



**CBF-LA
'BRIEFS'**



Our own **Dr. Sarah Frances Anders** will be the keynote speaker addressing "WOMEN IN BAPTIST HISTORY" at the annual meeting of the Baptist History and Heritage Society, Samford University in Birmingham will host the meeting June 2-4. Learn more at baptisthistory.org.

New Church Start Continue to pray for our church planting work. Leaders in this effort will highlight their plans in a break out session at Spring Assembly.

State Disaster Response **Lynn Hawkins** is recruiting volunteers from Louisiana who can be part of a national CBF network to aid victims of natural disasters. **David Harding** will lead the national effort that utilizes local churches to provide second stage, hands on, practical help. Contact Lynn at 318-255-4242.

Louisiana CBF Missionaries **Keith Holmes** and **Mary Van Rhee**en are will be home the last week of May and the month of June. Invite them to speak to your church or group about their work with the Romany people (Gypsies). They can be reached at kh@worldmail.org.

Notable and Quotable "When the church gets aligned with a political party—left or right—it's like mixing ice cream and horse manure. It won't hurt the manure, but it ruins the ice cream." - **Tony Campolo**

Correction: Last issue's "Briefs" section carried a quote regarding "The Common Good" attributed in error to Dr. Harry Boyd, Jr. The quote actually originated with Dr. Daniel Vestal.

Observe Baptist World Alliance Sunday The first Sunday of February every year is Baptist World Alliance Day when Baptists recognize the larger body of Christ and pray for each other. We ask God to help those who are denied religious freedom and who suffer for their faith, and pray for the Gospel to reach the ends of the earth.

CBF-LA Receipts	Nov-Dec	Fiscal Year
Undesignated	\$11,138.25	\$47,114.85
Partners in Hope	\$5,363.00	\$30,893.21
Stagg-Tolbert Forum	\$1,000.00	\$2,076.00
Credits	\$5.84	\$983.84
TOTAL	\$17,507.09	\$81,067.90

CALENDAR	
February 6	Baptist World Alliance Sunday
March 11-12	CBF State Assembly FBC Shreveport Dan Vestal speaker
June 30 - July 1	CBF General Assembly Grapevine, Texas
July 27-31	Baptist World Alliance Centennial Congress Birmingham, England



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To receive our newsletter contact:
CBF-LA News and Views
543 Oakley Drive
Shreveport, LA 71106
Or: e-mail kylek1@bellsouth.net

News and Views
Published bi-monthly by CBF of Louisiana
PO Box 807, Ruston, LA 71273
Lynn Hawkins, Coordinator
318-255-4242
cbf@cox-internet.com
Bill Hoffman, Partners in Hope
Louisiana Rural Poverty Initiative
318-453-6999
thoffmanfly@aol.com
Charlene Kelley, Moderator
Kyle Kelley, Newsletter Editor
kylek1@bellsouth.net



National Coordinator Daniel Vestal To Keynote Louisiana Spring Assembly

Louisiana's major annual meeting, known as "spring assembly" will feature respected pastor, writer and leader of the national Cooperative Baptist Fellowship movement, **Daniel Vestal**. Known for a thoughtful, passionate and inclusive leadership style, Dr. Vestal has been instrumental in developing a global vision that has united a diverse Baptist family around the ministry theme of being the presence of Christ.

Drawing from Ephesians 1:15-23, Vestal will speak on "Being Partners in Hope." He is slated to address the assembly Friday evening and Saturday morning. First Baptist Church, Shreveport will host the event March 11-12.

Also featured will be small group sessions on innovative ministries from leaders throughout the state, times of worship and celebration, sharing of stories, fellowship, and of course, food.

Rev. Bill Hoffman, coordinator of Louisiana Partners in Hope Rural Poverty Initiative will describe the state CBF mission outreach to the delta parishes of Tensas and East Carroll. Citing stories of redemption, hope and encouragement, he will outline ways for you and your church to be involved in this growing work.

