

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 1/16/11 Sunday evening
State of the Church Address: 2011

“How are things at your church these days?” That’s a question I get asked from time to time, particularly when I bump into somebody I haven’t seen in awhile. You probably hear it too. Of course, it’s not *my* church, but I know what they mean. They want to know how things are going at the local church where the Lord has privileged me to serve Him, at Wheelersburg Baptist Church.

That’s the question I want to talk about this evening. How are things at Wheelersburg Baptist Church as we begin 2011? In reality, that’s a tough question to answer because it depends on who’s making the assessment and on what the measuring stick is for the assessment.

So let’s do something to prepare us to make the assessment. Let’s answer the question, “What is God’s intent for the church?” In reality, it’s what He thinks that matters anyway. I could say the church is doing fine and be dead wrong if my assessment doesn’t agree with His. So how does God assess a church?

Paul answered that question for the church at Rome this way in Romans 8:28-29, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be *conformed to the likeness of his Son*, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

There’s God’s intent for His church. He is bringing people to Himself and then transforming those people so that they resemble His Son. *Conformed to His likeness*, that’s His goal. Or as Paul told the church in Ephesus in Ephesians 1:4, “He chose us in Him...to be holy and blameless in His sight.”

So let’s answer the question with that standard in mind. If we want to know how we are doing as a church, then we must ask a follow-up question. Is there evidence that we resemble Christ and is it increasing? Again, God’s goal is that we individually and corporately reflect the likeness of His Son. He wants us to look like Christ. After all, we are His Body. So is the evidence there?

Quite frankly, the evidence isn’t purely statistical. Just because a church has more people than it did twelve months ago, or bigger offerings, or more programs, doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s successful in God’s eyes. God measures success differently than a Fortune 500 Index. He says a church is successful if it’s growing in Christlikeness.

So that leads us to another question. What kind of things did Christ do while on earth? If we’re growing in Christlikeness, then it follows that we ought to be doing the same kinds of things that Christ did during His incarnation.

I was pondering this question a couple of weeks ago and made a list of things that Christ did. To the degree that we are resembling Christ, then we’ll be doing the kinds of things He did, which includes...

- Getting up early to pray, like He did (Mark 1:35).
- Treating people who have wronged us with kindness and mercy, like He did.
- Responding to difficult situations by praying, “Not my will, but Yours be done.”
- Living for God’s kingdom rather than the things of this world (Matt. 4:10).
- Denying ourselves for the good of others.

- Looking for ways to help the poor and needy.
 - Spending time with people for their encouragement.
 - Going after people who are in the shackles of sin.
 - Making disciples.
 - Submitting to parental authority, as He did as a child in Luke 2:51.
 - Submitting to civil authority as He did when He paid His taxes.
 - Making sacrifices so that others will have eternal life.
 - Cherishing the Father and pleasing Him.
 - Quoting the Scriptures.
 - Obeying the Scriptures.
 - Willing to offend hypocrites out of love for their souls.
 - Praying for the unity of the church, as He did in John 17.
 - Spending time with down-and-outers, even eating with them.
 - Spending time with up-and-outers, even visiting their homes.
 - Giving God's Word to people, explaining it, urging obedience to it.
 - Training His followers for the mission at hand.
 - And of course, most of all, dying so that others can live
- Discuss: What else would you add to the list?

Now ponder that list. It's certainly far from exhaustive, but I think it will serve us well as we do some evaluation. These are some of the things that characterized the life of Christ, and to the degree that we are resembling Christ, there ought to be evidence of these same things in us as a church. To the extent there is, then praise God! We're doing well as a church. But to the extent these traits are missing, then we have room to grow and mature so that our Father's intent is accomplished.

Looking Back: What evidences of Christlikeness do we see as we look back at 2010?

Here are a few...

Giving Our Money

Christ gave. He gave His time and energy and love and in the end His life for His Father's purposes and the good of lost souls. Similarly, in 2010 Christ's people at WBC gave. Due to our Father's provisions, your gifts, and the careful spending of our ministry leaders, we once again ended the year in the black, for which God deserves praise. In terms of the General Fund, approximately \$198,000 came in (about \$2500 above budgeted need) and \$191,000 was spent (about \$5000 under budgeted expenses). In addition to General Fund giving, several designated gifts were received through offerings and then sent to various ministries and individuals. This included special gifts of...

- approximately \$2,200 to provide biblical training for church leaders in Ukraine and Romania
- approximately \$2,000 for Fox Etta Hunt's ministry trip to Sagar Island, India in November
- Approximately \$2,400 to Scioto Hills Camp for the support of our young people who served on summer staff at Scioto Hills, for needy campers, etc.
- Special support of \$1400 for Abby Edwards to serve with Gary and Nancy Storm in Christian camping in Ukraine in the summer
- A love offering for the Union Mission around \$800

- Special gifts of \$570 for benevolence ministry
- A \$5,000 gift for the Education Fund which provides scholarships for young people from WBC attending either Cedarville University or Wheaton College

Giving Our Priority Attention to the Scriptures

Christ valued the Scriptures. He read them. He quoted them. He lived in light of them. He taught them to others. By His grace, we see the priority of the Scriptures at WBC when we look back at 2010.

