

Six reasons why . . .

We Need the NACC!

By Bob Russell

Years ago Ben Merold made a statement that we have all repeated, “If we didn’t have the North American Christian Convention, we would have to have something like it.” That is true, but what does that mean? Why would we need something like this convention?

Fellowship

If you are like me, you may say you don’t need the convention for fellowship; my closest relationships are in the local church, and I can do without the fellowship at the convention. But the convention broadens our perspective, rekindles relationships, and deepens roots. I see people here that I see only once a year and I wouldn’t see again until I got to Heaven, if not for the convention.

We had Roy Lawson as a guest speaker in our church 30 years ago, and he did a great job. We struck up a friendship, but I guarantee, if it weren’t for the North American Christian Convention, we would probably not have an ongoing friendship. But we have developed a habit. One night at every convention, Joy, Judy, Roy, and I go out to eat at the most expensive restaurant Roy can find. Then we argue about who paid last year. We have had such a great friendship over the years, all because of the convention.

In 1995 my wife had a stroke one week before the NACC met in Indianapolis, and Roy and Joy Lawson, along with two of their friends, left the convention (where he was speaking the next day) and drove to Louisville. They came to our house to see Judy for a half-hour. I will never forget that. That is a relation-

ship developed at the NACC.

The convention is like a large family reunion. There are some distant cousins you only spend five minutes with, but there are some close relatives you love to see. You embrace and you spend hours with them. It is a time of deepening relationships, and it gives you a sense of heritage and belonging to a family beyond your little circle.

Celebration

The NACC is a rallying point for nondenominational people. According to *The New York Times*, we are the second-fastest-growing movement of any religious group in the country. God is using our simple,

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nondenominational plea to reach people. What Alexander Campbell, Thomas Campbell, Barton W. Stone and others dreamed of we are experiencing right now!

At last year’s convention Jim Garlow said, “Your movement in the past 10 years has experienced renewal,” and it is strange for a movement to do that, “but your nondenominational position is being well-received.”

In 1987, when our church in Louisville grew to be more than 1,000 people, I knew I was way out of my league, and I knew I needed to talk to some other guys who were going through some of the same problems I was going through. I went to the *Di-*

rectory of the Ministry and contacted every church that was running about 1,000 in attendance. I said, “Let’s just get together and network a little bit.” At that point there were 10 of us. This year we have almost a hundred!

An official from the Navigators asked me what was going on in our movement. He said, “All over America, I am seeing more vibrancy in the Christian church than any other movement.” It is not just large churches; great things are happening in smaller churches, with new-church plants, in parachurch organizations, Bible colleges, and mission work.

Think about Dudley Rutherford pulling off a merger between a Baptist Church and Shepherd of the Hills. Jim Burgen wrote the first Gold Medalion book for Standard Publishing. Cecil Byrd was martyred for his faith in Africa, and his wife and son graciously forgave his killers. Think about what is going on in the chaplaincy and the senior adults ministry and some of our mission work.

We need to celebrate those things.

Fifteen years ago our movement had a poor self-image, and it’s time for us to get over that. God is using our plea to simply go back to the New Testament. Let’s rejoice in that and give Him thanks.

Identification

I like the word “identity” in the NACC mission statement. Most of us encourage Christian people who move into our area to move their membership to a local church because they need the identification with a local body. Every sheep needs a fold; every Christian needs a local church. It is not a matter of being a



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Members of our fellowship from around the world enjoy each year's reunion at the NACC. This scene, captured at last year's convention, is an example. Mary Ann Bream, George Melton, Alan LaRue, and Harvey Bream (left to right) shared smiles and memories.

Christian; it is a matter of commitment and belonging to a body.

There is a sense in which the same is true of the local church. Every church needs some kind of identification with the larger body, a sense of heritage.

The North American Christian Convention gives us a sense of belonging to a family of believers in a tangible way. I am not in favor of denominationalism at all, but I think the spirit of isolationism and total independence that is exhibited by some is selfish and dangerous. We are not a denomination, but we are a brotherhood. Brothers need to stay connected in some way.

Years ago, I met a crusty old World War II veteran named M.L. Kafphammer, and he related that after the war he went to visit an institution for the criminally insane. There he found many dangerous, neurotic criminals watched over by only two prison guards. Kafphammer asked, "Aren't you worried? Over one hundred prisoners and only two prison guards!"

They could overpower the guards."

The warden said, "Oh no, don't worry. Lunatics never unite!"

You know, God's people ought to be smart enough to know we need each other. Jesus prayed, "May they be one, Father, that the world will believe you have sent me."

I think the preachers of large churches are particularly at fault here. If you preach in a large church it becomes a denomination unto itself, and you don't feel much of a need to belong to a larger body. I hear pastors of large churches say that they don't go to the convention because it doesn't do that much for them. They go to leadership conferences and get challenged there. The music at the local church is just as good as what we hear at the NACC, so they don't encourage their people to go because they can get inspired elsewhere.

Maybe, just maybe, we ought to think about coming to the convention for what we give. By participating we give a sense of identification and encouragement to others.

