

Evangelists Hall of Faith dedicated at NAMB

By J. Gerald Harris, Editor

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ALPHARETTA — The chapel at the North American Mission Board was filled to capacity Jan. 14 with NAMB staff, Southern Baptist evangelists, and families and friends of the evangelists. The occasion for the gathering was the much-anticipated dedication of the "Evangelists Hall of Faith."

NAMB interim president Richard Harris greeted those present by saying "According to the Bible the evangelist is a gift to the church and churches are not complete unless they use God-called evangelists."

Harris continued, "Billy Graham has been my hero for many years and his ministry greatly impacted my life. We are here today to celebrate and honor these men and women who serve the Lord in vocational evangelism."

Major League Baseball has its Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. That is where the greatest athletes in baseball history are immortalized. Similar Halls of Fame dot the landscape of our nation.

When Georgia Baptist evangelist Brian Fossett was president of the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists in 2007 the officers approved a motion initiated by Fossett to establish something similar to the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.

However, Fossett reasoned that since so many evangelists have "fought a good fight" and "kept the faith" and since they weren't seekers of fame that it should be called the Evangelists Hall of Faith.

The inaugural inductees, 30 of them, were recognized in a beautiful celebratory worship experience at the North American Mission Board on the second Thursday of January.

A beautiful area on the first floor of the NAMB facility was dedicated as the location for the permanent tribute to the life and ministry of each inductee.

The dedication and ribbon cutting for the Hall of Faith was preceded by a heartwarming and inspiring worship service featuring a message by 86-year-old music evangelist Cliff Barrows, who has served with Billy Graham for 65 years.

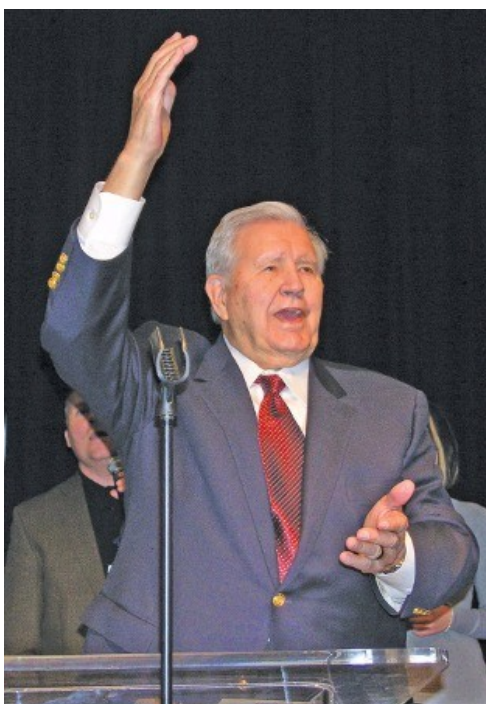
Evangelist Ron Herrod, current president of COSBE, expressed his gratitude to NAMB for providing a permanent place for the Evangelists Hall of Faith and praised Fossett for his vision and determination to bring the vision to fruition.

Herrod then hailed his fellow evangelists as committed, convicted, and consumed. He remarked, "Our Southern Baptist evangelists are 'wise,' because the Bible says, 'He that winneth souls is wise.'"

Fossett then testified about evangelists who had influenced his life. He said he heard Freddie Gage once preach and say, "When I started preaching I didn't know Job from job, I didn't know Psalm for palm. One time I preached on Moses and the lions' den and 25 people got saved. You may not get it all just right, but you have got to have passion."

Fossett added, "We all went out and bought our friends and loved ones gifts for Christmas. Can you imagine how you would have felt if the gifts you had carefully selected and lovingly purchased were ignored or rejected? That is how pastors and evangelists frequently feel because churches so often ignore or reject them."

The challenge was clear that evangelists are gifts to be effectively used in the church to draw the net, to win the lost.



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86-year-old Cliff Barrows, music evangelist with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association since 1945, leads attendees in a refrain of "How Great Thou Art" following his remarks during the Jan. 14 dedication ceremony and ribbon-cutting.

of days. Would you come and teach us what you know about the Holy Spirit?"



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Left to right, Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists (COSBE) president Ron Herrod, past COSBE president Brian Fossett, NAMB interim president Richard Harris, and Frank Page, NAMB's vice president for evangelism, cut the ribbon for the new "Evangelists Hall of Faith," a room honoring past and present Southern Baptist evangelists.

