

Speaker calls conference crowd to start churches, commit to evangelize lost_12604

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By John Hall

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RICHARDSON Texas Baptists must revert to first century methods to reach 21st century people, said Ray Still, pastor of Oakwood Baptist Church in New Braunfels.

Preaching from Acts 20:22-24, Still urged church leaders at the Texas Evangelism and Missions Conference to start new churches, find innovative ways to reach non-Christians and commit their lives completely to Christ as the Apostle Paul did during the first century.

Despite commercially packaged church- growth products and models, many churches across the nation are plateaued or declining, Still pointed out.

Ray Still

“For the most part as Texas Baptists, as Southern Baptists, we are not seeing the radical transformation. ... Yet we seem to be so proud of ourselves,” he said.

Christians need to commit themselves fully to reaching non-Christians, making evangelism the driving force of their lives, Still said.

Many congregations spend a lot of time diagnosing spiritual problems around them and reasons people are not coming to faith, but they never take action, he noted.

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Texas Baptists need to start new churches, Still said. His church in New

Braunfels began four new congregations during the past two years. Two of them now are self-sufficient. Three have average attendances of more than 100 people.

The new churches are reaching non-believers, he said. Oakwood Baptist Church's new congregations are baptizing people where older churches were not.

"These churches baptized more people than some of the well-established county seat churches in our association," Still said.

Baptists have a particular duty to start new churches because it is one of the denomination's strengths, he asserted. Texas Baptists have the funds and the models to start effective congregations, whereas other faith groups do not.

"We've got to start churches," he said. "No one's going to do it but us."

Texas Baptists also must look for new approaches to sharing the gospel with different cultures around them, Still said.

Like Paul, Christians must use culturally tailored techniques for evangelizing the various people groups around them, he added.

Above all, believers must keep their focus on bringing people to faith in Jesus, he noted.

Whether a person believes Christ is God remains the difference between heaven and hell, he said.

"That's what it's all about," Still said. "That's what it was about for Paul. That's what it should be about for you."

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