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Liberty University

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## Dr. Elmer Towns leads national Friend Day outreach

June 01, 2009 | Mitzi Bible

Dr. Elmer Towns, Liberty University co-founder and dean of the School of Religion, has always shared in the late Dr. Jerry Falwell's vision to see the local church impact the world for Christ.

“They fill their church with people who are the friends of their members — those are the most reachable and most likely to join the church,” Towns said. “Friend Day is when you bring people to Christ on the arm of a friend.”

The packet, written by Towns and Vernon Brady, president of Church Growth Connections, includes five weeks of devotionals and Sunday School lessons for all ages, as well as a DVD with sermons from well-known pastors, to help church members move past their fears of inviting friends and to help them unite around a church-wide effort.

“It's a momentum-builder to a great day,” Towns said.

And it's a concept that has already shown great success.

At Thomas Road Baptist Church's Friend Day in 2007, there were 2,676 visitors — of those, 58 walked forward to trust Christ and 39 more marked that they wanted to come up and didn't. Senior pastor Jonathan Falwell said he personally contacted those 58 people, and he has seen a huge blessing come from just this one day of simple outreach.

“We’ve had numbers of people who came on Friend Day and are now part of our church. I know some who are actually serving as Sunday School teachers, so they are on the back side now,” he said.

In fact, it was at Thomas Road Baptist Church where National Friend Day was launched. Towns will not take credit for the idea, saying he got it from talking to pastors on his travels before coming to Liberty, but said the inspiration for the material came from Jerry Falwell, Sr.

“Jerry had a Friend Day in the early 1970s ... I would go around and explain in a pastor’s meeting how to have a Friend Day and each time I would explain it, my lecture would get longer,” Towns said.

He developed the original Friend Day packet and sent 49,000 copies to churches around the country, in several different denominations.

That was 25 years ago, but Towns said the concept is catching on even more today.

“For a church that’s not evangelistic and for a pastor who is not used to evangelistic preaching, this works because it’s relationship evangelism. The hot method today in evangelism is one-on-one relationships,” he said.

Originally held on the third Sunday in October, Friend Day was changed to the first Sunday in November when the time change was instituted nationwide. The reason was simple: “When people have an extra hour, they are more likely to come to church,” Towns said. But churches can choose to have a Friend Day on any date. In fact, that’s what the Rev. Jonathan Falwell said is great about the material — it can be tailored to any church and the needs of its people.

“Every church has a different DNA, and it’s not a cookie-cutter approach — more churches are coming on board because they’re seeing there’s lots of different ways you can do this,” he said.

Brady said churches are encouraged to use the material as a “tool to help them get situated together, with the same focus, the same goal. ... We’re all marching like a little army,” he said.

Falwell, Towns and Brady are hoping that army gets bigger and bigger each year as Friend Day 2012 approaches. On that day (Nov. 4) the Southern Baptist Convention looks to have the biggest day of soul-winning in its history.

“We’re going to ask every member of the Southern Baptist churches to bring a friend to Sunday School or church who doesn’t know Christ,” Towns said. “[Even] if half of the members would do it, it would be a great time of salvation.”

*“My Friendship Connection” is available at [www.elmertowns.com](http://www.elmertowns.com) and [www.myfriendshipconnection.com](http://www.myfriendshipconnection.com).*