

Ominous missions challenge calls for collaboration_22105

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Ominous missions challenge calls for collaboration

By Marv Knox

Editor

ABILENE-Collaboration took center stage in a missions conference sponsored by Hardin-Simmons University's Logsdon School of Theology.

Almost every speaker invoked the word "collaboration" or something like it to describe how Christians need to cooperate in order to reach people who don't know Jesus as their Savior.

The conference, titled "The BWA, Texas Baptists and Global Missions," focused on how the Baptist General Convention of Texas can work with the Baptist World Alliance, an organization of 211 conventions, 160,000 congregations and 100 million believers around the globe.

Missions
statesmen Bill
O'Brien (left)
and Keith Parks
advocated
collaboration
among Christian
groups at a
global missions
conference
sponsored by
Hardin-Simmons
University's
Logsdon School
of Theology.
(Photos by
Charles
Richardson)

“Collaboration is one of the missing links in world Christian missions,” reported Bill O'Brien, former executive vice president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and former director of The Global Center at Samford University. “Why would anyone not want to enter into this venture of reaching the world for Christ?”

Unfortunately, many missions agencies “look like a collection of silos”-standing tall but alone and unconnected, unable or unwilling to cooperate, O'Brien said.

To be effective in missions, Christians must create “webs” of shared trust, shared resources and shared spiritual gifts to strengthen their missions efforts, he said.

Keith Parks, former president of the Foreign Mission Board and coordinator of Global Missions for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, echoed that theme.

“Regrettably, many have decided to forget about missions and do their own thing,” Parks said. “Reaching the unreached of the world cannot be done without collaboration of the whole Christian world.”

That challenge is overwhelming, he added, noting one in four people “have no access to the gospel.” Meanwhile, Christians spend the vast majority of their resources on the parts of the world that have been saturated with or at least touched by the gospel.

A major reason for this missions imbalance is “we as Christians have less interest in taking the gospel to the most difficult parts of the world, because it doesn't produce the satisfaction we want,” he observed. “We have to be smarter, work harder and submerge our personal sense of self-fulfillment.”

But collaboration works, Parks insisted. He noted that in 1996, Indonesia was home to 128 unreached people groups, and only 18 of them had some kind of Christian witness. But now, thanks to the collaboration of 200 denominations and other Christian groups, more than 100 of those people groups have received a Christian witness to some degree.

Baptists should be asking, “What is God calling us to do that we can't do alone?” said Stan Parks, associate director and international coordinator for WorldconneX, the BGCT's missions network.

Baptists will begin to see answers to that question when they look beyond themselves, he insisted, noting: “We should say, 'I'm a Christian first and a Baptist second,' ... in order to reach the world for Christ.

“One of the most effective ways to reach the world is to partner, to

cooperate-to proactively create networks to reach a city, a state, a nation, an unreached people group. God could do some very exciting things if we were committed to partner with other Christians.”

Collaboration works on multiple levels, said Terri Morgan, head of Partnership for the Environment, a nonprofit agency that works in developing countries.

“Collaboration fulfills a common agenda” to spread the gospel, Morgan said. “Collaboration is sacrificial; it sets aside self-interest.

“Collaboration works toward solutions to very real problems. Collaboration creates love, respect, understanding and consensus. And collaboration overcomes prejudice.”

The BGCT has taken a major step toward collaboration by petitioning to join the Baptist World Alliance as an associate member, noted Jim Heflin, professor of preaching and pastoral ministry at Logsdon Seminary and former general secretary of the European Baptist Union.

This contrasts with the Southern Baptist Convention, which voted last year to leave the 100-year-old BWA. As justification, SBC leaders claimed the BWA is “liberal” and un-American, claims BWA leaders and Baptists from around the world repeatedly have refuted.

Announcing the BWA's North American Baptist Fellowship has accepted the Texas convention as an associate member, Heflin reported: “We have a new day dawning for participation in BWA and other missions endeavors.

“We're looking for new ways, and the Lord is opening new doors for us to partner to do missions.”

Membership is only the latest in many steps of relationship between the BGCT and the worldwide Baptist organization, said Don Sewell, director of

the state convention's Texas Partnerships Resource Center.

For example, the BGCT sponsors 14 native church planters in Eastern Europe in cooperation with the European Baptist Federation, he said.

Most recently, the BGCT contributed \$129,000 to BWAid, the BWA's hunger and relief program, and he announced a goal to double that amount in five years.

“As Texas Baptists, we're extremely diverse, and we reflect that diversity in missions,” Sewell said, citing Texas Baptists' involvement with such missions groups as Wycliffe Bible Translators, Campus Crusade for Christ, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the International Mission Board.

“The one truly amalgamating force is our tie with the Baptist World Alliance. BWA is the glue that holds us all together.”

Dellanna O'Brien, former executive director of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union, affirmed that connection to BWA.

Noting she was proud the WMU voted to remain affiliated with BWA, she predicted of worldwide Baptists: “We will do as we always have done—work with passion for the salvation of the world ... in partnership, not as Lone Rangers.”

Denton Lotz, the BWA's general secretary, affirmed the collaboration of Baptists worldwide.

“BWA is kind of like Noah's ark,” with all kinds of Baptists riding through the world's storms together, Lotz said.

“We belong together because we belong to Christ,” he insisted. “We as Baptists need to realize unity is very important. ... Disunity is of the devil.”

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.