

# Falwell to pastors: 'Ask God to double our denomination'

By Charlie Warren  
Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine

NEW ORLEANS—"It is amazing what God can do with one visionary person who is not at all interested in Harris or Gallup polls, who is not interested in being popular, who is interested only in being faithful," Jerry Falwell told the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference June 11.

Falwell, the former independent pastor who led his church to affiliate with the Southern Baptist Convention in recent years, urged his fellow pastors to become anointed visionaries who will "ask God to double our denomination."

Falwell said his vision in founding Thomas Road Baptist Church was based on claiming Lynchburg, Va., for Christ.

"Claim your city for Christ and spend your life going out to capture it for Him," Falwell urged. "Ask Him for the whole city. Ask Him for everybody in it. Ask Him for the counties around it."

Falwell's message on vision fit the overarching theme of the June 10-11 Pastors' Conference. Every speaker addressed the urgency of evangelism. The conference theme was "Until He Comes, Go."

Evangelist Bailey Smith warned that even Southern Baptist churches are full of people who never have had a genuine saving encounter with Jesus Christ. Preaching from Matthew 13, Smith spoke of Jesus' parable of the tares among the wheat.

It is possible even for pastors to be unsaved without realizing it, he warned.

Smith closed with an invitation urging conference participants to ask the Holy Spirit to convict them if they never had truly professed faith in Christ. About 30 people responded to the invitation.

In addition to Falwell and Smith, the Pastors' Conference featured a number of lesser-known preachers from across the nation, including sev-

eral younger pastors and evangelists.

One of those was Dan Spencer, pastor of First Baptist Church in Thomasville, Ga., and son of Pastors' Conference President Jerry Spencer.

"God is calling out people today to have the boldness of John the Baptist," Spencer said as he preached from Luke 3.

"Don't stop preaching about hell, pastor," he urged. "Bold preaching is needed because the audacity of our culture demands it."

Charles Roesel, pastor of First Baptist Church of Leesburg, Fla., exhorted pastors to avail themselves of God's spiritual power.

"We must first 'be' something if people are going to listen when we say something," Roesel said. "The world will listen to us when we live what we talk. The world is not impressed by our buildings. They are turned off by our budgets. They could care less how many people we baptize. But if they see us helping hurting people in love and compassion, they ... know we are showing care and compassion."

Roesel, whose church has been a model for merging ministry and evangelism, reminded the crowd that Jesus expects His followers to be fishers of men.

"Witnessing is not voluntary" for followers of Christ, he stressed. "We have forgotten our No. 1 calling—to bring a lost world to Christ. ... We are guilty of giving our first-class loyalties to third-class causes."

Bobby Moore, pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Southaven, Miss., noted that 95 percent of Southern Baptists have never attempted to win anyone to faith in Christ. He added that those who have been followers of Christ for a long time tend to stop witnessing.

He suggested five motivations for witnessing: the indwelling presence of Christ, the spiritual need of the lost, one's devotional life, the nearness of the second coming and an understanding of the glory of God.

Evangelism is best done as Chris-

tians work together, evangelist Rick Gage said.

"I've seen with my own eyes the unlimited potential we have for winning the world for Christ. Yet our greatest need is for us to go together, with a broken heart and a passion to reach those who do not have a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ."

Philip Robertson, pastor of Philadelphia Baptist Church in Deville, La., urged pastors to go with authority. He said the authority for believers is the presence of Christ and the authority of Scripture.

He criticized the church growth movement that he said advocates meeting the perceived needs of people and preaching what people want to hear.

"Without the presence of Jesus, we are powerless," Robertson said. "Jesus never compromised the preaching of the Word of God. ... I believe you can preach the Word and people will come. ... Worship ought to be about what pleases God and not about what pleases men."

Pastors and others lose their power when they adopt the resentful, religious spirit of the Pharisees, warned Ken Whitten, pastor of Idlewild Baptist Church in Tampa, Fla. Basing his remarks on the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15, Whitten focused on the older brother, who resented his father's gracious spirit and refused to celebrate when the lost one returned.

Whitten spoke of those who criticize various aspects of emotional, contemporary worship as an example of people who have a resentful and rule-bound religious spirit that destroys their happiness and makes them useless.