Current work on a new church start in South Louisiana will be shared by committee members **Dr. John Goodwin**, **Dr. George Haile**, **Rev. Lynn Hyder**, **Dr. Steven Meriweather**, **Rev. Roger Sullivan**, **Ms. Sue Tweedy**, and **Rev. Pam Williams**.

Rev. Lee Weems, Associate Pastor, Emmanuel, Alexander will lead a session on conveying hope in times of loss through grief ministries.

Dr. Carlton Winnberry, Professor and Chair of the Religion Department at Louisiana College, will offer the workshop "Discipleship in Mark's Gospel."

Dr. Greg Hunt, Pastor, First Shreveport and his wife, **Mrs. Priscilla Hunt**, will describe how to develop a marriage ministry to reach out to couples and help them nurture and grow their relationships.

Mr. Tom Newsum, from CBF Atlanta, will address the topic of estate planning and furthering the work of ministries for years ahead.

Spring Assembly is a time of renewal and recharging of batteries, re-connecting with friends, and meeting new brothers and sisters. Together we come as co-laborers, discovering again "the reason for the hope that is within."

Being Partners in Hope



"that you may know what is the HOPE of His calling"

Ephesians 1:18

Louisiana

COOPERATIVE BAPTIST
FELLOWSHIP

Spring Assembly

March 11-12

First Baptist Church

543 Oakley, Shreveport 71104

Begins on Friday evening banquet,
Concludes with Saturday Luncheon

REGISTRATION INFORMATION
INSIDE - PAGE 2



Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. It's bursting out! Don't you see it?

Isaiah 43:19 The Message

Get involved! Be part of God's new surprises in CBF- LA!

Spiritual Pray to undergird Partners in Hope, mission projects, new church start, congregational supports and our national and international work. Send us your ideas, your creativity -- the places the Spirit is moving in your life.

Physical Share your time and presence. Let us know of your interests and passions and we will find the place of ministry and mission that only you can fill.

Monetary Give joyfully. Give hilariously! Use the enclosed envelope. Support this ever expanding work. If you send offerings to the national office, be sure to designate at least 25% for ministry in Louisiana. Make a monthly pledge!

WHY LOUISIANA BAPTISTS NEED TO KNOW DR. VESTAL

by Kyle Kelley

Baptists don't have a Pope, and if we did, Daniel Vestal wouldn't be the candidate. Present at the founding of CBF and at the helm since 1996, Dr. Vestal has worn many hats, though never an ecclesiastical crown. He speaks with a quiet authority that comes from listening to others and participating with them in disciplined, prayerful discernment.

It is not enough to say what we are against: narrow mindedness, small-hearted-ness, etc. Those who have heard Vestal speak at our national gatherings know how he has persistently pushed for a positive vision. "We're a Jesus people, we follow Jesus," he tells us. We are to imitate Jesus, be the presence of Christ, align ourselves with His Kingdom. It's not always as simple as you might think.

As coordinator, he is both administrator and the one in charge of "the vision thing." He would be the first to say he cannot speak for all of us on every issue. Part of the CBF experience is diversity and respecting the different traditions of Christian faith, (much less different

ways of being Baptist) and the myriad means by which God speaks to us. We have freedom in Christ, but it is a freedom to be servants.

No matter what title you give Dr. Vestal, you're not around him long before you realize he is a Pastor. As Pastor, he is about calling out our gifts as individuals and churches, developing those gifts in the grace God bestows, and using them in the joy of obedience. He's a Preacher too, who proclaims the whole Gospel.

We are called to be equally serious about evangelism and meeting concrete human needs even if that means speaking truth to power like the prophets of old who railed it's time to get our personal and our corporate houses in order.

If leading Baptists is like trying to herd cats, then I commend to you a pretty good cat herder, "Pastor Dan." Hear him when he comes to our Spring Assembly March 11. Read his words selected from his columns starting on page 4. These were condensed and sometimes spliced around particular themes. Celebrate with us "something new" God is doing.

