

African-American Fellowship celebrates diversity, stresses evangelism

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TYLER—African-American Baptists from across the state gathered to celebrate the diversity of their churches during the recent African-American Fellowship annual conference.

The event featured a different preacher representing a different style each night, a break from past conferences that featured one preacher. Featured speakers came from Texas, Louisiana and New Jersey.

Bernadette Glover-Williams, executive pastor of Cathedral International in Perth Amboy, N.J., addressed the Texas African-American Fellowship annual conference.

“I’m always concerned about being inclusive because Jesus was radically inclusive,” said Charlie Singleton, director of BGCT African-American Ministries. “There are a lot of small and mid-sized churches here. There are people from across the state. We’ve come together to celebrate the richness of our diversity and heritage.”

Fellowship President John Ogletree, pastor of First Metropolitan Baptist Church in Houston, encouraged conference participants to increase community outreach.

Many African-American churches already have multi-faceted ministries in communities, but more needs to be done, he insisted. People are hurting and in need. They are looking for hope.

By increasing outreach, African-American congregations can help people to

find what they are looking for in Jesus, Ogletree said.

Building on Ogletree's message, Bernadette Glover-Williams, executive pastor of Cathedral International in Perth Amboy, N.J. said a church's spiritual health can be determined by examining how it interacts with its community.

A healthy congregation meets people physical and spiritual needs, said Glover-Williams, the first female preacher to address the conference. People are drawn to it and transformed by the gospe, she said.

"Our outside witness makes a commentary on our inside influence," Glover-Williams said.

During the James Culp Banquet, held inWorship and song was conjunction with the fellowship meeting,part of the African-Solomon Ishola, general secretary of theAmerican Fellowship Nigerian Baptist Convention, encouraged annual conference. African-American Baptists to have churches shaped by God's heart. That kind of congregation sacrifices in order to restore people's lives in the name of Christ, he said.

"The church after God's heart seeks the soul, one by one," he said.

If churches follow God's heart, they also will rejoice in God's work in front of them, Ihola insisted. Referencing Texas Hope 2010—a Baptist General Convention of Texas initiative to share the gospel with every non-Christian in Texas by Easter 2010 and meet urgent human needs—Ishola said he hopes to see many people come to Christ soon.

"We should eat and dance because so many have come home," he said. "Before 2010, cannot we have more celebrations?"

The fellowship re-elected all of its officers. Ogletree was elected president, Michael Bell, pastor of Greater St. Stephen First Baptist Church in Fort Worth, as vice president; Michael Evans, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mansfield, as secretary; Marvin Delaney, pastor of South Park Baptist Church in Houston, as treasurer Steven Young, pastor of New Generation Baptist Church in Tyler, as assistant secretary; and Elmo Johnson, pastor of Rose of Sharon Baptist Church in Houston, as assistant treasurer.