outside.
- Sometimes dramatically express emotions.
- Mood swings.
- Difficulty controlling emotions.
- Secretive.
- Compulsive exerciser.

Characteristics of families where children are more likely to have eating disorders include:

- Parents are outwardly strong, highly principled, strongly committed to moral and spiritual values.
- Often practice denial of problems.
- Emphasize keeping up appearances.
- Avoid conflict instead of dealing with it.
- May tend to overprotect and over control.

The "Conquering Eating Disorders: A Christ-Centered 12-Step Process" workbook is available in Baptist and Lifeway Christian stores or by calling the Baptist Sunday School Board's toll-free customer service number at 1-800-458-2772.

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600 Southwestern students
vote to protest Dilday firing

By Toby Druin

Baptist Press
3/23/94

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--More than 600 Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary students March 21 condemned the firing of President Russell H. Dilday Jr. and asked the trustees to repent of their "unchristian behaviors" and reverse the action.

With only about a dozen votes in opposition, the students approved a resolution opposing the trustee action and organized a half-dozen committees to share their concerns with churches, other schools and the media; to collect the facts in the case and call it to the attention of the national media; and minister to the Dilday family.

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The action by the students came on their first day back in class after a week-long spring break. They crowded the sanctuary of Gambrell Street Baptist Church, adjacent to the seminary campus in Fort Worth. The meeting was called by an ad hoc group of mostly second- and third-year theology students. The seminary has no organized body of students. The smaller group drafted the resolution and called the meeting to "give the group most affected by the trustees' decision, the students, a voice" in the matter, said Robby Jones, a master of divinity student and spokesman for the group.

Jones explained they were not attempting to speak for all the students, only trying to give those who wanted to an opportunity to speak out on the issue. He noted some students did not believe Dilday was the best president for the seminary.

The resolution stated the "principles of love" were "abandoned" by the dismissal, which it contended was without due process, according to guidelines of the American Association of Theological Schools.

"Integrity was forsaken," the students said, by the trustees' "premeditated agenda" evidenced by preprinted ballots and letters to the faculty, selective polling of the board prior to the vote and refusing the president access to his office by changing the locks on the doors.

The trustees, the resolution charged, "deserted" honesty and truth by firing Dilday "after affirming, in the presence of the student body, the president's leadership both on Tuesday during his evaluation and on Wednesday during a trustee-led prayer in chapel."

Those actions, the students said, "betray the principles of Christian love and reflect a motivation contrary to the trustees' given responsibilities to hold the seminary in trust."

Jones said copies of the resolution will be mailed to each trustee.

The smaller group drafted the resolution and submitted it to the larger gathering of students for approval or rejection. No amendments were accepted, only corrections of fact. But there was lengthy discussion.

One student said she had observed "unchristian attitudes" expressed and urged the students to "forgive the trustees if you haven't already. Our hearts have to be right as well."

Another asked if Dilday had been asked if he would return if the trustees did reverse their decision, which brought a reply from another that whether Dilday would accept reinstatement "is immaterial. We are making a statement."

One student spoke against the resolution, saying "it won't be an instrument of peace."

Another, after the resolution had been approved, objected to the action, saying the students were falling into the same patterns they were objecting to. "We should throw all politics out the window," he said, adding the proper response would be for the students to get on their knees in small groups and pray.

The students also affirmed with a few dissenting votes similar action calling for Dilday's reinstatement passed by a group of about 300, including more than 50 pastors, at Gambrell Street church March 11. A spokesman for that group said the chances of that happening, however, were "nil."

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SBC volunteers needed
for Orlando phone effort

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
2/23/94

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--Starting three congregations is the goal of a two-day telephone campaign to precede this year's Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting.

Volunteers will be asked to make phone calls Saturday and Sunday, June 11 and 12, to discover prospects for the churches.

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Callers will ask residents if they are involved in a local church. If the residents say no, callers will tell them about the new churches, said Ronnie Reynolds, home missionary and church start-up strategist for the Greater Orlando Baptist Association.