**SPRING ASSEMBLY SCHEDULE**
March 11-12, 2005**FRIDAY**

7:00 Dinner
Business Session
Speaker - Dr. Daniel Vestal
Dessert and a Time of Friendship

SATURDAY

8:30 Complimentary Continental Breakfast
9:00 Break-Out Sessions (Choose one)
(All sessions repeated at 11:00)
10:00 Worship - Dr. Vestal, preaching
11:00 Break-Out Sessions
12:00 Lunch
Speaker - Rev. Bill Hoffman
CBF-LA Partners in Hope Coordinator
1:30 Adjourn

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

FRIDAY DINNER - \$10

SATURDAY LUNCH - \$5

Please reserve meals by February 25

CHILDCARE AVAILABLE THRU 3RD GRADE - Please reserve by February 25

CONTACT PERSON

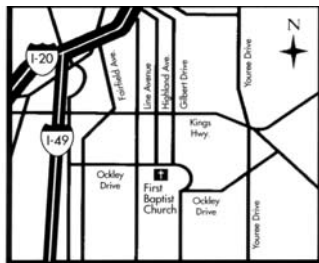
For meal or childcare reservations:

Mary Gurski - First Baptist Church
318-865-8414 ext. 24 or
gurski@fbseshreveport.org or
543 Ockley Dr., Shreveport, LA 71106
If registering by e-mail, you must include "CBFL" in subject line to assure registration is received.

HOTEL INFORMATION

Host hotel:

Clarion
1419 E. 70th
flat rate - \$69 per room
reservation cutoff date February 18
contact person - Shelli Briggs
phone: 318-797-9900, ext. 167
fax: 318-798-0822

**SPRING ASSEMBLY LOCATION - FIRST BAPTIST
543 OCKLEY - SHREVEPORT****CBF-LA NEWS AND VIEWS SALUTES THE WITNESS
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHRISTIANS**

They have taught us about courage, mercy, reconciliation, and the power of God's love over violence.

To our most bitter opponents we say: "We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws, because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as co-operation with good. Throw us in jail, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory." — Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

CBF commits to meet long-term needs in Southeast Asia

By Carla Wynn, CBF Communications, January 13, 2005

ATLANTA — The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship had a presence in Southeast Asia prior to tsunami destruction Dec. 26, and the organization has committed to staying in the region even after immediate relief efforts subside.

"We have a commitment to be there as long as we are welcome to be there," said Barbara Baldrige, CBF Global Missions acting coordinator.

The Fellowship's prior presence in the region has helped in relief efforts. "Our field personnel in these regions have developed relationships and networks that are strategic in this time of crisis. They know the needs, as well as the opportunities, and are able to implement relief in effective ways," said national CBF coordinator Daniel Vestal.

With such massive destruction leaving many people unable to obtain food and other necessities, one of the Fellowship's strategies for long-term impact is microenterprise development, which involves starting sustainable small businesses with small amounts of money, said David Harding, the Fellowship's international coordinator for emergency response and transformational development.

"The long-term gives us the option to build trust and to have a meaningful relationship with people over time in

order to meet their holistic needs," Harding said.

For immediate relief efforts, the only volunteers being sent to the region through CBF volunteer missions are medical professionals and water filtration experts. In the long-term, Timothy Wood, CBF's volunteer missions program manager,

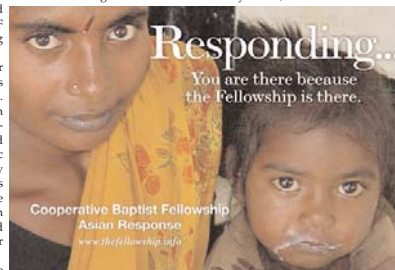
anticipates opportunities for volunteer teams to aid in the rebuilding process.

