

Hello, everyone:

Following is a report on the ABF meetings held September 30 and October 01, 2005 at First Baptist in Halifax.

The theme was "How shall we then live?" It was a reflection on Convention's recent action with regard to the provisional statement and code of ethics, and a consideration of possible responses.

Friday night Gordon Delaney spoke of churches/denominations which are creatively living into the future, and those that are tenaciously trying to preserve a past that probably never existed, and cannot be recovered. He used examples drawn from the United Church of Christ in the U.S. and the United Church of Canada - congregations seeking intentionally to welcome and include all people regardless of gender, age, race, socio-economic standing or sexual orientation. And he urged us to foster communities of inclusion rather than creating conclaves of narrow theology and rigid practice.

Gordon then talked about the "crisis of leadership" faced by the church in our time. He urged those who serve as pastors and denominational leaders to take up the difficult but necessary "prophetic" role of calling churches to model the life of Christ - lives marked by compassion, justice, acceptance, grace, and peace.

A lively Q & A session followed Gordon's address, which was then followed by a celebration of the Lord's Supper. Rev. John Boyd offered a very meaningful meditation that focused on the life of Paul. John reminded us that while we think of Paul as a great hero of the faith, many in his time thought him to be a trouble-maker and a heretic. He particularly struggled with James and the other leadership in Jerusalem who envisioned a more exclusive church that retained much of its "Jewish" past. It was Paul, led by the Spirit, who called the church to a wider, more inclusive view of the future, often in the face of much opposition. John shared quite confessionally that opposing the current agenda of Convention has taken a great deal out of him, but that he finds solace and renewed conviction in Paul's example.

The evening concluded with a delightful time of fellowship, complete with refreshments prepared and served by the church's Youth Group.

Saturday there was a panel discussion with David Dexter representing the First Baptist Halifax deaconate; myself; Debbie Matheson and Garnet Parker from the Kempt shore pastorate; and Andy Crowell from Truro. Debbie is a deacon and a student at the Divinity College. The Kempt pastorate (Hants County) is a very needy area and they are providing a vital healing, witnessing, and caring ministry. Garnett had 3 funerals this week and 65 last year! He is seen as The minister in the area. Their sense of

commitment to providing a healing, and evangelical ministry was inspiring. But, they are very upset over the Convention action. They see it as direct interference in the life of their church, a turning away from historic Baptist principles, and driving a wedge between themselves and gays they have been counselling. Debbie is sure she will not be ordained because of her views.

David Dexter said First Baptist has adopted a 4-faceted approach: 1) to stay in the fight and try to convince the Council and fellow Baptists of the dangers in adopting the provisional statement; 2) to inform their congregation of the issues; 3) to generate alternative ways of being Baptist; and 4) to not worry or fret but to put their energy into the first 3 items.

Others spoke. Marilyn Piers, who has had national experience in the social work profession, is upset with the code of ethics. In particular she says no provision has been made for investigating complaints and the very informal way proposed will get them in trouble. Other speakers called for more direct contact with the Alliance of Baptists in the US (the group that broke away from the Southern Baptists) and the Gathering (a body similar to ABF in Ontario), incorporation of ABF, and another participatory process to work this through.

The consensus was that there is a year to try to change the direction of convention before the provisional statement is ratified next year.