

Presidential Vision for B.G.C.

By Rev. Dr. Steven G. Blunt

“Had it not been for the sovereignty of His unfailing love, my soul would’ve surrendered to the eternal flame; the waves of despair would’ve overcome me.” Some time ago, the Holy Spirit empowered me to pen these words during a moment of prayerful meditation while sitting with my father as he was being prepped for a medical procedure. Though significantly poignant in that moment, these words have now evolved into a more universal testimony regarding God’s grace and unfailing love over our state convention.

If we’ve learned anything over these last few years as it relates to the sovereignty, the majesty and the sustaining/keeping power of our Lord’s Holy Spirit we’ve learned a few things. **First of all, we’ve learned that when we come together as a people of faith that there isn’t anything that we cannot accomplish for the sake of our Lord’s great convention.** In the midst of the state of the ship, in the midst of turbulent times, in the midst of the testimony “stony the road we have trod”...though there have been moments and seasons of uncertainty and unease where we’ve been unable to really find, discern, and see our way...though at times it was both incomprehensible and unintelligible when we’re willing to trust in the Lord and ban together in faith *“it is no secret what God can do.”* We cannot afford in this moment still of “push and press” to rob God of the opportunity to be God.

And so even as we continue to “push and press,” even as we move forward there are still areas, there are still many pockets of nebula that have to be discerned, articulated, and matted out along the way but if we can come to this moment acknowledging what **God has already done** then certainly and assuredly we can trust in Him to carry us further along the way. **So let’s not rob God of the opportunity to be God.** Let us continue to trust in Him and allow Him to lead us and guide us...for what good would faith be if we were always able to clearly articulate and define every measure of the variances and vicissitudes that comprise the ministry of our state convention.

Secondly, we’ve learned that when we come together that anything that God wills for us becomes manifest through convention teamwork and advocacy. It cannot be something that only the president does, or our past presidents, or our officers, or our executive ministry team, or our general board. No! It’s going to take all of our associations, all of our regions, all of our moderators, it’s going to take all of our churches (not just the “talented tenth” as Dubois would assert...not just a few here or there) but it’s going to take all of our churches that claim BGC and that attest to being a part of BGC. **It’s going to take all of us coming together with one common goal and that goal is to lift and magnify the name of the Lord building a more effective Christian witness across our state so that a greater sense of efficacy and effectiveness can be brought to the marvelous branches of Zion that we’ve been blessed to serve in.**

In consideration of that, I'd like to build upon the premises that have already been provided by our two immediate past presidents. From a pragmatic socio-cultural context we were challenged visionally by President Riddick during his tenure regarding the ecclesial challenge of **"Being Relevant"** and **"Being Intentional"** and then we were challenged by President White in a more institutional approach to simply **"Be the C.H.U.R.C.H."** In fleshing out the acronym **"C.H.U.R.C.H."** theologically and practically for our great convention we were able to embody a sense of being and organic intentionality (if you will) as it related to our churches and our advocacy within the convention.

I want to just stand on the foundation of that mantle and push it just a tad further and flesh out the actual acronym of the **B.G.C.** as we explore the trifold dynamic of **"By the Grace of the Cross, the Church, and the Community."** In recognizing the delicate yet necessary responsibility that the church has in bridging the Cross of Christ and the Community together, we now more than ever need to strengthen that relationship between the Church and the Community that is provided by and through the Cross.

As the Church goes, so does the Community and vice-versa...and I dare submit our great convention. There must be a healthy relationship (as we can never forget if we are to **Be the C.H.U.R.C.H.**, if we are to **Be Intentional**, and **Be Relevant**, if we are to **be B.G.C.** we must never forget that) there is a necessity in realizing that in everything we do, we do it because of the gift of God's grace we've been cast to stand in the shadow of the Cross. We're a people of the Cross and we cannot forget the magnitude, the poignancy, and the role that the Cross of Calvary plays not only in our salvation but also within the terminus of our Lord's church and the exigencies of our state convention. In addition to this, the recognition of the role that the 21st Century Church plays in these perilous times where the very identity of the church seems to be morphing almost every single weekend.

