

CGGC eNews: General Conference 2016— Reflections, observations, and some thoughts about moving forward

August 5, 2016

Over the last few days I've been reflecting upon the General Conference Triennial Sessions which were held in Chambersburg, PA last week. I'd like to offer some of my own observations and learnings from the week.

First of all, a couple words of thanks are in order!

The Chambersburg First Church of God (<http://cfcog.cc>) – What amazing and gracious hosts you were to all of us. I can't say enough about how pastors Lawrence Metzler, Chad Chute, Chris Clugh and their staff and teams at Chambersburg First welcomed us, served us and just went above and beyond in making sure people were well cared for during their time at the General Conference Sessions. This is a congregation that seeks to serve others and that was demonstrated over and over during our time in Chambersburg. Thank you for being such wonderful hosts.



The General Conference Staff and planning committee – I get a lot of platform time at General Conference but the bulk of the work is done by a large team of folks who have worked behind the scenes to make sure everything that needs to happen actually happens. The planning committee had invited Mike Breen to speak on discipleship long before I stepped into the mix and many of the other details and plans were already in motion before I got involved last year. Candice Shoemaker and Dave Green have spent countless hours arranging the many details to make sure speakers arrived when they were supposed to arrive, breakout rooms were ready, meals were prepared, and a long list of other details that most of us wouldn't notice but were important nonetheless. Mike Martin shot and edited hours of video to better tell the story of what God is doing throughout the world through the ministry of the CGGC. Our entire staff play a role in the General Conference Sessions – Kris Cupp, Bob Stephenson, Brandon Kelly, Ben Tobias, Travis Helm, Bill Shoemaker, Don Dennison, Jim Thomas (along with Candice, Dave and Mike from above) were all on the team that traveled to Chambersburg

and helped set up, run registration, offer breakout seminars and attended to a host of other behind-the-scenes duties that made things run smoothly for everyone involved. Back in Findlay we had Pat Burnap, Angie Lavey, Jenn Schlumbohm, Rachel Foreman, Becca Shrom, Darlene Mattox and Scott Frobels who held down the fort and were involved in a lot of the preparations for General Conference Sessions. I get to work with a great team of folks who strive to serve others like Jesus and the General Conference Sessions were just a glimpse of some the work they do in order to serve Jesus and His mission.

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A couple of observations:



Mike Breen (<http://www.disciplingculture.com/>) really brought some amazing insights and important challenges to us. He made an observation about John Winebrenner that I've not heard before: he noted that in researching the history of the CGGC and Winebrenner's ministry that it was difficult to find much more than a paragraph or two about Winebrenner in the typical historical sources. His observation was that perhaps Winebrenner had done a better job of making Jesus known than he did making a name for himself. In an age of social media and self-promotion, this was a sobering and challenging observation. The challenge that he left us with at the end of his three sessions was that to move mission and discipleship into the hands of the people, it would require clergy (or the paid professionals) to get out of the

way. As I shared in my opening remarks – I grew up in a church world where it was our job to get people to the church and let the preacher do the rest, but the reality is that we're living in a world where fewer and fewer folks are open to the idea of accepting an invitation to attend a church service. They are open to spiritual conversations and only one-third of unchurched folks say that someone has bothered to explain to them why they should be a Christian, so they're not being overrun by Christians trying to share their faith. I think we're living in an era where more people will be introduced to Jesus and come to embrace Him over the fire pit in the back yard or in their neighbor's living room than at a church service on Sunday morning. This is worth a blog post of its own, and I don't have all the answers of how this looks or what this means as we move forward, but I'm convinced that the future lies in our embrace of the priesthood of all believers and the mobilization of all of God's people for mission and discipleship.

Christopher Yuan (<http://www.christopheryuan.com>) and his parents were gracious to share their story: *A Gay Son's Journey to God, A Broken Mother's Search for Hope*. What a powerful time of learning how we can carry both grace and truth to those in the homosexual community. I walked away with a couple of key takeaways from our time with Christopher. 1) The importance of talking openly and often with our kids about sexuality. Parents, and to some degree, the church, have let other realms of society do most of the talking to our kids and it's critically important that we face our fears and overcome the awkwardness of talking to our kids to develop a healthy, God-shaped view of sexuality. 2) Most folks in the gay



community know that Christians don't approve of their homosexuality, what they don't know is that Christians actually love them or care for them. We need to do a better job of leading with love and grace and offering relationship to our gay family members and friends. They need our friendship, not our condemnation.

A couple of challenges:

We're an aging body. There's no delicate way to state this, but I couldn't help but think forward to a few years in the future and ask "who will take the place of these faithful folks who will no longer be able to serve?" The issue of discipleship and raising up the next generation of leaders is beyond the discussion stage, we must take action and we must become more intentional about raising up and equipping the generations that follow so that they can continue the work of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We must take diversity more seriously than we do presently. One of the bright spots in the CGGC in North America right now is what the Lord is doing to bring racial diversity into our body – this is most evident in our work with Latinos and Spanish-speaking people and African Americans. The Kingdom of God will be represented by every tribe and nation, tongue and ethnicity and I believe that the Lord has been at work to bring a much richer diversity to the CGGC than at any time in my lifetime or memory. That diversity wasn't represented in the delegation at the General Conference Sessions to the degree that it should have been. This will have to change if we are to become all that God is calling us to be as a church body. This will take intentionality on our part to ensure that all of our body is represented well as we move forward in the future.

A closing thought:

The real work begins now. It's one thing to come together and talk about reaching, restoring and reproducing. It's one thing to learn about discipleship and mission or showing grace and truth to the homosexual community, but how do we actually do this? Will we put it into action? We received some great information last week, but our faith isn't just about information, it's about what we put into practice and actually live out.

If we had a great experience at General Conference Sessions but nothing else changes in the next three years then we've wasted a lot of time, energy and resources because it's not just about what we know and understand, it's about what we do as a result of that knowledge. Let's not waste this opportunity my brothers and sisters. Let's ask God to move us into greater faithfulness to Him so that the world would see and know the Glory of Jesus and the peace that's only found in Him!

Christ's Peace,

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