The need for volunteers will not diminish over time. In fact, as the immediate needs of water and food are addressed and the relief phases moves into a reconstruction phase, volunteers with a more general skill set will be needed. Wood said he will keep contact information on file and volunteer teams could be called on to

go in about six months.

Experts predict the rebuilding process will take years, but the Fellowship's commitment remains. "Our commitment is not only to immediate relief but to long-term transformational development and long-lasting relationships," Vestal said.

By accessing the Fellowship's Web site, www.thefellowship.info, individuals can read up-to-date dispatches from the field, learn of the latest prayer needs or make a contribution online.



FREEDOM

Baptists were born as a freedom movement. From our beginning we have championed the freedom of every believer to interpret and apply Scripture without the imposition of man-made creeds or ecclesiastical authority. We have challenged a monarchical form of church government or denominational connectionalism that minimizes the autonomy of the local church. We have stood for the freedom of the individual conscience in matters of faith and have resisted attempts by either the church or state to control the conscience by any form of coercion or intimidation.

How precious is this freedom and how easy it is to take it for granted! I sometimes hear younger Baptists (as well as not-so-young Baptists) say, "We don't care about the politics or power struggles of the past," or "We are not interested in what happened in Baptist life in the past." When I hear such remarks, I wonder if those individuals would say the same thing about the Protestant Reformation, the American Revolution, the Civil Rights Movement, the collapse of Communism or the dismantling of Apartheid. Would they also say, "I don't care about tyranny, prejudice or oppression in the past and efforts to resist and overcome it?" Or, "I don't care when human dignity is denied, character is assassinated, careers and ministries are destroyed, churches are divided and institutions are changed."

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was born out of a struggle for freedom: soul freedom, Bible freedom, church freedom, religious freedom. The birth of this renewal movement came from the pain of freedom fighters. These noble men and women resisted fundamentalism, authoritarianism and just plain meanness. We will not be cut off from those roots that birthed us; nor will we be separated from the principles of freedom that continue to form us; nor will we shrink from the struggle against any form of tyranny that enslaves

the soul or imprisons the mind. We will continue to be a freedom movement.

Perhaps freedom is not valued unless it has been lost or is threatened. I hear regularly from Baptist laypeople who are in churches where there is little freedom. They always speak with grief and anguish at being in a church that they love (and in many cases helped to build) where freedom is no longer valued. They are not free to disagree or even discuss. They are not free to be involved in the decision-making processes of the church. Everything is controlled and imposed. I also hear regularly from clergy who are looking for a church where they are free to lead, where they are free to speak and live out their calling. These clergy confess with grief and anguish that they do not feel free to exercise their God-given gifts, but rather feel stifled by the tradition and inertia of the church.

How precious is freedom? I'm grateful to be a part of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. It is a place where we hold unwaveringly to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, yet treasure the freedom to disagree with one another. This is a fellowship where there is love of Scripture, yet freedom to differ in interpretation. This is a fellowship where we share a common commitment to global missions, reconciliation and justice, yet affirm the freedom that results in diversity. In the words of Julie Pennington-Russell, "I've been bound and I've been free, and free is better..."

But with authentic freedom comes equal responsibility. We are set free from man-made creeds so that we might obey the Word of God. We are set free from human traditions, rules and regulations so that we might be a slave to Jesus Christ. We are set free from fear so that we might be humble servants. We are set free from forced conformity so that we might nurture community. We are set free from guilt so that we might live in peace and be peacemakers.

**ON SECULAR POLITICS**

It is a myth to think that CBF is homogeneous when it comes to secular politics. We have rock-ribbed Republicans, yellow-dog Democrats, tree-hugging Greens and just about everything else in this fellowship. I preach in churches across the country, visit in the homes of some of our strongest supporters and have conversation with leaders in various states. I can tell you that we are "all over the board" when it comes to political perspectives.

