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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SADDLEBACK CHURCH TRAINS NEARLY 2,400 NEW MEMBERS ON HISTORIC DAY:

Dr. Rick Warren Welcomes Largest Membership Class in Church's 30-Year History, Close to 800 of Whom Are Baptized

LAKE FOREST, Calif., March 28, 2009 – Dr. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in Southern California, trained nearly 2,400 new church members this morning representing the largest membership class in the Saddleback Church history.

Over the past 30 years, more than 35,000 people have participated in Class 101, Saddleback Church's introductory membership session. The new member training walks attendees through three areas focusing on God's plan and purpose for everything; the history, faith and future vision of the church; and the importance of membership. This foundational, historic class comes in the midst of economic troubles and uncertainty in our nation. But, Warren says difficult times are why the church was created.

"The Bible says the church is the support and foundation of the truth," said Warren, who personally led the class. "We in California know the importance of support and foundation, because we have earthquakes. If you don't have a good support and a good foundation when an earthquake comes around, your house will collapse. The same is true of every area of life. If you don't have the correct foundation and support for finances, relationships and your marriage, it will all collapse. God never meant for you to go through life alone; you need relationship, you need a spiritual family."

Throughout the morning, Warren stressed the importance of the five purposes for both the church and individuals – knowing, relating, sharing, growing and serving. These purposes, as outlined in Warren's best-selling book, "The Purpose Driven Life," and church resource, "The Purpose Driven Church," can help individuals find joy and peace in a life centered on God.

"When bad things happen in life, don't ask why, ask how, and then discover what God wants to teach you," Warren said. "The way God is going to teach you the good qualities in life is to put you in the exact opposite situation. How will God teach you joy? By putting you in the middle of sorrow. How will God teach you love? By putting you around difficult people. How will God teach you peace? By putting you in the middle of chaos. God never wastes a hurt. He can bring good out of anything."

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In addition to becoming Saddleback members, hundreds of participants made a personal commitment to Christ for the first time during the new members program. Afterward, Warren and other Saddleback Church pastors spent more than three and a half hours baptizing nearly 800 people and signifying the life-changing decisions made during and prior to the class.

“It’s good to see God at work in so many people’s lives,” said Steven Tang, a small group leader from Anaheim, Calif. Tang and his five other small group members were baptized together. “This is what the small group community is about and what Pastor Rick is always talking about. It’s amazing to be able to live and participate in the reality of it.”

Upon the completion of this session, members will be encouraged to take three additional Saddleback Church new member trainings including Class 201 focusing on growing in Christ, Class 301 helping individuals discover their purpose and Class 401 centering on discovering mission in life. Warren recently revised and updated each of these trainings to incorporate information about the PEACE Plan, an effort to mobilize Christians to **P**romote reconciliation, **E**quip servant leaders, **A**ssist the poor, **C**are for the sick and **E**ducate the next generation. He will teach each of the classes in May, June and July, respectively.

While this class was specific to the Orange County community and Saddleback Church, Warren emphasized that everyone needs to find a church in which they can become connected and fulfill the five purposes.

“A Christian without a church home is an orphan,” said Warren. “We aren’t in competition with any church. We want every church to grow.”

Warren is using Purpose Driven Connection, a new multimedia platform he created through a partnership with The Reader’s Digest Association, Inc., to help individuals around the world connect with others and local churches. Purpose Driven Connection consists of a foundational quarterly magazine themed around the five purposes as well as small group DVD and workbook curriculum and an interactive Web site. For additional information, visit www.PurposeDriven.com.

Founded in 1980 by the Warrens, Saddleback Church is located in Orange County, Calif. With an average weekly attendance of 22,000, it is one of the five largest churches in America. For more information, visit www.saddleback.com.