Thirdly, of course is the dynamic of our community in recognizing the particular station of our church as the primary target of our church's praxis for ministry and advocacy. What good is the Church if it has not had an impactful presence within the Community that we've been placed? Dr. Robert Dale, imminent theologian and scholar on church leadership, speaks to the ecclesial presence of the church in the community and what would happen if the church disappeared from the community. Dale raises the question, *"If our church were to disappear, what would be lost to God's Kingdom? Would it be missed? Would the community mourn or celebrate our disappearance? Or worse yet, would they even realize that we're no longer there?"*¹

The time has long past that we can expect the community to receive and embrace us as a Church just because we're there. There has to be something that we're offering by way of the Grace of God, the cause of Christ, in the shadow of the Cross that compels the Community to feel that we're a wanted, needed, and contingent necessity to serve in their particular parish.

¹ Dale, Robert D. Pastoral Leadership. Nashville: Abingdon Press 1986, p.100.

Besides Sunday Morning Worship, what does the church offer to its surrounding community? What are we translating for the culture of our communities where we serve that are no longer being transformed by our plants and our people? Says Dr. Robert Putnam, imminent sociologist and author of *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*:

Religious affiliation is by far the most common associational membership among Americans. Indeed, by many measures America continues to be an astonishingly “churched” society. For example, the United States has more houses of worship per capita than any other nation on Earth. Yet religious sentiment in America seems to be becoming somewhat less tied to institutions and more self-defined.²

These are questions and realisms that our 21st Century Church must address in this growing age of “self-definition” and churches will be looking to our state convention to aid in articulating some of the answers to these realities.

Visional Scripture:

“[It is of] the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. [They are] new every morning: great [is] thy faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:22-23.

This text is not only the testimony of our faith, it is not only the testimony of our personal and collective sojourns with the Lord, but it is also the undisputed testimony of our state convention.

Points of Interest (At a Glance)

The following variables speak to a cultural restructuring of our state convention that will aid and empower us in continuing to become increasingly effective in our ministry praxis:

- ❖ State Commissions will now receive their ministry praxis from the state office. This will provide a greater sense of vision, fluidity, and execution as it relates to the particular ideals of the commission.
- ❖ Commission on Health can either be absorbed into Dr. Elijah Burke’s position of “Director of Men & Health Ministries” or can continue to serve in the traditional vein with the visional directives coming from Dr. Burke. This suggestion curtails unnecessary

² Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks 2000, p.3.

overlapping and reinforces state office servants/personnel/staff as conduits for effective ministry.

- ❖ Commission on Social Justice will focus on primarily one area of concern that can be adopted by the entire convention. Instead of being completely reactionary to the plethora of social ills that plague us all the convention can adopt one area of concern for the year or one area of concern for the entire president's tenure that will give the convention a sense of identity as it relates to a particular social justice issue. This will allow churches within the convention to receive the necessary awareness to move towards advocacy so that each church within the convention can be unified on one area of concern.
- ❖ Development of Director of Ministries position for the state office. This position will continue to convey the new transition of the convention as ministry titles will begin reflecting more relevant ministry targets. The Director of Christian Ed. title still represents a needed commodity within our convention but it also communicates to a former generation of the convention.
- ❖ Increase the convention's effectiveness and ministry marketing brand through corporate investing/partnerships and professional capital campaign initiatives.
- ❖ General Board Revisioning: Explore how the constitution of the General Board can be revamped (non-parochial: beyond ministry representation) to reflect the universal ideals of the convention; Men's Ministry Revisioning: Explore how the life-ideals of men can be utilized as a state curriculum to strengthen the fellowship and advocacy of men across the state; Clergy Revisioning: Identify "ministry pressure points" that are particular to clergy that will encourage greater camaraderie, support, and connectivity across the state; Regional Revisioning: Develop a representation model where the regions of the state convention have a heightened opportunity for communication, solidarity, and ministry partnerships.
- ❖ Develop a community partnership/advocacy matrix for convention churches where churches can actually be registered in their communities for advocacy programs/ministries.
- ❖ Mutual Ministry Target to be annually identified/shared with the Virginia Baptist State Convention (i.e. Children's Home).