When it comes to politics and moral issues, it seems to me that no political party has a corner on the truth. Christians ought to be concerned about social issues, but let us be careful in choosing the issues that fit only in our political persuasion. The USA faces a crisis of political immorality and promiscuity. We ought to be concerned about the erosion of the family and the attacks on the sanctity of marriage as well as the loss of respect for the unborn. We ought also to be concerned about the growing disparity between rich and poor and the fact that 40 million Americans don't have health insurance.

There is in this country an unprecedented abuse of the environment as well as a pervasive indifference to violence and pornography. Racism remains a cancer that eats at the very fabric of our society. There are an array of global issues that Christians need to face: proliferation of nuclear weapons, terrorism, nation building in the developing world and

the pandemic of HIV/AIDS. Quality education for all Americans as well as affordable and quality health care for all Americans are moral issues. I could go on and on.

From the beginning, CBF has resisted passing resolutions at our General Assembly on social, moral, political issues. I continue to

believe that this is a wise practice and it shouldn't be interpreted as indifference to contemporary culture. Nor should it lessen our commitment to equip and empower Baptist Christians to be involved in the political process and addressing the concerns of our day. Being the presence of Christ involves awareness, concern and action in the world...

I don't see so partisan that you can't envision compromise and collaboration with those of different perspectives to achieve common goals. I know some who are so partisan in their politics that they have difficulty relating honestly and warmly to others who do not share their views. This is unfortunate, but among those who are inexcusable. Why? Because our ultimate allegiance is not to our own country (no matter how much we love it) and it is surely not to any political party (no matter how much we are committed). We are disciples of Christ and our ultimate devotion is to the Kingdom of God which transcends all political boundaries, systems and parties.

The Kingdom of God first?
REALLY FIRST?
... How inconvenient!

**PARTNERS IN HOPE***rural poverty initiative*

by Bill Hoffman

What a great way to bring 2004 to a close! Thank you for the overwhelming response to "Kids @ Christmas". Over 650 gifts for the children of inmates in Tensas and E.Carroll Parishes were donated! This more than doubles last year's generous response. Chaplains, prison guards, inmates and their families were all touched by the outpouring of Christian love and concern showered upon them.



Participants in Bible study at Newellton Detention Center sing the benediction together.

Businesses, churches, youth groups, S.S. classes, Bible study groups, mission kids, families, and individuals all had a part in expressing God's love through our restorative justice ministry to our East Louisiana neighbors.

Amid the many challenges and obstacles facing these communities in crisis, it is a genuine blessing to see the stirring of God in these detention centers. We have been so fortunate to have a small part in the resurrection of hope and purpose and the transformation of lives taking place there. There have been over 100 inmates baptized in Tensas Parish in 2004!

Thank you for your continued prayers and investment in this ministry.

Bill will lead a session on Partners in Hope Rural Poverty Initiative at the Spring Assembly March 11-12 at First Baptist Shreveport.

PRAYER REQUEST:

Pray for the opening of doors for expanded work in East Carroll and opportunities for summer church group and family mission activities.



Bill Hoffman baptizes a new believer at Newellton Detention Center, one of 16 baptized that December morning.



Five Regions With 20 Target Counties

Partners in Hope is CBF's 20-year commitment to offer hope to people in and around the nation's poorest counties. This is done by listening to local leaders and others who work among the poor in these areas, building relationships of trust with them, learning about existing resources, and walking alongside them to find solutions. Barely three years old, the dream for Partners in Hope developed out of the CBF Global Missions commitment to the most neglected peoples. Counties with the highest percentages of their total population living below the nationally established poverty line were identified based on the 1995 census. The 20 counties that emerged from the study were all in rural areas in five regions. Out of that list of 20 counties, East Carroll Parish in our own state ranked as the second poorest county in the nation. Interest began to build and by 2003, there was active service in 8 of the 20 counties; now efforts are going on in 15 of the 20 counties. Learn more: thefellowship.info or ruralpoverty.net



Louisiana Partners in Hope Parishes

LOOKING TO JESUS, HIS KINGDOM AND HIS PLAN

Jesus is the interpretive principle for the Christian. This means that we interpret all Scripture in light of the life teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus. He is ... the normative principle by which everything is measured. In simple terms, this means that we follow Jesus and seek to be like Him. We study His teachings, especially His Sermon on the Mount, to form our behavior and character. The Kingdom He announces and embodies is our passion. The ethic of discipleship is a Kingdom ethic and it is radical. Forgiveness of our enemies, compassion for the poor, simplicity in life and speech are to mark us because that is what God's order of things is all about.

