

FOCUS

A Newsletter for ABCCR Professional Church Leaders

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It has been an interesting afternoon. I was invited to meet with congregational and denominational leaders from several different communions: Disciples of Christ, Southern Baptists, Nazarenes, Lutherans, National Baptists and me. Others had been invited and many more needed to be present. We weren't there to talk theology or polity or worship styles. We were there to talk about a move in the state legislature that could have significant negative impact on all our churches. We were there to seek ways to work together to address our concern and give voice to the value of Christian ministry in our culture.

I returned to the Region Office where I had opportunity to bring greetings to a gathering of regional staff from Church World Service. These were men and women from Minnesota to Texas (and parts in-between). They work with many different churches of many different denominations to help address issues of human suffering. Church World Service works with partners to eradicate hunger and poverty and to promote peace and justice around the world. Many of you know them as the CROP Walk people.

Yesterday and today I have been copied on some email correspondence tying up loose ends from last month's Mid-Winter Mission Conference. The conference was a great event for our Region churches, highlighting the use of simple technology to connect with ABC missionaries wherever they are.

Missionary speakers from Haiti shared from the depths of their aching hearts even as the news of the Haiti earthquake was beginning to slowly make its way to us.* The conference itself was put together by a team of committed people from churches all over Kansas. Each one brought their gifts to bear on the task at hand, and God did something wonderful.

I lift up these three recent experiences only to remind you of something our mothers taught us long ago: "Many hands make light work." There is something very powerful about working together. Though someone has joked that teamwork is essential because it allows you to blame someone else, the truth is we must work together as we seek to engage the ministries to which God has called us.

I continue to be amazed as I hear the historical stories that are beginning to surface as we prepare for the Region's 150th anniversary celebration. As our early Baptist forebearers gathered in Atchison in 1860, they were confronted by an incredible array of political, social, economic, agricultural and industrial concerns. They were also confronted with the truth of the Gospel that compelled them to combine their efforts and work together to bring the presence and power of Christ to bear on the needs of the world around them.

There were only 23 churches that met together that week. They realized, however, that though they

might individually be only “one drop,” together they were “an ocean.”

A century and a half later we Central Region Baptists are still confronted by an incredible array of concerns. In some respects, so little has changed since then. In addition, this truth has remained constant: we need one another if we are going to do the work God has given us. This is true ecumenically as well as within our own ABCCR family. I have been writing the cover letter for FOCUS for over two years. You may have noticed, my message has not varied greatly. Like you, I can easily recognize the many differences that exist from church to church (and within our churches); but I am more and more convinced that the Spirit of Christ within is far more interested in pulling us together than pushing us apart. A century ago Henry Ford observed, “Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.” We have had our beginning. Making progress requires constant effort and grace. Godly success is possible as we work together.

Blessings,

John Williams

*In the month of January, churches and individuals of the Central Region gave \$37,995 to One Great Hour of Sharing designated for Haiti Relief. Special offerings which were taken during Mid-Winter Mission Conference (\$1,957) and the Board of Directors meeting (\$825) brought the Region’s Haiti Relief total to \$40,777.

Your generous gifts can be added by writing a check to your local church and designating it, "One Great Hour of Sharing/Haiti Relief."

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