

Charismatic Church Leaders Commit to Integrity at Orlando Summit

Larry Stockstill has seen enough fellow ministers fall. At a “Summit on Integrity” Tuesday in Orlando, Fla., the Louisiana pastor and a roomful of influential Christian leaders took a stand against the American church’s ongoing leadership crisis by pledging to walk with integrity in every area of life.

Amid the latest ministry scandals, Stockstill, senior pastor of Bethany World Prayer Center in Baton Rouge, La., charged pastors and church leaders with specific ways to not only avoid moral failure, but also leave a Billy Graham-like legacy of integrity.

“We’re now seeing many of the largest churches in America pastored by people who are living a double lifestyle,” Stockstill said at the all-day gathering. “This is a crisis. This isn’t something I’m dreaming up—this is the reality of where pastors are right now.”

With ministry scandals reported almost weekly and studies indicating that up to 40 percent of American pastors view pornography every day, the need for integrity among church leaders is obvious. Yet Stockstill and the assembly, which included the Rev. Samuel Rodriguez of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference and Bishop Harry Jackson of

Hope Christian

Church in Washington, D.C., discussed how leadership integrity isn't simply staying away from sexually explicit websites, but includes everything from keeping a commitment to managing church budgets to honoring a spouse.

"The Lord told me we're going to lose our nation if we don't turn our pastors around," said Stockstill, whose book, *The Remnant: Restoring Integrity to American Ministry*, has been given away to more than 150,000 pastors. "[But] how can we change our nation if we can't keep our word?"

The summit, hosted by *Ministry Today* magazine and Ministry21 Network, convened pastors, ministry leaders and church-network founders representing almost 100,000 congregations around the world. After Stockstill offered specific guidelines for situations involving such issues as financial integrity, sexual and relational purity, and personal character and calling, each attendee signed a personal "Remnant Covenant" containing 10 pledges to foundational elements of living biblically.

The group also discussed forming a document on integrity similar to Graham's Modesto Manifesto, in which the respected evangelist established strict lifestyle guidelines to adhere to the apostle Paul's warning to "abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thess. 5:22, KJV).

"Integrity can easily be stolen by a lapse in watchfulness

or vigilance,” Stockstill said, “but when it comes to integrity, you can’t watch too much. You can’t be too careful when it comes to your integrity.”

As long as more leaders fail to stay vigilant, Jackson added, Americans can expect more cultural degradation—and the outward signs of an nation no longer blessed by God. “The American church is at a place where the nation has been under a judgment of God,” Jackson said, citing the cost of leader’s “hidden” sins in Ezekiel 14:8-12. “Our economic woes are not just economic, they have to do with God saying, ‘I cannot bless you as I have blessed you in times past unless you turn to Me.’ America cannot return to her God until the prophetic voices mount pulpits and declare this word.”

For Barbara Wentroble, founder of International Breakthrough Ministries, the Summit provided an invaluable setting to strengthen those key prophetic voices: “It was a day in which some high-level leaders were able to come together and sharpen one another on how do we deal with the crisis we’re seeing in the church today, to share from each other’s wisdom and experience so that hopefully in the days ahead we can prevent a lot of the casualties that we’ve seen in ministry—and so we don’t have to keep repeating the same pattern.”