But it is in His sufferings that Jesus shows us most clearly what the reign of God requires of us. Christ calls us to follow Him in His sufferings. In the cross of Christ is our salvation. Also in the cross is the pattern for our life. The elder I became, the more convinced I am that what we do with our pain and the pain of the world is the acid test of

the Christian faith. What will we do with our own pain? Will we embrace it, not as a friend, but as a reality, or will we avoid it? Will we allow pain to do its work in us and through us or will we deny it? Will we trust and obey God in our pain or will we always be looking for a way out? ... What will we do with the pain of the world? Honestly now, how much do we bear one another's burdens or weep with those who weep? ... The Christian community is one to be characterized by suffering. Love. And lest this sound morbid, let me remind you that the joy and power of the resurrection is God's promise to those who learn to die. It is the gift that follows, even accompanies our obedience....

We will our mission in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we witness and as we suffer, God works in beautiful, mysterious and powerful ways. God convicts people of sin and draws them to Christ. God heals bodies, minds and spirits. God restores broken relationships. God transforms character. God answers prayer. In the power of the Spirit, God works among the people of this world.

CHURCHES IN CRISIS

I don't need to tell you that many Baptist churches are in trouble. And the tragedy is that many more of them don't know they're in trouble. They're not just plateaued or declining, but they're irrelevant to the community where they live. They baptize few converts and make even fewer disciples. Some of them are playing church. Others of them are doing church, but very few of them are being church. Missional churches practice authentic evangelism and discipleship. They nurture one another in faith and spiritual formation. They create community and seek justice and reconciliation....

The crisis in church after church is related to false expectations. Some are imposed on the leaders by the congregation and some are self-imposed by leaders. The expectations have to do with what I call "a con-

sumer ethos," the overwhelming characteristic of which is selfishness. The expectation is that the church be a vendor of religious goods and services for felt needs rather than a missional fellowship that serves and sacrifices for THE COMMON GOOD.

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is flourishing because of widespread commitment from so many to our shared ministry. Many different people bring their influence and energy, their gifts, their calling, their time and resources to "serving Christians as they discover and fulfill their God-given mission." From church planting to chaplaincy, from leadership development to social justice, from spiritual formation to global mission, the vast number of Cooperative Baptists are discovering how much we can accomplish when we are passionate about THE COMMON GOOD.

Christ in the gathered church and the continued mission of Christ in the scattered church.

I anticipate life beyond death, the resurrection of the body, a final judgment and a future glory that words cannot describe.

- I cherish
- the truth and power of prayer,
- the beauty and goodness of life,
- the redemptive power of pain,
- and suffering
- the pure joy of family and friends.

I affirm the freedom of conscience and competency of every person to respond to God for themselves.

I believe in the love and grace of God for all people, including those whose confession is different than this one.

GUERRILLA EVANGELISM OR GARDENING?

The church is the mystical Body of Christ. We are the continuing presence of Jesus in the world, extending and continuing His redemptive mission. God is at work and present in the world outside the church. In culture, in government, in politics, in justice and in religious movements, God is active and present. But it is in and through the church that the living Christ dwells. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit endowed with gifts, empowered for witness and created to bear fruit that makes us look like Christ and act like Christ. As Christ's Body, we are to engage in the same mission that consumed Him.

What does this mean for our lives?

