

Highlights from Dr David Waltz' convention report:

I would love to focus on all the good things happening: great convention with great diversity – there's no place I would rather be; friends; our president, Peter Yanes; the staff we have; our support staff. Great times, exciting times; GPS was a great opportunity with Bob Hylton leading Philadelphia pilot, Church Planting now being led by Barry Whitworth, baptisms up which bucks the trend among other SBC state conventions.

But part of the responsibility of leadership is to see the big picture, see what lies ahead, where we are heading. The SBC is in crisis.

CP is in decline – in 2002 for the last 20 years churches gave 11% but it was under 7%; during the last 7 years it has dropped to average under 5 ½ %. There is less denominational loyalty. The world is changing – there is more diversity.

We have to change – but change is tough. BCPSJ is making change – the local church must be the focus.

- Need to streamline – efficiency and effectiveness
- Decentralize – moving staff out into the regions
- Personalize
- Contextualize
- Strategy must flow from region and focus on local church and new church planting
- Kingdom initiatives
- And it all takes teamship

In North America Christianity is in crisis – Newsweek had the cover The Decline of Christianity. We're rearranging the chairs on the Titanic.

But as David Dockery recently pointed out that the freedom of religion that we have enjoyed in the U.S. "has led to an Americanization of Christianity rather than a Christianization of America."

North America is the only continent where Christianity is not growing. There are more Christians in Africa than there are citizens in the U.S. Christians in America have become Americanized.

To look at our priorities we only need to check our checkbook and calendar. The budgets and calendars mainly support institutions/buildings/programs. Is it any wonder many don't take seriously the gospel? They see us as another club catering to our own members.

The next generation is not interested in institutions. What will it take to make a difference?

If we just had a nice building, great praise team, enough money for tv time or web design, our worship service more exciting, more seeker friendly, better signs, better greeters, more visitor friendly, etc, etc.

Do we think that God is really impressed by all of this?

Let me share with you what God has to say about this through his prophets –

Amos 5:21-24

<sup>21</sup> "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. (*church services*)

<sup>22</sup> Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them.

<sup>23</sup> Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. (*guitars, keyboards*)

<sup>24</sup> But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!

Hosea 6:6

<sup>6</sup> For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

Micah 6:6-8

<sup>6</sup> With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

<sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

<sup>8</sup> He has showed you, O man, what is good. **And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.** (*What does God want? Most important questions*)

Isaiah 1:11-17

<sup>11</sup> "The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?" says the LORD.

"I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

<sup>12</sup> When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts?

<sup>13</sup> Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me.

New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— (*Christmas, Easter*) I cannot bear your evil assemblies.

<sup>14</sup> Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.

<sup>15</sup> When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood;

<sup>16</sup> wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong,

**<sup>17</sup> learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.**

Isaiah 29:13

<sup>13</sup> *The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.*

What will it take?

Repentance – what is the church of Jesus Christ often known for? What we are against – narrow; judgmental; harsh.

NEED – mercy, forgiveness, encouraging the oppressed; being less like the world and more like Jesus.

On a recent plane trip I was sharing with a non-Christian – a CEO of a company that developed leaders. She said others had shared with her but she didn't see much difference from non-Christians. I talked about Jesus and how our goal was for people to be like him – sharing but often not our reality. She said in her business that is putting too much emphasis on marketing and not enough on product development.

Repentance – the transformation

I've given a lot of reflection lately to giving my energy and time – my life's work – to planting and building churches, but I fear creating lukewarm Christians who will just be as the rest of society.

God is looking for disciples of Christ.

Jesus in Luke 4:18ff defined our ministry:

*to preach good news to the poor,  
proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
recovery of sight for the blind,  
to release the oppressed,  
<sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

We are the body of Christ – his on-going presence in this world. In Matthew 25:35-40 Jesus said:

<sup>35</sup>*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup>I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*

<sup>37</sup>*"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup>When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'*

*<sup>40</sup>"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

It is costly – discipleship – following the steps of Jesus – even to the cross

Romans 12:1 tells us to:

*<sup>1</sup>Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.*

There are some older folks here – some I've known for most of my life and others that I have come to know and love – and have served the Lord and your church faithfully through the years. Thank you for your faithfulness.

Hear me, the church that I grew up with, the church many of you grew up with – is not going to reach a new generation for Christ.

We have not yet seen the church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Younger pastors, church planters, collegiate workers, we must be before God seeking Him for what the 21<sup>st</sup> century church will look like.

I don't know what it will look like – my prayer and challenge is that it will look a lot more like Jesus and a lot less like an institution.

My prayer and challenge is that the budget will be a lot more for the people and ministries that Jesus was concerned about than for buildings and institutional survival.

Sometimes I look around, see struggling churches, declining ---- get discouraged, look at myself trapped in old thinking, discouraged. But then I see young people that God is raising up – young church planters and seminary students who are willing to do whatever it takes and I am filled with hope.

I see a God who is still on his throne who is the God of the impossible who can transform a broken sinful people and make them new; who can take a sinful, broken self-centered church that is only concerned about its own institutional survival and transform it into a missional body of Christ – and transform its community and I am filled with hope.

Oh, God forgive us, transform us, use us, until the whole world knows.