

Page cautiously optimistic about Southern Baptists

March 3, 2007

Posted: 3/02/07

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North Carolina Biblical Recorder

PHILADELPHIA—The future is bright for the Southern Baptist Convention if its members have the right mindset, follow the right motives and adopt the right methodology, [SBC President Frank Page](#) told a group of Baptist state newspaper editors.

Repeating themes he has emphasized in several recent speeches, Page said he is challenging the SBC to be “more authentic in faith and more intentional in sharing the gospel,” to “reach the lost and challenge the saved.”

Baptists need a mindset of Christlike selflessness, a motive based in understanding the convention belongs to God, and methodologies that are always Christ-honoring, said Page, pastor of First Baptist Church in Taylors, S.C.

“I sense a huge number of people who are authentically loving Christian men and women” who care about others and want to help, Page said. Church members are “really tired of the pastors fussing and fighting,” he

added. "They don't understand it all, and if they do, they don't like it."

Page expressed concern that many churches "have become one-generational churches, small groups of white people that haven't learned how to reach out to ethnic groups or even (to) other generations of their own ethnic group."

With current pastors aging and a declining number of seminary graduates who want to pastor traditional churches, he said, "we could see some serious issues soon."

Although SBC seminaries are experiencing record enrollments, most of the growth has been in new undergraduate college programs and degrees not designed to train pastors, he said.

Younger students sense "an extreme call to make a difference," he said. "If challenged properly, they will make a great difference. But they want to do it differently."

Page often encourages seminary students not to disregard traditional churches and to "see potential in them, that they are not dead yet," he said. "It's hard work, extremely hard work, and casualties along the way are many," because some who say they want to change really mean "so long as you don't change what I like."

Self-centeredness also is a problem for churches, Page said. Larger churches sometimes think they don't need the Southern Baptist Convention, so they cut back on support for the Cooperative Program, the SBC's unified budget.

Agreeing his upset election last year was in part "a referendum on the Cooperative Program," Page said the giving program could use some work, "some adjustments in percentages," but deserves increased support. Those who have issues with the Cooperative Program should continue supporting

it and try to bring change from within, he said.

Page downplayed a recent interview in which he was reported to have said that divisive issues in the SBC, such as the [2000 Baptist Faith & Message](#) statement or the ordination of women, should be up for discussion.

Page affirmed the Baptist Faith & Message position that only men should serve as senior pastors but said, “We should also affirm the ministry that women do in all of our churches.” He did not elaborate further.

Asked if he thought it was appropriate for SBC entities to institute policies more strict than the Baptist Faith & Message on issues like refusing to endorse female chaplains or not allowing women to teach theology, Page said he affirms the structure that allows entities to be governed by their trustees.

“Personally, I would encourage entities not to go beyond the Baptist Faith & Message,” he said.

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