

Baptist Collegiate Ministries of Chattanooga

We live in a world where commitments are no longer measured by lifetimes but rather by months or even days. Conversation is limited to a maximum of 140 characters and rather than take place facing the other person, is done by typing into a cell phone. It is a world where messages or “facts” are judged true simply because they are said to be so and not necessarily because they are proven so over time and through experience. Success is judged as a function of production with little regard to cost. It is a time where often the developmental goal of individuals is not independence or even character but comfort. In many cases the world is one in which our loyalties are measured not in the currency of conviction but solely by our willingness to give our time or money. It is indeed a different world than the one in which we grew up. In many cases, it causes us to shake our heads because it is not the world where we wish to live. Our temptation is to either deny this world's existence, isolate ourselves from it or even become like it.

Yet, this is our world of today.

And it is the world into which God has placed us to be His disciples...and to make disciples. God does not give those of us who are older the option of ignoring those who are younger. Rather, we are surely made responsible.

For 80+ years Tennessee and Hamilton County Baptists have been about the business of making disciples among the college communities of Chattanooga. During that time there have been numerous shifts in the world. There have been depressions, wars, eras of “love” without consequence and decades defined by consumerism. Earlier Baptists remained faithful to the calling to be disciples and work cooperatively as the church to make disciples. These callings were greater than their fears or the various temptations to consider their own needs above those of the other. They recognized that in order to be heard over cultural shift of great magnitude the necessary voice was not that simply of individuals or individual churches... rather the voice of Christ as spoken through the collective voice of the whole Christian community...His church working together. The corporate efforts of Baptists have enabled us during times of greatest challenge to remain relevant not just in our respective corner of the culture but among all of society. Our cooperative efforts in Chattanooga have enabled us to do more than maintain a presence among the academic community. It has provided us the security and stability to be faithful to the task of making disciples among our best and brightest. For decades these young men and women have then gone on to lead our churches, to care for our sick, to teach our children, to enforce our laws and build our homes...and to do so in every corner of our community and many others.

A young Queen Esther realized that God required her to put aside her own plans and join her voice to the voices of His chosen people in order that a whole nation might be saved. “For such a time as this...”, Esther understood her responsibility to put aside her own comfort and security in order to secure the opportunity of others, those that would come after her, to experience what it meant to be the people of God. Such is the time we find

ourselves in. It is a time of tremendous change, challenge and turmoil. It is yet another time when the question remains whether this generation and the ones that follow will know and follow “the Way” of Christ. More than ever it is crucial for those of us who have known and benefited from the truth of Christ put aside our own comforts and recommit to joining our voices and efforts together to secure this same opportunity for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Baptist Collegiate Ministry has always been a cooperative effort of our local churches. Through the years some have engaged more in our efforts to reach the local college and university communities. Some have engaged less. Now is a time, however, when more than ever it is critical that we join our voices and efforts together to respond to the shifting culture....not by ignoring it....but engaging, shaping and defining it.

During the last several years we have worked not only to continue to reach, teach and nurture young men and women. We have also worked to put into place new structures and mechanisms that will provide increased opportunities for churches to work together in accomplishing this goal. Most notably, over the past year our ministry has formed and implemented a local “Board of Directors” comprised of local laypersons, pastors, state and associational staff, alumni and university administrators. This board is already working to provide a foundation for ministry that is strategically positioned to address the needs of students but is also more capable of exploring new partnerships and avenues of service with our local churches. This board structure also means that more of our decision-making is made in response to local ministry needs and is done so by local people. The Board structure is a rotating one. If there are people in any of our churches with a passion for reaching and making disciples among young adults, we would welcome knowledge of their interest as we seek to move our on campus ministry forward. Likewise, if there is opportunity for us to promote together the efforts of local churches, we ask that you share those with us in order that we might join with you in your efforts.

Two additional mechanisms that hold continued great promise are the intern ministry that has been developed and our alumni ministry that is in development. The intern ministry obviously provides opportunities for ministry training among young men and women. It also puts a structure into place where the potential exists for strategic partnerships with local churches that could place their young people or even staff people “on campus” and not be on the outside looking in. The alumni ministry has recently been given attention by our board. While extending our ability to influence young adults beyond their 4-5 years on campus, it also may eventually provide a mechanism whereby graduates are able to naturally use their ministry gifts by functioning as mentors, advisors and “disciplers” for generations of students that will follow.

Yes, the world is changing. In many ways it is a different place. But, it is the mission field that God has given us and called us to. Will you prayerfully consider joining your voice to ours so that together we might be a greater part of God’s redemptive work?

Steve Roper, Campus Minister