I am grateful for the team of godly men God has raised up to share in the preaching ministry at WBC. During 2011 Pastor Matt, Dave Beam, Scott Bruns proclaimed God's Word during Sunday worship services. Jack Branon, Aaron Cook, and Gary Storm taught during the Wednesday evening Bible study. I also thank the Lord for all our Sunday School teachers, Growth Group leaders, youth and children's workers, and others who teach God's Word in a variety of settings in the church. Here's an overview of the pulpit ministry of the Word that I've shared with you in 2010...

On Sunday mornings: We began the year with a book series in Lamentations, followed by a biographical series in the life of Jeremiah. In conjunction with our Good Friday outreach, we devoted a couple of messages to what happened on the cross. Following Easter we began a new series, "*Getting to Know Jesus Better: A Journey through the Gospel of John*," that occupied our attention through the rest of the year. We are currently at the end of John 5.

On Sunday evenings: The purpose of our Sunday evening service is to take care of "family" business. We focus each week on what God is doing in the people and ministries of WBC for His honor. We also interact with His Word in a variety of ways to move us towards application. For instance, we began the year with a topical series, "*Seven Values of a Strong Church*" (including messages on the values of worship, edification, love, service, evangelism, fellowship, and obedience). Later in the year we had messages on Pentecost, the book of Philemon, and Overcoming Sexual Sin. In March the entire church family read and discussed in our deacon care groups Mark Dever's book, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*. In October and November we again met in our deacon care groups to discuss David Platt's, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*. During the year we enjoyed a couple of services with our friends from Pleasant Green Baptist Church (in March and July). We went through the *Good Soil* evangelism training for four weeks, led by our missionary, Erin Wawro, who was home on furlough. Additional special speakers included missionaries, Gary and Nancy Storm (ACCG), Bob Litteral (Wycliffe), Shelly Grimm (Nicaragua), and Steve Stairs (South Africa). We also heard from the Scioto Hills summer staff, Chuck Spears (director of Cooperstown Bible Camp), and the Union Mission staff. Our young people ministered to us in two Youth Services as well as the Children's Christmas program. In the summer months we moved to homes once a month for Home Fellowships and discussed the implications of the morning sermon.

On Wednesday evenings: We began the year with an inductive Bible study series, “Walking through the Book of Revelation” which finished in the summer. In the fall we began to study the book of Nehemiah in a series that continues. We invited other area churches to join us for a special service with Shawn Harper, former NFL player, who shared his testimony and challenge.

Dedication of the Nancy Rae Litteral Fellowship Area

About four years ago the Lord called home to heaven our sister, Nancy Rae Litteral, after she spent more than fifty years in a wheelchair as a quadriplegic. In her will Nancy left WBC a gift of money which has been used for various ministries as well as a new fellowship area in the foyer. Our desire is that the Lord will use that area, with Nancy’s paintings found there, to encourage people to trust Him, no matter the challenges they face. On a personal note, it was a great blessing to have Nancy’s 96 year old mother, Lacy, join us for the dedication service.

A Providential Partnership Begins with the Union Mission

In the Winter we received an invitation from the Union Mission in Charleston, W. Va. to provide biblical counseling training for their staff. The training took place in the months that followed, but so did a growing relationship between our church and this 99 year old ministry to the needy. The Lord willing, our Biblical Counseling team will be returning to Charleston in March and April to provide additional training. Furthermore, plans are being discussed to send a team of workers to serve at the Mission.

New Things at WBC...

The year 2010 saw several “new” things come to WBC...

A New Church Pictorial Directory—thanks to Elaine Uhl for coordinating the effort.

A New Roof over the auditorium—It’s hard to believe our “new” building is now twenty years old (built in 1990). The cost for the new roof was approximately \$21,000 which we covered by a self-loan.

A New Website—thanks to Wilma DeCamp and others for revamping our website which now includes a wealth of valuable resources, including a sermon archive of messages in audio and written format, our counseling and discipleship training (tracks one and two), helpful information about the church, etc

A New Facebook account—as another tool to stay connected, thanks to Pastor Matt and Bethany.

A New Look to our Wednesday evening Children’s Ministry, thanks to Scott and Pam Bruns leadership and the hard work of many children’s workers

A weekly meal before Kids Club to feed the kids and workers, thanks to Don and Connie Boggs

Making Christ Known to the World

It never ceases to amaze me how God does extraordinary things through seemingly insignificant sources. That’s the case when I consider the world-wide ministries that God continues to accomplish through the members of WBC.

It starts on the home front through the ministries of Scioto Hills Camp and Retreat Center and CRADLE. The Lord is using these ministries in a regional way to bring the hope of Christ to people in the Tri-State area.

