

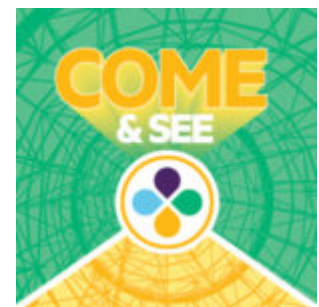
CBF general assembly challenged to ‘come and see’

July 1, 2022

DALLAS—Houston Pastor Ralph Douglas West invited participants at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship general assembly in Dallas to “come and see the unique ways God encounters us.”

Just as no two sunrises, sunsets, mountain peaks or snowflakes are identical, the ways Jesus summons his followers and the disciples Christ calls are “wonderfully different,” said West, founding pastor of The Church Without Walls in Houston.

Basing his sermon on John 1:35-51, West identified four categories of individuals Jesus called as disciples.



He began with the spiritual seekers who were listening to John the Baptist when John identified Jesus as “the Lamb of God” and who were asking questions “life’s big questions.”

“There were some who already were looking for something good and found something—or someone—better,” West said.

He then examined three disciples of Jesus and the types of people they represent.

Simon—whom Jesus renamed Peter, “the rock”—represented people who are full of potential that God can turn into reality, West said.

“It took some time to get Simon to rock status,” he noted, noting Peter’s initial instability and unpredictability.

Philip—whom West said is portrayed in the Gospels often either stating the obvious or missing the point—represented the “clueless” whose eyes God can open to truth.

Finally, he focused on the cynical Nathaniel, who asked, “Can any good come out of Nazareth?”

“We need converted cynics,” West said. He gave the example of a man in his church who had been an embittered follower of the Nation of Islam. Once he became an enthusiastic Christian, he discipled hundreds of other followers of Jesus.

‘Set a new table’

In his report to the general assembly, CBF Executive Coordinator Paul Baxley called on the Fellowship not just to make room at the table for others, but to “build a whole new table” that reflects “the dream of God” for his people.



CBF Executive Coordinator Paul Baxley presented his report to the CBF general assembly in Dallas.

(CBF Photo)

He urged CBF to “answer a call that the Spirit is giving ... to set a new table where all gifts are welcome and all gifts are unleashed.”

Baxley reported 154 churches, more than 1,000 individuals and 18 organizations contributed \$1.12 million to the CBF Ukraine Relief Fund in four months. He called for ongoing prayer for people still in Ukraine and for the 5 million refugees spread across Europe.

At this point, however, Baxley announced CBF is ending active promotion of the relief fund. At the recommendation of field personnel in the region, CBF will hold back a significant portion of the funds received for long-term recovery in the months and years ahead, he said.

Preaching from Psalm 66, Pastor Courtney Stamey of Northside Baptist Church in Clinton, Miss., emphasized the importance of God’s people participating in worship services of testimony after tumultuous times.

“We need a sacred space to leach out this poison of pain, to celebrate the presence of the Holy Spirit, to confess our doubts and concerns, to lament, to cry, to sing, shout out and praise,” Stamey said. “We need it so we can truly know—deep, deep in our souls—what remains.”

From a global pandemic and racial reckoning to political division and a rise in Christian nationalism, she said, unsettling events should prompt Christians to reflect upon where “God’s steadfast love has showed up.”

‘We have carried on’

Patricia Wilson, a Baylor Law School professor and member of Seventh and James Baptist Church in Waco, completed her time as CBF moderator at the general assembly. She reflected on serving during a global pandemic.

“What I found is that God is good. We have carried on,” Wilson said. “Many things have happened despite COVID. Because we haven’t been able to have a typical general assembly, we missed greeting friends, participating in uplifting worship services. Because of COVID, our field personnel and partners were unable to carry out ministry in usual ways. Because of COVID, we became more aware of inequities and injustices that exist in our local communities, country and world.”

In spite of the challenges COVID presented, Wilson said, “My hope and optimism for CBF have never been greater.”

Incoming CBF Moderator Debbie McDaniel from First Baptist Church in Huntsville, Ala., told the general assembly: “My dream is for each of us to come and see and know the people and the resources of the Fellowship on a deeper level. As I serve you, I will pray for you as you continue your journey of discovery and living into your own unique calling to Christ’s mission.”

Valley Ranch Baptist Church in Coppell received a Mission Excellence Award from CBF for its long-term support for ministries along the Texas-Mexico border and its local English-as-a-Second-Language programs. Other mission award recipients were Heritage Baptist Church in Heflin, Ala., and First Baptist Church in Corbin, Ky.

Stephen Reeves, executive director of Fellowship Southwest and director of advocacy for CBF, announced the creation of the Suzii Paynter March Advocacy Fellowship.

Endowed by the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation, the fellowship will provide a current student or recent school of social work, seminary or law school graduate practical experience in advocacy.

The first fellow will work in partnership with Pastors for Children to help develop a network of advocates for public education within CBF churches.

The CBF general assembly approved a \$16.5 million budget for 2023, an increase of about \$2 million in anticipated revenue. To fund the budget fully, CBF will need to raise \$250,000 in new contributions from churches and individuals to CBF Missions and Ministries, and it will require \$225,000 in new contributions to the CBF Offering for Global Missions.

With additional reporting by Aaron Weaver and Carrie Harris of CBF.