When it came time for Cliff Barrows to speak, Alabama evangelist Junior Hill introduced him, admitting that he met him personally for the first time that very morning in Alpharetta. Hill stated, "This seems as awkward and inappropriate as asking a door keeper at the Vatican to introduce the Pope to the citizens of Rome. Cliff Barrows is a living legend. He's probably one of the most loved, respected, honored, and appreciated men of God in the religious world today."

Barrows feebly approached the pulpit, but with a spiritual dignity seldom seen in this day. His presence added grace and spiritual charm to the meeting. Everyone waited for his first words.

As he opened his mouth he began to quote the words of the hymn "Only a Sinner" written by James M. Gray in 1905.

Naught have I gotten but what I received; Grace hath bestowed it since I have believed; Boasting excluded, pride I abase; I'm only a sinner, saved by grace! Suffer a sinner whose heart overflows, Loving his Savior to tell what he knows; Once more to tell it would I embrace — I'm only a sinner saved by grace!

After offering a prayer Barrows admitted that he could no longer read his Bible due to macular degeneration. But he praised his wife, Ann, for faithfully reading the Bible to him and for being "my life in this life."

Barrows continued, "I want to bring greetings from him (Billy Graham) and from George Beverly Shea, who in two weeks time will be 101 and who's still singing.

"When you get above 80 usually your [voice] gets as deep as Death Valley and as high as Mount Everest and you can hardly stand in between, but Bev's [voice] is just so beautiful.

"I told Bill (Billy Graham) some time ago that when we get to heaven he's going to be out of a job, but Bev and I won't. And he said to me, 'Well, when I get to heaven I'm going to sing like Bev Shea.' I said, 'It will take heaven to do that, that's for sure.'"

Barrows based his message around three things that were the essentials of Billy Graham's ministry: (1) his passion for the Word of God, (2) his passion for the invitation, indicating that God gave Graham the faith to believe that people would respond, and (3) his passion to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Reflecting on an experience when he was 23 years old, Barrows recounted, "Our team was in England and we heard Stephen Olford preach on "How to be filled with The Spirit." When the meeting was over Billy went to Stephen and he said, 'We are going to start a meeting in Wales in just couple

"He came to our hotel and we sat in the second floor lobby and Stephen took his Bible and opened the Scriptures in John 14, 15, 16 and other related passages and taught us what it meant to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We drank it in as he talked about confessing every known sin [and] the cleansing the Holy Spirit gives.

"Then he talked about claiming by faith and believing that you are filled and you're trusting him We prayed, 'Oh God, by your presence and by your power anoint us by your Holy Spirit. May we sense a new freshness, a new anointing, a new power,' and you know, men and women, we did."

Barrows words were well-chosen, fitly-spoken, divinely-anointed, and extremely well-received.

Music evangelist Bob Smith followed Barrows by leading the assembled congregation in singing "How Great is Our God" and "How Great Thou Art," perhaps the signature hymn for the Graham Crusades. For the last stanza of the majestic hymn Smith turned the song leading over to Barrows, who in his own characteristic way led the assembled hosts to ascend the staircase of worship with triumphant praise.

The spiritual tone and blessings of this one day enhanced both the office of the evangelist and the stature of the North American Mission Board. We desperately need both to accomplish our divine mandate.

(Writer's note: I went to the North American Mission Board's ministry complex to write a story and in the process had an encounter with the living Christ in such a way that my life was gloriously transformed by the Spirit of God.)

Inaugural class of the Evangelists Hall of Faith

Hyman Appelman
Walter K. Ayers
Cliff Barrows
Manley Beasley
Wayne Bristow
Sam Cathey
Clyde Chiles
E.J. Daniels
Ron Dunn
Freddie Gage
Mike Gilchrist
Billy Graham
Vance Havner
Jesse Hendley
Rudy Hernandez
Junior Hill
Eddie Martin
Angel Martinez
Homer Martinez
George Beverly Shea
Bailey Smith
J. Harold Smith
Jerry Spencer
Bill Stafford
Bette Stainecker
Jay Strack
Leon Westerhouse
Gene Williams
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6405 Sugarloaf Parkway, Duluth, GA 30097
770-936-5590/877-424-6339