

Baptists challenged to advocate for reform of a broken criminal justice system

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Baptists challenged to advocate for reform of a broken criminal justice system

By Bob Perkins

ATLANTA—It's imperative that Baptists ask tough questions in order to spark reform of the U.S. criminal justice system, according to panelists engaging the criminal justice system breakout session Feb. 1 at the New Baptist Covenant Celebration.

Wendell Griffen, judge in the Arkansas Court of Appeals, said its time for Baptists to speak out about a broken system.

"Baptists should demand that the criminal justice system stop wrongful prosecutions," Griffen said. "We who believe that Jesus was tried and punished wrongly should demand transparency in the criminal justice system."

• [See latest photos](#) and the latest [video clips](#) from the New Baptist Covenant Meeting. ([And go here to see our complete coverage of the event](#)).

Griffen said the recent trend has been to hire more police officers and build more prisons, but that's not a good solution.

Any church can participate in

disaster relief, Baptists are told

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Any church can participate in disaster relief, Baptists are told

By Bob Perkins

ATLANTA—To test how prepared churches are to face natural disasters, panels offered suggestions for participants during a special interest session at the Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant meeting Feb. 1.

For example, conference leaders asked participants if they have “go bags” in their churches that are easily accessible for church members in the event of an immediate forced evacuation.

From New York City following Sept. 11, 2001, to the Gulf Coast following Hurricane Katrina, panelists shared their experiences organizing church responses to disasters. Willard Ashley, founding pastor of Abundant Joy Community Church in New York, said disaster can strike at any time and churches should be prepared.

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Pastors: World waits for authentic messengers

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Pastors: World waits for authentic messengers

By Norman Jameson

Biblical Recorder

ATLANTA—People outside the church will hear a gospel message only from a passionate messenger who lives an authentic, transformed life, said two pastors leading a special interest session on evangelism at the celebration of a New Baptist Covenant in Atlanta Feb. 1.

“The proclaimer of the good news must be gripped and transformed by the presence of the living word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit,” said Brenda Little, pastor of Bethany Baptist Church of Christ in Evanston, Ill. “Saved and satisfied is not going to work.”

Sexual exploitation alive in America; churches can end it

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Sexual exploitation alive in

America; churches can end it

By Hannah Elliott

Associated Baptist Press

ATLANTA (ABP)—Many churchgoers know human trafficking and sexual exploitation are global issues. But more than 200,000 children in the United States have become “sex commodities” as well, Baptist social workers say.

Ellyn Waller and Brenda Troy led a discussion about exploitive sex at the New Baptist Covenant meeting Feb. 1 in Atlanta—a city with the nation’s second-highest rate of human trafficking, they said.

Panelists offer practical suggestions for peacemaking

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Panelists offer practical suggestions for peacemaking

By Patricia Heys

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

ATLANTA—David Gushee and Stan Hastey offered Baptists ways to promote peacemaking during a special interest session Feb. 1 at the celebration of a New Baptist Covenant.

Gushee, a professor at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta and recent author of *The Future of Faith in American Politics*, talked about just war theory and its seven criteria. He also outlined the 10 best practices of peacemaking from Glen Stassen's book *Just Peacemaking*.

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Rogers challenges churches to engage in justice issues

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Rogers challenges churches to engage in justice issues

By Jeff Huett

Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty

ATLANTA—Participants at a session held in conjunction with the New Baptist Covenant celebration in Atlanta received a lesson in “going upstream” to address the root causes of injustice.

Melissa Rogers, a visiting professor of religion and public policy at the Wake Forest University Divinity School in Winston-Salem, N.C., led a special interest session that focused on matters at the intersection of faith and public policy.

Baptists wrestle with ways to

find common ground with other faiths

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Baptists wrestle with ways to find common ground with other faiths

By Sue H. Poss

CBF of South Carolina

ATLANTA—As Baptists seek common ground to work with people of other faiths, they face the challenge of finding ways to be relevant in an interfaith context while retaining their own distinctive identity.

“We often don’t reach out to other faiths because we are scared of losing what’s essential about our Baptist faith,” said Noel Erskine, associate professor of theology and ethics at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, Ga. “We are so afraid of losing our identity that we are not relevant in a multi-faith context.”

Relationships needed to break

poverty cycle

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Relationships needed to break poverty cycle

By John Pierce

Baptists Today

ATLANTA—While soup kitchens and clothes closets meet some basic human needs, something more personal is needed to counter poverty, said one who lives and works among the poor.

“We need football games, where we can play together,” said Jimmy Dorrell of Mission Waco, a multifaceted ministry with impoverished persons in Central Texas.

Prophetic preaching breaks down barriers, builds up God’s kingdom

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Prophetic preaching breaks down barriers, builds up God's kingdom

By Jennifer Harris and Ken Camp

Word & Way and Baptist Standard

ATLANTA—Breaking down barriers, healing the hurting, challenging Christians to transcend categories of “us and them” and announcing the coming kingdom of God are just a few of the roles prophetic preachers must fill, according to speakers at a Baptist preaching conference.

Four preachers representative of varied traditions delivered sermons during a seminar on prophetic preaching held in conjunction with the Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant in Atlanta, Feb. 1.

Panelists urge New Covenant Baptists to fight institutional racism

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Panelists urge New Covenant

Baptists to fight institutional racism

By Bob Allen

EthicsDaily.com

ATLANTA—The church's struggle against racism no longer is primarily about skin color but about institutions that bestow privilege on some and penalties on others, an activist, denominational leader and scholar said in a special-interest session Friday at the New Baptist Covenant Celebration in Atlanta.

"While I applaud the organizers of our event in coming together and asking the question of how do we move forward beyond race, I think the real challenge for us is to deal with that insidious cancer that is within the very fabric of our society, that I would term racism," said Aidsand Wright-Riggins, executive director of National Ministries, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

Separation of church & state can be complex, but it's worth the effort, speakers insist

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Separation of church & state can be complex, but it's worth the effort, speakers insist

By Robert Marus

ATLANTA (ABP)—Although often difficult to negotiate, drawing the proper line between church and state is worth it for both institutions, according to experts in the topic.

A panel of religious-liberty advocates addressed a small-group session of the Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant Feb. 1. They said that religious is Baptists' birthright—but that the church-state separation that protects religious freedom is imperiled and need Baptists' advocacy.

“Whether we have a wall or a zone or a rickety fence or whatever, we must continue to have at least a strand or two of barb-wire to keep the institutions of religion from cozying up to the institutions of government,” said James Dunn, a professor at Wake Forest University Divinity School..”

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Medical professionals urge congregational health advocacy

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Medical professionals urge congregational health advocacy

By Brian Kaylor

Baptist General Convention of Missouri

ATLANTA—Medical professionals explained how the biblical calling to take care of the sick could be met by churches offering medical treatment and information Feb. 1 during a New Baptist Covenant special interest session titled “Reaching Out to the Sick.”

Offering advice, resources, contacts and a strong challenge, panelists addressed the health needs of people and how churches can help.