It means first that we will live cross-culturally. We are "in" this world, not "out" of this world. There is an alien and foreign quality to our existence when it comes to the values and standards that surround us. This should not be interpreted in a petty way as Christians do. It is not drink, dance or go to movies. Rather, it should be interpreted in a profound way that suggests Christians don't succumb to the commercialism, competitiveness and classism that surrounds us.

We simply refuse the militarism and triumphalism of the world. We are cross-cultural in that we reject the violence and racism pervasive in our world.

To live cross-culturally will be difficult for some of us, and perhaps we can learn from career missionaries who have lived this way for a number of years. Missional living begins when I allow my life to be shaped by Jesus and the Kingdom He embodies and not by the popular media, peer pressures or pundits. Missional living begins when I embrace the ethic of a crucified, resurrected Jesus and not one of civil religion or consumer church....

[Missional living] leads to living incarnationally. This means I must become immersed and involved in personal relationships with people. I don't stand apart from others to judge or condemn, but I identify with them where they live. I learn their language (both spoken and heart lan-

guage). I listen to them (both when I agree with them and when I don't). And most of all, I love them (both unconditionally and sacrificially).

This is how the mission of Jesus was accomplished. He became a servant to all. He did not aspire to greatness or glory, but to service. If we are to live missionally, we will not aspire to power or position, to fame or fortune, but to simple life of self giving. We will defer to one another, seek ways to meet one another's needs and look for practical ways to promote the welfare and well-being of others.

Finally, missional living means living transformationally. We seek our own transformation, the transformation of others and the transformation of the world. Joel Vestal, president of ServLife International, wrote the following words in a recent newsletter.

We sold Elise's car yesterday! There is a nice 'rush' or 'sense of accomplishment' when you "close a financial deal." Money is exchanged, the keys are turned over to the new owner. IT WAS DONE! It reminded me recently when a dear lady asked me how I "close the deal" in evangelism, as if evangelism were like a sales presentation and it the "goods" in a nice presentation are "closed when someone says the prayer."

It threw me back a bit as I don't think of evangelism in this category or through this

lens. I have to confess I used to. I remember thinking of the "GUERRILLA" evangelist days, I would think of "how many I could get that day. I would brag of how many 'prayed a prayer.' Don't misunderstand, I do believe in people praying a prayer of confession and salvation, but something has been missed when we forget to realize that people are on a process and a journey of faith in Christ. We simply can't "close the deal" in one moment and then forget the rest of the journey of formation, transformation into His likeness. Gardening is a much better metaphor for evangelism (as it came from Jesus) as opposed to business.... We take seriously the truth that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself... and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19 RSV). ...we ourselves experience the transforming reality of Jesus Christ and we seek to be instruments of that reality."

IT'S ABOUT CONGREGATIONS

Our mission is to serve churches as they discover and fulfill their God-given mission.... Our passion is the health and welfare of Baptist churches. Our vision is congregations being the presence of Christ, locally, globally, cooperatively. Our strategy is to network, empower and mobilize churches.... We partner with a number of institutions to strengthen the witness of churches.

Why is our focus so centered in congregations? Because we believe that this is where the Great Commission will be fulfilled and where the Great Commission will give us the power, reconciliation and justice we live in. It is where as churches incarnate the life and ministry of Christ and proclaim the Kingdom of God in word and deed.

GETTING NORTH AMERICAN CHRISTIANS "UN-INSULATED"

[We must have] ... a global vision and passion for missions and ministry. The Great Commission of Jesus Christ is to make disciples of all nations and the biblical mandate of justice is for all people. The parable of the Good Samaritan is as true and just as the network is anyone that is in need regardless of where they live or what language they speak. ... Yet most of us live, spend, pray and worship as rich North Americans more than we do as global Christians. We live in insulation and isolation.