A phone bank with 100 lines will be set up at First Baptist Church in Winter Park, Fla. Volunteers are asked to work one of five shifts: Saturday 8:30 a.m. to noon, 1 to 4:30 p.m. and 5:30 to 9 p.m. and Sunday 1 to 4:30 p.m. and 5:30 to 9 p.m.

Volunteers will receive 30 minutes of training before their shift begins, Reynolds said.

The three church starts will be Hispanic, African American and Anglo English. Reynolds said he would like for people from each of those culture groups to volunteer to make the phone calls.

To participate in the phone campaign, contact Reynolds at (407) 293-0450.

Other pre-convention activities include door-to-door surveys, block parties and street evangelism. To register to participate in those events, contact Bobby Sunderland in the Home Mission Board evangelism office at (404) 898-7688.

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Church helped Haitians build
a spiritual home in St. Louis By Laurie A. Lattimore

Baptist Press
3/23/94

ST. LOUIS (BP)--William Joseph wanted to find a church in downtown St. Louis, normally an easy task.

Unless you speak only French-Creole.

But Joseph, who came to Missouri from Haiti last summer, was determined. He trekked more than 10 blocks down Grand Boulevard one Sunday morning, stopping in every church along the way. Eventually he came to Harmony Baptist Church and met pastor Rick Lay. It was the spark to a new friendship.

Haitian Baptists in St. Louis number just over 50 so far, but they have tremendous plans for the French-Speaking Baptist Church of St. Louis -- a mission church started through coordinated efforts of Harmony Church, Joseph and other Haitian Christians.

Speaking his native language, Joseph said he was welcomed at Harmony immediately.

"Every other church was closed -- the doors were closed and the people were closed," he said. "But here, two people received me and gave me a warm feeling. I did not understand pastor Rick, but he opened up to me and gave of himself."

Lay recalls the morning vividly. Joseph, an evangelist in Haiti, pointed to a Bible and Lay responded that he preaches the gospel. Joseph pointed to the church, and Lay knew they were going to have a problem communicating that way for very long. He introduced Joseph to member Sandy Mudd, an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher who teaches at the church every week. Mudd began teaching English to Joseph that afternoon.

"He was so appreciative of us that he brought his wife and family the next week," Lay said. "The next thing we knew, he was bringing new Haitians every week. They were always smiling in worship even though they had no idea what was going on."

Concerned for the rapidly growing group, Lay called Mauricio Vargas, language missions coordinator for the Missouri Baptist Convention. Vargas put Lay in touch with Peter Golinski of the Home Mission Board.

Golinski spent 1951 to 1976 as a missionary in Haiti, and he has since been helping Haitian congregations start up in the United States. There are more than 200 Haitian churches in America.

Golinski arrived in St. Louis two weeks later and helped the Haitians establish their own Sunday school class before the English worship service. Soon after Golinski helped Joseph get things started, Lay recalled, God brought Christian Sanon to Harmony.

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Sanon, a physician at St. Mary's Hospital in St. Louis, is a native Haitian and was at the time a member of another Baptist church. Most important, he could communicate between the members of Harmony and the new Haitians.

The first time Sanon, Joseph and Lay met together, they talked for hours.

"It was exciting. Our church had been very open to the Haitians, but I think there was a perception of unfriendliness among both groups just because we couldn't talk to each other," Lay said.

Sanon found the group of Haitians at Harmony to be an answer to prayer. He had been holding Bible studies in his home. "I had been praying for some way to put a Haitian church in St. Louis, and when I came to Harmony, the church was already here," Sanon said.

Sanon's father, also named Christian, came to America in 1969. Over the next decade, he brought his wife and nine children to be with him in New York. The elder Sanon is a minister at the largest Southern Baptist church in New York, French-Speaking Baptist Church of Claremont. There are more than 2,500 members, and the church has started 12 missions. The younger Sanon established a medical center at the church before moving to St. Louis in 1991.