Whitten said the cure for a resentful and religious spirit is to trust in God's abiding presence, abundant provision and achieved purpose.

Ernest Easley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Odessa, Texas, encouraged pastors to "go courageously."

He compared his own battle with cancer to the Old Testament king



Hezekiah's illness and near death. Like Hezekiah, he has learned to maximize his time to honor God, Easley said.

Easley had cancer of the tonsils that had moved to his lymph nodes. Through 44 radiation treatments, he lost about 50 pounds. He also lost his ability to taste, almost lost his voice and experienced some nerve damage.

Now, however, his voice is restored and he has been declared cancer free.

"God taught me the greatest opportunity for bringing glory to God is during the crises of life," Easley said. "When the storms come, you praise God from whom all blessings flow."

He asked what Southern Baptists would do if God said only 15 years remained. "Would our priority be winning souls?" he asked. "We have become an issue-driven convention rather than a soul-winning convention while people are dying by the thousands without Christ."

Whitten was elected president of the Pastors' Conference by acclamation. Michael Clauch, pastor of First Baptist Church of Slidell, La., was elected vice president. Charles West, pastor of First Baptist Church of Bethalto, Ill., was elected secretary.

Tony Cartledge, William Perkins and Lonnie Wilkey contributed to this article

**CITY VISION** Jerry Falwell challenges Southern Baptist pastors to "claim your city for Christ." (BP photo by Kent Harville)

# Protesters for acceptance of homosexuals arrested again

By David Winfrey  
News Director

NEW ORLEANS—Thirty-four demonstrators protesting the Southern Baptist Convention's position on homosexuality were arrested June 13 outside the Superdome where the SBC annual meeting was being held.

This was the second consecutive year Soulfence has demonstrated at the annual meeting and staged civil disobedience resulting in arrests.

Last year's demonstration coincided with the adoption of a revised Baptist Faith and Message that says homosexual behavior is sinful.

This year, protesters claimed Southern Baptists' attitudes about homosexuality result in spiritual and physical persecution toward homosexuals.

"We're here to say the violence must end," said Mel White, executive director of Soulfence.

White, a former ghostwriter for such evangelical leaders as Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell before White acknowledged his own homosexuality, accused Southern Baptists of isolating themselves from the world they purport to serve. "The Southern Baptist Convention is the only denomination who has no one

studying the issue," he claimed.

Protesters staged a New Orleans-style jazz funeral parade in front of the Superdome coinciding with the noon recess from the SBC meeting.

A casket held the photos, names and stories of homosexuals whom White said had faced persecution because of Baptists' stated and implied attitudes of condemnation.

Protester Jerry Greenlee, a former volunteer staff member at Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, said he left that congregation because he felt its leaders didn't support his attempt to provide a ministry to homosexuals. "It was my experience that the staff was not sympathetic."

Ron Sisk, pastor of Crescent Hill Baptist Church, said Greenlee was never a paid staff member at the church but served in association with his seminary training at Wesley Theological Seminary.

"While it's inappropriate for me to comment on the reasons why any member chooses to leave our church, Crescent Hill, in the spirit of Christ, ministers to anyone who comes through our doors," Sisk added.

White said Soulfence leaders sought to meet with SBC President James Merritt, but received no re-

sponse. Merritt said during an unrelated press conference that he recently responded to their letters but, "I did not see any good that could come out of meeting with Soulfence."

Merritt added that he perceived the invitation to be an "ultimatum," and "I don't respond to ultimatums."

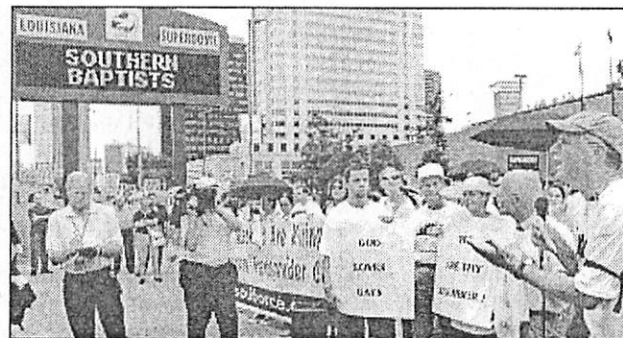
White said the group at least wanted an SBC leader to come to the protest and join the group in condemning persecution against homosexuals.