If you are a leader in a small church and you go to the NACC and none of the leaders or presidents of the Bible colleges are there, none of the publishing houses are represented, none of the ministers from the large churches attend, you feel somewhat let down and think, *This isn't very important, or they would be here.*

The truth is that those of us in large churches need identification too.

Accountability

There are a lot of benefits to being nondenominational, but there is a disadvantage: the local church and the local leaders have little accountability. If I preached in a denominational church and I violated the basic doctrinal stance or the moral values of the denomination, I would be called into question or defrocked for my behavior. Church leaders in our brotherhood can be all over the board and there is no pressure outside of the local eldership to restore them.

The North American Christian Convention in the past has served as a gentle, optional accountability group. We need some accountability and some peer pressure to remind us of our responsibility to live right and to preach the truth.

There are a lot of things that keep me straight, and although it's not a major incentive, there is fear of embarrassment in facing you. I have seen the humiliation of those who have fallen, and I shared the disappointment in those people at the NACC. I don't want to disappoint you, and I don't want to be humiliated like that.

Testimony to the World

How does the world know who we are? The NACC provides an annual impressive testimony of what we stand for and who we are, and that is what most frequently identifies us. People ask us at Southeast all the time if we are the Disciples of Christ

Continued on next page

North American Christian Convention Registration & Financial Support

Indianapolis, IN / July 8–11, 2003

NAME _____

ATTENDING SPOUSE _____

HOME ADDRESS _____

CITY / STATE / ZIP _____

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PREFERRED EMAIL _____

CHURCH _____

CITY / STATE / ZIP _____

REGISTRANT OCCUPATION _____

SPOUSE OCCUPATION _____

REGISTRANT AGE 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+

SPOUSE AGE 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+

ATTENDING MINORS

NAME _____ DATE OF BIRTH _____

NAME _____ DATE OF BIRTH _____

NAME _____ DATE OF BIRTH _____

NAME _____ DATE OF BIRTH _____

Is this your first time attending the convention? Yes No

ATTENDEE FEES

Registration and payment must be postmarked, faxed, or completed online by the deadlines below to receive the discounted amounts. Cancellation fees: \$25 weekly Family / \$15 weekly Individual. No cancellations will be accepted after May 15, 2003.

EARLY REGISTRATION: JUNE 24, 2002–MARCH 31, 2003

Four-day rate: \$135 Family \$80 Individual \$25 Student
 One-day rate: \$50 Family \$30 Individual \$10 Student
 Day(s) attending: Tues Wed Thur Fri

DISCOUNT REGISTRATION: APRIL 1–MAY 15, 2003

Four-day rate: \$145 Family \$90 Individual \$30 Student
 One-day rate: \$55 Family \$35 Individual \$15 Student
 Day(s) attending: Tues Wed Thur Fri

REGULAR REGISTRATION: MAY 16–JULY 11, 2003

Four-day rate: \$155 Family \$100 Individual \$35 Student
 One-day rate: \$60 Family \$40 Individual \$20 Student
 Day(s) attending: Tues Wed Thur Fri

NON-ATTENDEE AND LOVE GIFTS

Registration fees only cover approximately 14% of our total cost. We welcome love gifts to help make up the difference.

I want to support the convention with the following tax-deductible Non-Attendee Sponsorship:

\$15 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$ _____

PAYMENT

Total number attending: _____ Total amount: \$ _____

Check enclosed payable to NACC

Charge my: Visa MasterCard Discover

ACCOUNT NUMBER _____

EXPIRATION DATE _____

SIGNATURE _____

MAIL OR FAX REGISTRATION TO:

NACC, 110 Boggs Lane, Suite 330, Cincinnati, OH 45246
 Phone: 513/772-9970 Fax: 513/772-9980 www.nacc-online.org

or the North American Christian Convention church.

That is one of the reasons I love to have outside speakers visit with us. It is a time not only for us to listen to them, but a time for them to get acquainted with us and know who we are. Outside speakers at the NACC have told me their respect for us has really gone up. They thought we were a baptismal re-generation group or isolationists.

That is why I am excited about inviting Kevin Leman and Becky Pipert and Ken Blanchard to have exposure to our people. If we don't have the convention, we lose the opportunity for a testimony to those outside our group.

Networking

The convention provides opportunity to interact and share opportunities. The NACC helps us share new ideas and learn about new missions that merit support. We can express needs that need to be fulfilled and learn about people who might fit in. That is not going to take place in a nondenominational movement if we don't have something like the NACC, a giant revival where we get together and share ideas, resources, and needs.

Our mission statement says we are a connecting place. The convention is needed, but it has lost steam. The convention has not yet taken the up-

ward turn that our movement has, and it is time for the convention to catch up.

I urge you to get behind this convention, not because of a good program or good city; I encourage you to believe in this movement from the bottom of your heart and say we need the convention as a family. We need to get together.

Bob Russell, senior minister with Southeast Christian Church, Louisville, Kentucky, is president of the North American Christian Convention meeting July 8-11 in Indianapolis, Indiana. This article is adapted from his address to the convention's continuation committee, October 7, 2002.