Sanon, who had been licensed to preach, became pastor of the French-Speaking Baptist Church of St. Louis. Joseph is the full-time evangelist. The Haitian congregation has its Sunday school hour while Harmony members have worship. The Haitians move into the sanctuary for their service afterward.

"They call worship services 'adoration.' I just love that," Lay said.

The first Sunday of the separate services, more than 30 Haitians attended adoration. Now they are averaging more than 50 each week. Sunday school has three classes -- a class for new Christians, an adult class and a children's class. Sanon said more than 25 children are coming to Sunday school, so the class will be divided soon. A children's choir of 15 has been going strong. Currently 36 Haitians are taking ESL classes at the church.

"We are really blessed by the staff at Harmony," Sanon said. Members of Harmony have volunteered to make six to eight trips every Sunday morning to bring Haitians to Sunday school and worship. They have helped provide clothes, food and work for the newcomers.

Lay pointed out the International Institute of Metro St. Louis often contacts Joseph when new Haitian refugees arrive in the city. More than 250 Haitians reside in St. Louis. About 50 are recent arrivals who came to the United States seeking political asylum.

Golinski had advised Lay and members of Harmony to proceed cautiously with establishing a separate Haitian congregation because the political and social climate at home could cause fragmentation. Golinski said racism was the bottom line to problems in Haiti. The hatred created between light-skinned Haitians and dark-skinned Haitians could not become an issue in the St. Louis church.

Racial injustices in Haiti marked the 30-year reign of "Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc" Duvalier, creating a distinguished elite and a growing poverty class. A military coup forced President Jean-Bertrand Aristide into exile in 1991.

An international embargo on Haiti put pressure on the country to reinstate Aristide. But as his October 1993 return neared, reports of Aristide's own questionable behavior caused concern in the United States -- one of the outspoken supporters of Aristide -- and added to the confusion in Haiti.

Since the beginning, it has been the goal of Lay, Sanon and Joseph to keep political opinions from entering the church.

"The bottom line is that there are a good deal of political problems in Haiti, but our focus is to minister and worship in Christ," Lay said. "We emphasize that we are not in Haiti."

Sanon added, "Aristide's name is not mentioned. We bring people together to fellowship and to educate them socially and spiritually."

A colleague of Sanon's at the Haitian Medical Association in St. Louis told him Haitians there seem to be better integrated into American society than in other cities, largely because of their church.

"We have all been hurt by the political unrest, but we are here to rebuild lives," Sanon said. "Some tell me that now they feel human. In Haiti, they were not human."

Aside from politics in Haiti, even religion is a mess, Sanon said. There are more than 100 religions, but the majority of Haitians are Catholic and about 25 percent are Protestant. Sanon and Golinski said more than 90 percent of the Catholics practice voodoo.

Sanon and Joseph said their mission is to spread the gospel to all French-speaking people in St. Louis, even beyond Haitians and Haitian refugees.

Joseph said the foundation they have built so far is leading them to becoming "la plus grande eglise Baptiste d'expression française," the largest French-speaking Baptist church.

Lay thinks it could happen. "We are doing nothing but growing," he said of both congregations. Lay credited the Haitian church for the recent spurt at Harmony. "I have no doubt they will grow us right out of this building."

Lay said working with the Haitian congregation has helped Harmony put action behind its claims of being a church for the community.

"It has helped us not just say we are open to everyone, but made us really be open," he said. "(Christians) are very good at rhetoric, but when push comes to shove, many churches struggle to back it up."

Likewise Sanon and Joseph are grateful for the love from members of Harmony and their help in establishing a strong foundation for the Haitian church.

"We have been praying a lot and just watching how God changes things," Sanon said of the miraculous way in which the Haitian church has come together. "We just follow up!"

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(BP) photo available upon request from the Word & Way, Missouri's Baptist newsjournal.

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