

Retooling required for reaching others

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Retooling required for reaching others

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Urging ministers to retool their thinking about reaching others for Christ so they may retool the lives of church members and nonbelievers more effectively, Baptist pastor Charles Booth delivered the keynote speech at the African American Leadership Workshop March 9-10 at the George W. Truett Theological Seminary.

Quoting scripture, poetry and a scientist, Booth urged ministers at the 3rd annual conference sponsored by Baptist General Convention of Texas, to propagate by changing themselves.

Charles Booth
Watch a video clip of Booth's address to the conference.

With nearly 600 ministers and church leaders listening, Booth urged the

Baptist leaders to “dip the bucket into an old well and prayerfully bring up fresh water,” to make Jesus the difference in their lives, the lives of church members and non-believers.

Booth, who is professor of preaching at Trinity Lutheran Seminary and pastor of Mt. Olivet Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio, also encouraged ministers to pursue substance over style.

“The pulpit is no place for personal opinion,” said Booth. “The pulpit is the place for propagation of the gospel.”

Echoing the same theme in an interview following his speech, Booth noted too many churches are beginning to look like the culture we live in, instead of personifying Christian values.

“I think there are so many things now that have occurred in what I call the “secularization of the sacred” that necessitate our return to the roots of our biblical heritage and the claims that Christ made,” Booth stressed.

Booth says African American leaders need to return to a serious study of biblical heritage, make the Word of God practical and be wedded to the great concerns that are impacting the people they want to reach.

At Truett, Booth used the illustration of Paul in the New Testament to drive home a point about preaching. Saying Paul was short, had a humpback, bald head and a pointed nose, Booth told ministers not to worry about their external packaging or attire when they retool, but more importantly focus on what comes from within.

To examine a growing dilemma in the church and its membership, Booth quoted Shelley as saying, “I could accept Jesus Christ, if he didn’t bring along that bride, the church.”

Nearly 600 ministers and church leaders attended the African American

Leadership Workshop sponsored by the BGCT

The church is not as powerful as it used to be, Booth said. At one time, the preacher spoke and everyone listened.

To underscore the need for transformation, Booth stressed that ministers, leaders and church members may be unable to reach nonbelievers unless they change.

He used Freud's teachings to illustrate how the various church groups are battling the "super ego" and the "id" in the conflicts of their best versus their worst. Steer clear of church life that is "like a fraternity or a sorority," Booth said.

"You are not a member of the church," Booth said. "You are a disciple of the kingdom."

The reason behind the chaos and conflict in the lives of church members is that "we [churches] have more members than disciples."

The reason we have more members than disciples is that too many people are not willing to be retooled, Booth said.

If beliefs are based on what people watch on TV and what music sons and daughters listen to, "we are a people with a proclivity for profanity and vulgarity."

To retool, Booth emphasized that ministers and church members need to be reeducated, be born again and go through rehabilitation. Turn the other cheek. Walk the second mile. Suffer from withdrawal symptoms.

The problem is, Booth adds, is that "some of us never have been rehabbed." Referring to a scene in the movie about Ray Charles titled Ray, the professor described how Charles withdrew to a rehab center to get over a heroin addiction.

The emotion in the scene, Booth said, still shakes him from center to circumference. Withdrawal from what has always been your life is not always easy to do, he noted.

To accentuate his point, Booth used Saul's journey from Damascus following three days of blindness into the Arabian Desert for three years.

"Sometimes it's a struggle to become what the Lord wants you to become," Booth said.

"But God gives you a period of detox, a period of rehab called grace." With God's grace always in your Christian toolbox, Booth said ministers and church members can be better positioned to lead others to Christ.

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