

# Attendance disappoints, quality encourages Covenant planners

November 21, 2011

ATLANTA (ABP) - Planners of the Nov. 17-19 New Baptist Covenant gatherings were disappointed with attendance but pleased with the diversity and quality of presentations, one of the organizers said Nov. 21.

“We had hoped for a larger attendance,” said David Key, director of the Baptist studies program of Candler School of Theology at Emory. “At the same time we feel like our content with the program was very strong.”



Day of Service participants Daniel Vestal and Colleen Burroughs help spruce up mission church.

Key said planners were disappointed that more people didn't hear them in person, but thanks to Internet technology video of all the plenary sessions is available on demand at the New Baptist Covenant [website](#). He said more than 1,000 people viewed the site over the weekend, and he encouraged others to do so as well.

Crowds at Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta, host site for sessions broadcast by satellite to eight other venues across the United States, ran about 250. Key said local pastors promised to bring church

members but didn't show up.

About 200 people attended sessions at St. John Missionary Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, an African-American congregation in the city's northeastern sector. While numbers did not match organizer's hopes, diversity did. Participants primarily included African-Americans and Anglos, but Hispanics and Native Americans also joined in.

Les Hollon, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio, noted disappointment with the attendance for the events at his church, but he applauded the effort as "a bold experiment."

Organizers in Washington, D.C., commented on low turnout. "The people are not here but it is not our fault," said Morris Shearin, pastor of Israel Baptist Church in the District of Columbia's northeast sector. "We have done what we were asked to do."



Volunteers spread mulch on a playground at Edgewood Church in Atlanta.

In Philadelphia the satellite feed was shown in the 3,000-seat sanctuary of Sharon Baptist Church. Attendance was sparse until the final sessions of the NBC event, which was combined with the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Eastern Keystone Baptist Association.

Steven Avinger, pastor of Philadelphia's Greater Saint Matthew Baptist Church, said initiatives like the New Baptist Covenant II help lower racial barriers, but there is "still a lot of work to do."

To that end, the meeting consisted of two days of worship services followed by community service at all nine locations on Saturday. Key said between 160 and 200 volunteers stuck around for hands-on mission work in Atlanta. "We were very pleased with that."

Volunteers including Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Coordinator Daniel Vestal and moderator Colleen Burroughs, pitched in at Edgewood Church, an urban church start in east Atlanta. Projects included landscaping, painting and light carpentry to a building donated a year ago by the local Baptist association.



Pastor Nathan Dean, right, tells the story of Edgewood Church to CBF Executive Coordinator Daniel Vestal.

Pastor Nathan Dean said the building was "in pretty rough shape," but the price was right for the congregation that had up till then been worshipping in a middle school. He said he was encouraged that a building that was built by white Baptists in the 1950s and then turned over to the association when members left the neighborhood due to white flight is now home to a congregation that is 80 percent black and 20 percent Caucasian.

Dean said the church intentionally reaches out both to the homeless, prostitutes and drug addicts and the “post-modern, post-Christian” affluent people moving back through gentrification. “A lot of people think you have to do one or the other, but you can’t do both,” Dean said. Even though they may lack a church background, he said, upwardly mobile young professionals have compassion for folks who are down and out.

Randy Shepley, coordinator for the Atlanta Day of Service and pastor of First Baptist Church in Tucker, Ga., described Edgewood Church as “an oasis of hope” for the community.