

Partnership, cooperation fuel churches' missions engine_72604

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By Marv Knox

Editor

HOUSTON-Partnership and cooperation are important fuels for missions, leaders of missions groups insisted during the Texas Baptists Committed annual convocation.

Participants explored the theme "Local Churches on Mission." In addition to learning from congregational missions leaders, they heard from missions strategists who help churches do missions.

Christ's Great Commission applies to all Christians, not just clergy, stressed Joan Parmer Barrett, director of Gloria al Padre Ministries, a "missions broker" that links churches to ministry opportunities in Mexico.

"Every layperson has that responsibility to go and tell. Everybody has a purpose and a mission. It's part of being Christian," said Barrett, whose late father, Billy Ray Parmer, founded Gloria al Padre more than 40 years ago.

She cited her father's "4F" advice to missions volunteers: Remain faithful to the mission, focused on the mission, friendly to the culture and flexible.

Christians of Latin America are waiting to join Texas Baptists in spreading the gospel, reported Otto Arango, president of the Piper Institute for Church Planting.

The Piper goal is to create 5,000 church-planting institutes in 5,000 Latin American churches so they can train 100,000 church planters and start 50,000 churches.

"In the next 10 years, you're going to see at least 50,000 churches," predicted Arango, president of the Union of Baptists in Latin America, one of six regions of the Baptist World Alliance. "That means millions of people coming to Jesus.

"The Baptists in Latin America are ready to work with Texas Baptists in doing missions. We're going to do some crazy things for the Lord in starting churches.

"We hope the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be exalted."

One of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's largest missions projects involves a strong partnership with Texas Baptists, said Gary Baldridge, co-coordinator of CBF Global Missions, and Rick McClatchy, executive director of CBF-Texas.

Partners in Hope is the Fellowship's rural poverty initiative, designed to minister in the name of Christ in the nation's 20 poorest counties, which include seven counties along the Texas-Mexico border.

Rural poverty in the region is "crushing," McClatchy noted.

In the Rio Grande Valley, Partners in Hope serves children and families through Kids Heart, a joint venture with CBF and Buckner Baptist

Benevolences.

Other “partners” working in the ministry include Rio Grande Valley Baptist Association, Texas Baptist Men, Baptist University of the Americas and Baptist churches, he said.

McClatchy called on Texas Baptists to “pray every day for missions,” set aside \$1 per day for missions and spend an average of one hour per week in hands-on missions.

The connection between Texas and CBF Global Missions is strong, Baldridge said, noting half the Fellowship's missionaries have Texas connections.

“Our No. 1 mission is to serve you and your church as you discover your mission,” he added.

Compassion is an essential component of missions, stressed Emily Row, Texas Baptists Committed's program coordinator.

She described how Jesus cared for the crowds who followed him and sent his disciples out to serve them because he had compassion on the “lost sheep of Israel.”

In Texas, that's a huge crowd, she added, reporting that 10.5 million residents of the state report no church affiliation.

Missions is built on divine vision, insisted Bill Tinsley, leader of WorldconneX, the Baptist General Convention of Texas' new missions network.

“Something happens when we connect with God's vision,” he said.

Missions has been Texas Baptists' vision since 1880, six years before the BGCT began, when they appointed their first missionary, he said.

Baptists fall into malaise when they lose that commitment to missions and fail to “connect to God's vision,” Tinsley said. “We need to reach back to the past and grab hold of that passion for missions. ...

“We have to connect with God's vision and ask: What is God's vision for my life? What is God's vision for my church?”

Christians should look for missions opportunities all around them, urged B.J. Ritchie, site coordinator for Christian Women's Job Corps in Houston.

The ministry helps underprivileged women gain job skills so they can support themselves and their families.

It is sponsored by Woman's Missionary Union and involves not only training, but one-on-one Christian mentoring-“nothing more than just being a friend,” she said.

“We get to see people come to Jesus every day,” Ritchie noted. “We get to say, 'Hallelujah!' every day.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.