

Don Finto Honored for 60 Years in Ministry

✖ Charismatic pastor Don Finto is being honored this week for his legacy through 60 years of ministry as he marks his 80th birthday.

Messianic worship leader Marty Goetz and contemporary Christian musician Michael W. Smith will be among those paying tribute Thursday to the former pastor of Belmont Church in Nashville, Tenn., who turned 80 on Sunday. Musician Ricky Skaggs, and prophetic leaders James Goll and Heidi Baker will be among those honoring Finto by video during the service being held at Belmont Church.

"I think honoring spiritual fathers and mothers properly actually opens heaven over us," said Tod McDowell, co-organizer of Thursday's tribute service and associate director of the Caleb Company, a ministry Finto launched in the mid-1990s to mentor young leaders.

Noting that his generation often has had hurtful relationships with fathers and mothers, McDowell, 40, said he wants the event to "help cultivate a culture of honor, which ... attracts heaven and attracts God's glory."

Known as "Papa Don," Finto became pastor of Belmont Church during the Jesus Movement of the 1970s and led the congregation to embrace charismatic renewal. "It was a revival like never before, but we didn't even realize how big the revival was because we were living in it," Finto said. "And it was hard. There were times when it was very hard."

Once part of the Churches of Christ, which prohibits the use of musical instruments, Belmont eventually left the denomination and became a hub for contemporary Christian music. Amy Grant was one of the first musicians to play a

guitar in the church, and Smith, who attended Belmont for several years, has called Finto his “daddy in the Lord.”

“They call him Papa Don for a reason,” Smith said. “He’s been a father to so many, and I am one of them. We’ve walked together for nearly 30 years now, and I’m convinced I’d not be the man I am today if it weren’t for him. It’s an honor to have him as one of my dearest friends.”

Since he stepped down as pastor in 1996, Finto has refused to retire. He founded the Caleb Company to “empower” the next generation and encourage older Christians to “keep taking their mountains.”

“Older people who are still involved in the hearts and lives of younger people are very, very needed,” Finto said. “We will not win the battle today with just young people. We will not win the battle with just old people. We will only win the battle when young and old are together.”

In the last 13 years, Finto has traveled the world to speak about personal integrity and the themes in his books, *Your People Shall Be My People* and *God’s Promise and the Future of Israel*. He says now is the prophetic time for Jewish people to come to faith in their own Messiah. “We’re seeing that by the hundreds of thousands,” Finto said.

He says that revival is fueling Christian conversions worldwide. “The reason we are having such success in world evangelism is because it’s prophetically connected to the return of Jews to the Lord and to the land,” Finto said.

“I mention this in both books; 450 years ago there were people reading those passages [in Romans 11] and saying when Jewish people start coming back to the land it will be the greatest revival the world has ever known. That’s happening today, and the missions agencies of the world don’t yet understand why.”

Despite heart surgery 10 years ago and a knee replacement

surgery more recently, Finto says he is in the best years of his life. He believes the greatest legacy he can leave is to raise up a new generation of leaders.

The Caleb Company hosts six-week training schools during the summer, where students spend time in Nashville and Israel learning about the role of the Jewish nation in the end-time harvest as well as integrity and godly leadership. McDowell said that is the kind of leadership Finto has provided through the years.

"I believe that God sent me here to encourage the body through an elder statesman that is still running passionately for the Lord and has not messed up in over 60 years in ministry," said McDowell, who was on staff with Youth With a Mission for 15 years. "He has not ... gotten lukewarm or gotten greedy or even become lazy. He is still diligent.

"I think examples are what's so missing in all the communication we give and we preach and we teach. But if you just see someone living it, you don't need all the sermons. You don't need all the books. And I want the world to see that it's possible to be passionate and to be godly. ... By the grace of God and the Holy Spirit, we can finish strong."

The tribute service will be broadcast live beginning at 6:30 p.m. Central at Belmont Church's Web site.