

Theology of caring guides church

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WACO—Without compassionate care at its core, a church is just “going through the motions” as it performs all its other ministries, a Houston-area pastor told a workshop at the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting.

“What is a theology of care? How is this appropriate in our church and our lives?” asked Byron Stevenson, pastor of The Fort Bend Church in Sugar Land.

Pillar of compassion

Stevenson anchored his presentation—and his church’s ministries—in Matthew 9:35-36, which describes Jesus was moved with compassion for the multitudes.

“One of the things that blesses our church are the five pillars of faith our church is built upon—trust, faith, kindness, liberal giving and compassion,” Stevenson said. “And without the pillar of compassion and care, our church is merely going through the motions.”

Often in church, the focus can be too heavily emphasized on the preaching and teaching of God’s word, the glitz and glamour of church buildings, and the outward appearance of the entire church, he said.

“That’s when we literally forget how to care about people,” Stevenson said. All other church activities must be rooted in a theology of care to be transformative, he asserted.

Shepherd and sheep

Stevenson outlined principles foundational to his theology.

“A theology of care is always rooted in seeing God as the ultimate shepherd and the church having shepherding qualities,” he said.

“Sheep have poor eyesight, poor eating habits and little strength to defend themselves. Sheep need help. If we are going to embrace a theology of care at our churches, it comes with the risk of getting messy with these sheep.”

A theology of care is rooted in conviction “to make sure that the sheep are cared for,” he explained.

“Lastly, a theology of care is rooted in our compulsion. Compulsion is an irresistible urge to act a certain way. Our care should move us with a burning passion to meet people’s needs.”

‘Take a risk’

Stevenson urged church leaders to take the risks that come with empathy.

“Many of our churches have hurting people in the pews, but the staff isn’t feeling the congregation’s pain. May our hearts never become so numb that we cease to operate with compassion for people,” he said.

“So, get in the game. Get yourself dirty. Take a risk. And remember that when Jesus saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion. May we always be compelled to allow conviction to draw us to care for our sheep.”