A global vision and passion for missions and ministry is as close as the stranger next door and it is as distant as those who have no access to the Gospel. Christians who have a global vision and passion are compelled from within to seek Christian unity, to work for reconciliation and peace, to preach the Gospel to every creature and to pray for the Kingdom to come and the will of God to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Some of us falsely assume that the global mission of the church will be fulfilled primarily by Christians in North America, when actually there are more missionaries from other parts of the world than there are from North America. I do not imply that God is not the impact that the Christian Church in China had on me last year. The explosion of the gospel witness in China is one of the great movements of God in the past 25 years. What is happening in Korea and parts of

Africa is nothing short of amazing.

So take heart and rejoice. But at the same time, be aware of unmet need and unreached peoples.... There are still a billion people who have little or no access to the message of Christ. There is staggering human suffering, as well as inequity and injustice on this globe. We cannot be at ease or satisfied.

The growth of the church is greatest in those places where the unchanging truth of Christ is adapted to the language and culture of the people. Whether it is in China, Latin America or Africa, the Christ that is proclaimed and embraced is not a westernized Christ or an American Christ or even a Baptist Christ, but the crucified, living One.... The day of "colonial missions" is over. The day when western countries and western denominations impose their culture on other parts of the Body of Christ is over. But the day when Christians from all over the world, in mutual trust and respect, work together for the sake of the gospel is just beginning. Perhaps this is not to imply that God is not already at work among the unevangelized. God is surely at work and Jesus goes ahead of us before we ever arrive to witness and minister. But the mission mandate is clear: everyone, everywhere.

We want every person in the world to hear the Jesus story in their own language and culture. This is not to imply that God is not already at work among the unevangelized. God is surely at work and Jesus goes ahead of us before we ever arrive to witness and minister. But the mission mandate is clear: everyone, everywhere.

COVERAGE, COMMUNITY AND TRIBALISM

There are at least two kinds of courage. There is the heroic act of self sacrifice in a time of crisis, as exemplified by the New York firefighters and police officers on 9/11. Their courage "made a difference" both in the rescue of individuals and in the inspiration it gave to our nation. Another kind of courage is demonstrated in sustained and principled action that seeks change. This is what Eugene Peterson calls "a long obedience in the same direction." Courage of this kind is equally heroic because often it is exhibited in the face of opposition and without apparent results. This is commonly the courage of the dissenter or the prophet.

I don't think there is such a thing as "collective courage." But I do believe that courage can be fortified and strengthened in community. We can "encourage" each other in doing the right thing, even when it is not popular and when it is not easy. If we do so, we encourage ourselves we must live in community....

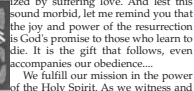
In a dangerous world and in difficult times, human beings form tribes - clusters of individuals who share a common identity, interest or ideology. Devotion to a tribe is not necessarily bad, except when it leads to tribalism.... In some parts of the world tribalism actually leads to physical violence and even war. Ethnic cleansing and genocide are present day realities. The tragedy is that racial and religious rivalries exist

in every part of the world and they create unimagivable harm.

The Christian faith doesn't obliterate the reality of tribes but it stands in judgment against tribalism as that is provoking and divisive. Recently I heard about the ministry of a US Army Chaplain stationed in Iraq. As he prayed for the safety of American soldiers, he also prayed for the safety of Iraqi soldiers, he also prayed for the life of the Iraqis to be spared, for the war to be ended soon and for peace and reconciliation. He didn't just pray to a tribal god but to the One who is the Lord of all peoples and the One who loves all peoples. It is disturbing to me to see the priority of some American Christians that is to "win the war."

If my belonging to a tribe promotes bigotry, resentment or hatred.... If my love for a tribe transcends a love for my neighbor (even if that neighbor is a Samaritan), then I really do not understand the Christian faith. Christian faith should broaden our perspective, not narrow it, make us more sympathetic and more sensitive to those outside our tribal circles, not less. Christian faith should foster dialogue, compassion and relationships, not isolation and bitterness. For all of you who are not necessarily Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:27-28.

VESTAL CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



"Pastor Dan"



IN HIS OWN WORDS

Excerpts from "Vestal on Line" - for full text of columns see thefellowship.info