At the press conference, Merritt said Southern Baptists hold no malice as they "call sin what the Bible calls sin."

"I can say as the president of this convention that we abhor any physical violence against anyone regardless of his or her race, nationality, political philosophy, religion or sexual preference," Merritt added.

In a scene coordinated with police, Soulfence leaders said at the end of their press conference that because no SBC leader would come out to hear their concerns they would attempt to take the casket full of stories inside to the SBC messengers.

A police officer outside the Superdome's main entryway told the group their attempt to enter the building was in violation of a city code and asked the protesters to leave.



At that point, most of the protesters went back to the area where they were allowed to protest while 34 demonstrators stayed put. After a final warning by the police, officers handcuffed the demonstrators and placed them in a van to go to jail.

A Soulfence media coordinator said New Orleans' city attorney declined to charge those who were arrested and released them later that day.

Protester co-leader Karen Weldin, a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University and a lesbian, said the group had been successful in its goal of starting a dialogue with individual Southern Baptists attending the annual meeting. "We've spent the last two days with people willing to listen to our stories."

**PROTEST** Mel White, right, executive director of Soulfence, leads a press conference with demonstrators in front of the Louisiana Superdome. Soulfence, which promotes the acceptance of gays, lesbians and transsexuals by churches, also protested last year's SBC meeting, when 27 demonstrators were arrested. This year 34 people were arrested. (BP photo by Bob Carey)

# Motions' primary topic: Homosexuality

By Charlie Warren

Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine

NEW ORLEANS—More than one in five motions made during last week's Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting addressed the issue of homosexuality.

Three of the six motions related to homosexuality were referred to SBC entities for further consideration and two others were ruled out of order.

A proposal calling on the SBC to ask President Bush to proclaim Heterosexual Family Pride Month was declared to be a resolution rather than a motion. It was referred to the SBC Resolutions Committee which declined to take action on it.

"Southern Baptists are on record several times saying we believe homosexuality is a sinful lifestyle," Resolutions Committee Chairman Danny Akin told reporters. "As a result, we did not feel a need to speak to that again."

Among motions referred to SBC entities:

■ Terri Brown of West Monroe, La., who identified herself as the mother of a gay son, asked that the appropriate SBC entity "develop ministry resources for those of us who for so long have suffered silently." Brown's motion was referred to the North American Mission Board.

■ Tim Wilkins of Wake Forest, N.C., asked SBC seminaries to "explore and implement methods to train students in reaching homosexuals for Christ and disciplining them." His motion was referred to the six seminaries.

■ Robert Stith of South Lake, Texas, asked the SBC to form a task force to "inform, educate and encourage our people to be proactive and redemptive in reaching out to those who struggle with unwanted same-sex attractions." His motion was referred to LifeWay Christian Resources.

Motions ruled out of order were:

■ Randy Thomas of South Lake, Texas, asked that "the appropriate entity of the convention" invite a former homosexual to give a testimony at next year's annual meeting.

■ Gary Rucker of Largo, Fla., argued that since homosexuality is "a sinful decision," all SBC agencies "no longer refer to them as homosexuals as if they were so created, but as those who are living a homosexual lifestyle."

Messengers introduced 28 motions during the two-day meeting. Among them, with action in parentheses:

■ Loren Hutchinson of Lee's Summit, Mo., asked the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission to oppose President Bush's plan for funding faith-based ministries. His motion was referred to the ERLC. A second motion to overturn the decision by the Committee on Order of Business to refer his motion was unsuccessful.

■ Richard Boswell of Fort Worth, Texas, requested appointment of a committee, including bivocational ministers, to explore programs to give assistance to bivocational ministers, including a national Web site. (Referred to NAMB.)

■ William Blossch of Dunedin, Fla., asked NAMB to stop endorsing

women as chaplains. (Referred to NAMB.)

■ Keith Hynds of Birmingham, Ala., urged development of a program similar to Acteens for young men. (Referred to NAMB.)

