

Preaching Lab provides resources and creative ways to lead

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“Every Sunday, we want to create something that changes someone,” Wes Hamilton, lead pastor at Hulen Street Church in Fort Worth, told attendees during The Art of Preaching & Teaching Lab.

The lab, held at the Texas Baptists’ office in Dallas on Aug. 6, drew 65 attendees, including lead pastors, youth ministers and other church leaders.

David Miranda, then director of Millennial/Gen Z Ministers Network, and a team of volunteers coordinated the preaching lab, which was hosted by The Pastor’s Common.

Launched by Miranda in 2019 in collaboration with David Foster, Jordan Villanueva and Abraham Quiñones, The Pastor’s Common is a Texas Baptists ministry dedicated to providing opportunities for emerging ministry leaders to be heard, resourced and find community.

Miranda said the labs’ purpose is to create a space for unity among pastors and leaders, and also offer resources that will bless their church or ministry.

“Pastors tend to be autocritical because there is so much stress and identity tied to [preaching],” Miranda said.

“We want to alleviate and mitigate any type of self-inflicted wounds from the pulpit and just show them that we’re all in this and know there’s no real

expert, we're all learning at the same time."

Strengthen preaching, improve church health

During the lab, attendees learned how to strengthen their preaching abilities and improve church health from three keynote speakers.

Hamilton addressed creative preaching that encouraged attendees to bring clarity to their sermon's text in an unexpected or surprising way.

"Creativity is an ability we all possess. We all possess this ability because we were made in the image of a God who is a creative God," Hamilton said. "While we are all creative like God is creative, we never will create like God does. God creates something from nothing. We only create something from something."

Hamilton suggested that because a pastor's source material—Scripture—never changes, creative preaching is "nothing more than finding fresh ways to say ancient things."

He warned attendees not to let creativity overshadow God's word.

"Creativity is always helpful, but it's never essential [because] God's word never comes back void," Hamilton said.

Meghan Hendrickson, BSM director at Dallas Baptist University, said she gleaned a fuller understanding of generosity as it pertains to ministry from Hamilton.

"God invites us to be generous not only with our finances, but also with our time, our prayers, our relationships and our creativity. I had never considered creativity as an act of generosity, but that is so true," said

Hendrickson, who is scheduled to speak at the 2024 Texas Baptists annual meeting, Nov. 10-12 in Waco.

“I’m walking away encouraged to continue pursuing creativity in my own life of ministry and to create space to encourage others to exercise their own God-given creativity in ministry.”

Preach to serve the congregation intergenerationally

Al Curley III, youth and young adult pastor at Cornerstone Church in Arlington, spoke of crafting a message to serve the congregation intergenerationally by being intentional to find common interest or insight for multiple generations in the church.

“The beautiful thing about intergenerational preaching is that it doesn’t put one generation in front of the other. We’re all on the same playing field, and your job as the preacher is to get the different generations to look at one another in empathy, sympathy and adoration ... for the goal of cooperation and collaboration for the advancement of the kingdom of God,” Curley said.

Curley presented to attendees Holly Catterton Allen’s definition of intergenerational: comprehensive mutuality, equality and reciprocity that makes individual and collective transformation more likely.

He taught attendees that intergenerational ministry and preaching work hand-in-hand to find and communicate ways for every generation to engage in conversations about Jesus and faith relationships.

Curley told attendees in order for their churches to survive, they need to be having conversations about Jesus outside of the physical space of the church, and intergenerational preaching can achieve that.

“People are growing and declining at the same time, and it takes place throughout the duration of their lives. So, no matter how old you are, you haven’t arrived, and no matter how young you are, there’s something I can learn from you,” Curley said.

“I think that’s by God’s design that we can learn from one another, no matter how young or old we might be.”

Nathaniel Ledyard, a student leader at Lake Church in Arlington’s college ministry, attended the lab alongside his college minister to learn more about pastoral ministry. He said he found Curley’s talk on intergenerational preaching particularly impactful, inspiring him to encourage community within his ministry.

“I think I’m going to try to make it very apparent that, to further the kingdom, we need community just as God has called us to have,” Ledyard said. “This was my first time attending, but it’s definitely been a very big eye-opener seeing other peoples’ perspectives on leading and teaching and how to best serve a community.”

Vital importance of prayer emphasized

Jason Paredes, lead pastor at Fielder Church in Arlington, concluded the lab with a message on “The Role of Prayer and Power of Preaching.”

“The most important thing you can do is pray, not prepare your sermon, because ultimately the greatest thing that will change the heart of man is the Spirit of God, not my words ... so that your faith won’t rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God,” said Paredes.

Paredes encouraged attendees to look to Mary and Martha’s story in Luke 10 as an example of the role of prayer in a movement of the Holy Spirit. He suggested sitting at the feet of Jesus and waiting on his instruction is where

life change will happen.

“Prayer isn’t what I’m supposed to do before the work. Prayer is the work,” said Paredes. “The amount of time you linger at the feet of Jesus, that’s what’s going to make the difference.”

The Pastor’s Common is set to host its Sabbath Retreat on Oct. 28-29 at Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas.

Miranda said there are so many engagements pastors are involved in it becomes easy for pastoring to become a job and not a calling tied to their relationship with God. So, he said, the Sabbath Retreat is intentionally set toward the end of the year to allow attendees to focus on areas they need rest.

“We want to return them back to, as Revelation says, to their first love, which is God and from God. Everything stems from that,” said Miranda.

Miranda emphasized the hope of The Pastor’s Common is that attendees would walk away from The Art of Preaching & Teaching Labs knowing their ministry matters and they are not alone, but have support in leading their churches.

“In the kingdom of God, we are always better together, and I see that proven true each time The Pastor’s Common gathers. I always walk away encouraged and ready to keep walking by faith,” Hendrickson said.