

CECLSM PASTOR BREAKS GUINNESS WORLD RECORD FOR LONGEST SMILE

Editor's Note: The article below was written in response to Lilly Endowment's request for a USA Today style story on the CECLSM program. The Guinness Record is fictional; all other elements are factual.

Pastor Wally Holt of First Baptist Church of Macomb, Illinois has just broken the Guinness Book of World Records for smiling continuously for 423 days.

This reporter interviewed Pastor Wally, his wife and members of his church to find out why he has been smiling for over a year. It seems that Pastor Wally enrolled in the Center for Excellence in Congregational Leadership (CECLSM) at Green Lake Conference Center about four years ago. According to Pastor Wally, he was about half way through the program when a light came on for both he and a number of the church's lay team who were attending the CECLSM program. "We looked at each other after an evening session and realized that we were spending all our time, energy and resources taking care of the existing members. We weren't doing anything to share the love of Christ with our neighbors," said Pastor Wally.

That evening the team committed to go back home to Macomb and reach out to the community instead of just taking care of themselves. "Once we shifted our focus from ourselves to others, positive things began to happen," a lay leader told this reporter. "New people began coming to church; we made church a welcome place and realized that it needed to begin with each of us showing the love of Jesus to our friends and neighbors."

The church has grown from an average weekly attendance of 60 before CECLSM, to over 160 as non-believers and unchurched believers are drawn to this healthy, vibrant church. The church is rapidly

outgrowing its current facility and has just voted to buy 15 acres of land to provide a new home that will enable the church to continue its growth.

I also spoke with Mrs. Holt and asked her what it was like living with such a happy pastor. "Well I can tell you this; the past year has been filled with joy. In the past, Wally was expected to do everything and be everywhere. Now, Wally has leaders coming to him and saying, 'Pastor we can do this for you, you don't need to do everything yourself.' Wally's life is more balanced. There is time for our family as well as time for personal spiritual devotions."

I asked Pastor Wally what lies ahead for him; is he worried about a loss of joy in ministry? "No not at all. I am trying to share my experiences with other pastors in the hope that they, too, will experience the joy that I have rediscovered in ministry. I am now a coach for a group of pastors who are in the latest CECLSM class. I need to give back to others. You know, Jesus told us that he did not come for insiders, he came for outsiders. We are trying to reach outsiders by following Christ's example."



Wally Holt (back right) with members of his church (First Baptist Church of Macomb, IL) at Green Lake.

I asked Wally if he is concerned that someone might come along and break his record. "Of course not. All of us involved in CECLSM want to reach out to as many pastors and churches as possible and share with them so that they can experience the joy that comes from sharing God's love and plan. If someone breaks my record it means that they have become a pastor of excellence who is experiencing the joy of reaching out to others with the love of Christ."

I have to admit the smile is contagious. There is no greater joy than knowing that you are serving Christ by serving others.