■ Rick Dominic of Fort Towson, Okla., asked NAMB and the International Mission Board to change their missionary appointment policies regarding divorce and remarriage to include those who were divorced for biblical reasons and remarried. (Referred to the two mission boards.)

■ Calvin Wittman of Wheat Ridge, Colo., asked the convention to study the feasibility of combining Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo. (Referred to the seminaries.)

■ Ron Wilson of Thousand Oaks, Calif., requested that IMB trustees reconsider their decision regarding the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message and require all current missionaries and staff to sign the statement. (Referred to the IMB.)

■ Paul Blizard of Beckley, W. Va., asked LifeWay "to produce a video or video series on the history of the SBC with emphasis on the conservative resurgence of the Southern Baptist Convention." (Referred to LifeWay.)

■ Richard Powell of Fort Meyers, Fla., asked the Executive Committee to "document the history of each cooperating state convention's distribution of CP dollars year by year." (Referred to the Executive Committee.)

# Resolutions range from marriage to the Sudan

By Lacy Thompson  
*Louisiana Baptist Message*

NEW ORLEANS—Displaying a unified front on weighty issues ranging from human cloning to campaign finance reform, Southern Baptist Convention messengers approved nine resolutions last week without discussion or debate.

Resolutions Committee Chairman Danny Akin noted that the rapid approval of resolutions was "pretty unusual." Akin, dean of the school of theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, added that he thought it shows Southern Baptists "are very much of one mind" on the issues addressed in the resolutions.

In addition to a customary resolution on appreciation for the host city, the resolutions take strong stands on:

■ **Covenant marriage.** The statement affirms the sacredness of marriage and the devastating impact of divorce. "The disintegration of marriage has tragic implications for the future of our churches and our nation," it reads.

In response, the resolution affirms the current covenant marriage movement in many states and encourages its spread. The movement seeks to impose a higher standard of marriage on couples seeking marriage licenses, requiring types of counseling and setting tougher guidelines for divorce.

■ **Human cloning.** The resolution repudiates the movement toward clon-

ing human beings. It urges a "permanent, comprehensive" ban on human cloning, including that involving human embryos.

■ **Genocide in Sudan.** The resolution outlines the tragic impact of an 18-year genocidal war in Sudan that has resulted in the deaths of 2 million people. The war is fueled by an extremist Islamic regime that "increasingly has tortured, maimed, raped, enslaved and murdered Christian men, women and children who refuse to deny their faith," the resolution says.

The statement calls on Southern Baptists to be educated about the situation in Sudan, to pray regularly for those in the region and to support the delivery of relief aid to the nation. It also calls for a halt to ongoing genocide and commends President George Bush for his strong public stand on the issue.

■ **Hunger relief.** The resolution cites the biblical basis for responding to the needs of the hungry. It also points out that if every Southern Baptist gave just \$1 per month through the convention hunger offering, gifts would multiply by 18 times.

■ **Internet pornography.** In addition to decrying the impact of Internet porn, the resolution urges individuals to commit to lives of sexual purity "in thought and action," urges churches to address the issue of pornography during Social Issues Sunday Aug. 5, calls on churches to educate others about the dangers of pornography and calls on public libraries to use filters

to protect Internet users.

■ **Euthanasia in the Netherlands.** Noting that the Netherlands recently became the first democratic country to legalize active euthanasia, the resolution affirms the sacredness of life and decries euthanasia as "immoral ethically, unnecessary medically and unconscionable socially."

■ **Discrimination against military chaplains.** The resolution notes that a current lawsuit contends the Navy has discriminated against Southern Baptist and other evangelical chaplains. It renounces such unconstitutional treatment and urges the Navy to implement policies that "insure free religious practice for all military personnel, without discrimination."

■ **Protecting free speech in campaign finance legislation.** The resolution notes that some proposed versions of campaign finance reform legislation "threaten freedom of political speech by restricting individuals and organizations from exercising their divinely granted and constitutionally protected right to their consciences in the public square."

It vigorously objects to "any attempts to abridge the free speech rights of any American citizen or group" and reaffirms Southern Baptist commitment to defend freedom of political speech.

In a subsequent news conference, Akin explained the resolution should not be construed as opposition to campaign finance reform but to measures that would threaten free speech.



## **Baptist Faith & Message debate continues at SBC annual meeting**

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over the new Baptist Faith and Message as a cause of recent tension between the SBC and the Baptist General Convention of Texas, told reporters he "didn't want to cause trouble" but felt the issue was too important to ignore.

Messengers overwhelmingly rejected Woodell's amendment, however, along with amendments offered to the article on Scripture and one on the Lord's Day.

Fred Malone of Clinton, La., suggested that a new article on the Lord's Day "inadvertently" weakened Baptists' commitment to the Sabbath by leaving appropriate activity up to an individual's conscience. He sought to strengthen it by adding an appeal to Scripture.

"In the last 50 years we have lost the culture war on our Lord's Day," Malone said. "We are losing the sanctity of the Lord's Day. It belongs to the Lord and not to us."

A member of the study committee, however, said it would be "reckless" for the convention to continue to tinker with its faith statement year after year.

"We should not be in the business of continually debating the Baptist Faith and Message on the floor of the convention," said Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville.

"Southern Baptists need to be clear about where we stand and what we believe," Mohler added. He said ongoing revisions "would impugn our testimony before a watching world."

Baptist Faith and Message study committee chairman Adrian Rogers also spoke against the amendment. "God does not lay down specific rules for the Lord's Day," said Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in suburban Memphis, Tenn. "Any revision is superfluous."

A third amendment, offered by Steve Barrett of Waseca, Minn., sought to remove a reference to "religious" opinions in the article on biblical authority, arguing that the Bible is "sufficient" in all realms of knowledge.

Mohler responded that current language "by no means seeks to limit" the Bible's authority.

"If we felt the word 'religious' limited Scripture," he added, "we would have deleted it last year."

In related action, Chris Hughes of Toombsboro, Ga., proposed a motion seeking to give power and support to Baptist associations "to use correctional measures" against churches that "deliberately and willfully disregard" the Baptist Faith and Message and the Bible. His motion was ruled out of order.

**"If the family disintegrates, then everything goes with it."**

*James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family*

## Dobson: Safeguard your personal family & the institution

By David Winfrey  
News Director

NEW ORLEANS—America's traditional families are disintegrating, but Christians must continue to work to protect God's plan for marriage and child development, James Dobson told the Southern Baptist Convention June 13.

Speaking to the closing session of the SBC annual meeting in New Orleans, the founder of Focus on the Family encouraged Baptists both to work to preserve the institution of the family and to safeguard their own families.

Dobson spoke via satellite from his office in Colorado Springs, Colo., because his jet had malfunctioned en route to New Orleans, forcing him to return home.

Recently released statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau show the critical status of American families, Dobson said. According to the census statistics, during the past 10 years:

■ The number of households headed by unmarried partners increased 72

percent.

■ The number of households headed by single mothers increased 25 percent.

■ The number of households headed by single fathers increased 62 percent.

Additionally, Dobson said, census figures state that for the first time in American history households with both a married couple and children in the home have fallen below 25 percent of all households.

"The family is disintegrating. It's not just Christians or conservatives who are drawing this conclusion," Dobson said. "If the family disintegrates, then everything goes with it because our government, our institutions, our way of life, everything sits on that foundation of the family."

Two byproducts of disintegrating families are suffering children and declining family evangelism, he said.

Dobson said the chaos and unpredictability of a failing family affects boys more harshly than girls.

He said he recently completed a book titled "Bringing Up Boys."

Among his findings were that boys are three times more likely than girls to be on drugs, five times more likely to commit suicide and 12 times more likely to commit murder.

"Why are boys in such trouble? The reason is because of the breakup of family," Dobson declared.

"Boys, because of their nature and testosterone and all that makes up what a boy is, are more likely to get in difficulty when there's chaos in a family," he added. "They need stability. They need predictability."

Dobson said boys also need male role models to teach them what it means to be a man. Boys are born emotionally attached to their mothers but transition that attachment to their fathers between ages 2 and 5, the psychologist said.

"Boys are not born knowing what it means to be a boy. They certainly aren't born knowing what it means to be a man. ... They learn that from being around the male role model, hopefully a father."

In some cases when boys have no male role model to learn from, they can attach back to their mothers and develop homosexual tendencies, Dobson asserted. "You hear often that homosexuality is genetic in nature. Don't you believe it," he said, adding that there's not "a scrap of evidence" to document that claim.

The disintegration of the family also has the potential of yielding entire generations of families that don't know about Christ, Dobson said. "The soil in which the seed of the gospel is planted will turn acidic if there are no

families."

Dobson noted that researcher George Barna has stated that people who have not committed to the Christian faith by age 18 have only a 6 percent chance of becoming Christians.

"The family is the greatest vehicle ever devised for transmitting the value system to the next generation," Dobson said.

Dobson applauded the Southern Baptists Convention's Council on Family Life, created a year ago to study how SBC agencies can help strengthen families.

"Focus on the Family is going to stand with you in this initiative in every way that we can," he declared. But he warned that talk about families is insufficient to preserve them.

"Your families are in danger too," he said.

To laymen, Dobson urged daily prayer for their families and to be conscious of what they are teaching by their actions.

To pastors, Dobson asked whether the growth of their churches had become a greater priority than the health of their families.

He noted that when he was a teenager his father, a prominent Nazarene evangelist, cancelled a four-year slate of speaking engagements to be with his family when Dobson had become a rebellious teenager who was too difficult for his mother to control.

"He saved me, he pulled me in. ... He let me know that I mattered to him," Dobson said. "He paid the price to invest himself in my life, and I'm very grateful that he did."

## ***SBC annual meeting puts focus on the family***

*Continued from page 1*

American family woes, including:

■ "One million children a year see their parents divorce."

■ "In the last 40 years, pregnancies out of wedlock have increased 600 percent."

■ "In less than 40 years, cohabitation by unmarried couples has increased almost 1,000 percent."

In his SBC president's address, James Merritt also emphasized the decline of families.

"There is an assault on the family today that is unparalleled in the history of the human race, and much of the damage is self-inflicted," said Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church of Snellville, Ga.

SBC Executive Committee President Morris Chapman, who proposed the family emphasis a year ago, also decried the decline of the family.

"For the first time ever, married couples with children make up less than 25 percent of the America population," Chapman said, citing data from the 2000 U.S. Census. "It's our prayer and hope we'll be able to save the families of America."

The Census data Chapman referenced show 23.5 percent of U.S. households are comprised of married couples with children in the home. That reflects a decline of about 2 percent in the decade of the 1990s. But married couples either with or without children in the home still constitute 52 percent of U.S. households.

Census data reveal the decline is due in part to Americans living longer, with more widows and widowers alive than ever before, as well as many Americans waiting until later in life to get married and have children.

The council's interim report to the convention outlined five guidelines to structure its work as it develops long-term strategies. The council stated a family-saving strategy must:

■ "Draw together both our resources and our people with the goal of elevating our families and

the meaning of the word 'family' to God's standard as clearly stated in Scripture."

SBC messengers articulated that meaning in a 1998 amendment to the SBC Baptist Faith and Message statement. It gained most notoriety for stating wives should "graciously submit" to the "servant leadership" of their husbands.

■ "Deal with both our internal practices and the external perception of our convention." This guideline would lead to strategies to help Americans see Southern Baptists as "great for the community because we are great for the family."

■ "Assist in the development of strong Great Commission-oriented families."

■ "Enable pastors and church leaders to mutually identify and affirm key biblical principles for marriage and family."

■ "Emphasize our desire to provide an authentic ministry to those whose lives and families have been fractured and ravaged by the adversary; seek to provide ... compassionate restoration and encouragement typified by our Savior, made possible by the grace of God and consistent with the clearly stated principles of the Scripture."

The status of marriage and related issues also was on the minds of messengers to the convention. Six items presented as motions or resolutions from the floor addressed homosexuality, with one calling on President Bush to declare June Heterosexual Family Pride Month.

The resolutions committee brought a statement on covenant marriage that passed without discussion or dissent.

The family council's task is large, Elliff acknowledged as he looked to its work over the coming year.

"Families are not going to be rescued simply because we hope so, simply because we think God owes us," he said. "But because we decide we're going to do something about it."