Another ministry with regional effect is our Counseling Center. In the winter, we offered our eleventh year of counseling training to around forty individuals from approximately fifteen churches. As mentioned, the training went on the road to Charleston in the Spring. In October, after a lengthy application process, our training center was recognized by the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors as a certified center. Furthermore, week after week free biblical counseling is offered to hurting people, not just in our church, but throughout our region. Last year certified biblical counselors, Dave Beam, Barb Miller, and myself, provided approximately 150 sessions of biblically based assistance to hurting individuals. Several times area pastors came to the sessions to observe and learn how to care for their flock.

Our ministry went nationwide as well. In the summer the Lord direct Chuck Spears to Cooperstown Bible Camp in North Dakota. In the fall Oliver Thompson joined him for a one year internship. Josiah Bruns began his ministry with the mentally disabled at Shepherds in Union Grove, Wisconsin.

And amazingly, the Lord took our people beyond the shores of this country, to take the gospel to the world. Throughout the year Gary and Nancy Storm traveled to Eastern Europe to train God's servants there in Christian Education, particularly in how to use Christian camping as a ministry tool. In the summer, Abby Edwards joined them for a ministry in Ukraine.

Also in the summer months, Kristen Wawro once again taught a World Religions class to young people in Switzerland. In the Fall Kristen Wilson moved to China to begin teaching.

In the late Fall, our sister Fox Etta Hunt traveled with church family members Tapan and Sandhya Bandyopadhyay to the Sagar Island in India, to encourage ministry workers there. Also in the Fall, you sent me as your representative to Ukraine and Romania once again, along with our missionary Dave Dernlan. As in previous years, the purpose was to train two different groups of church leaders, teaching the Doctrine of the Scriptures and the Book of Joshua.

The Immeasurable Results

The things I've just mentioned, in my estimation, are evidences of Christlikeness. When people give generously, they're reflecting Christ. When people serve willingly, they're doing what Christ did. When people are willing to leave their comfort zone to minister to hurting people, they're showing their likeness to the Savior. But of course, ultimately, most expressions of Christlikeness can't be documented. When God's people get up early to have a quiet time with God in the privacy of their homes, no one knows about it. But He does, and it reflects His likeness. Brothers and sisters, when you invest hours preparing to teach your Sunday School class or youth lessons, and when you make a sacrifice to take a meal to a shut-in, and when you invite a new family to lunch, no one else may notice. But He does, and it reflects His likeness.

A year ago in the State of the Church Address, I laid before the church three goals for 2010. Here they are, and here's how the goals materialized.

1. *Increase the support of our currently under-supported missionaries.* By His grace, we have added to our 2011 budget Steve and Vicky Stairs, missionaries to South Africa; the ministries of NANC, Union Mission, and the Sagar Island ministry.

2. *Look for ways and opportunities to present the gospel in 2010.* In the winter we had a special church-wide growth group on evangelism, as well as the Good Soil training in the summer. For the second year on Good Friday we again had evangelistic neighborhood Bible studies. And you've just heard the many ways the Lord used His people to take the gospel to the world.

3. *Look for ways to pray more and pray more biblically as a church family.*

That's a big part of what happened in our Sunday evening and Wednesday evening services in 2010. And we're just getting started.

Looking Ahead: Getting Radical in 2011

Three months ago we read David Platt's book, *Radical*. We discussed together our wonderful calling as disciples of Christ. Now it's time to take action, to *get radical*, to get back to the fundamentals (which is what "radical" means). I recently challenged each of our Sunday School classes, from junior high and up, to spend a few moments each week praying about and encouraging one another in the fulfillment of five challenges Platt calls *The Radical Plan*.

1. *Pray for the entire world.* I recommend you get either the book *Operation World* or use the website to guide you on a daily basis. Learn and pray for the countries of the world. SS teachers, talk about the countries on the weekly prayer schedule and pray in your classes. Dads and moms, pray at mealtimes for the country of the day. Deacons, pray for the Lord to send laborers from us into His harvest in these countries. Also, I urge you to make our Sunday evening and Wednesday evening services a priority, for that is when we invest time as a church to pray for our missionaries and hear reports of their ministries around the world.

2. *Read through the entire Word.* There are 929 chapters in the Old Testament and 260 in the New Testament. If you read three chapters a day from the OT and one chapter from the NT, you'll make it through the whole Bible in a year with days to spare. If you've never read through the NT, start there. Then add the OT next year. The Bible is God's self-revelation. If knowing Him is priority to you, then make reading His Word a top priority in 2011.

3. *Sacrifice your money for a specific purpose.* Start by giving the Lord the first portion of your paycheck, if you're not already. Then target a particular ministry for the year, such as The Union Mission, or Scioto Hills, or ACCG, or Sagar Island, or CRADLE, or the Baptist Children's Home. Make sure the ministry is gospel centered and local church focused. In order to give, let's set a cap on our lifestyle. Resolve to live more frugally so you can give more generously.

4. *Spend your time in another context.* If we are in Christ, we have been saved to serve. We start by serving in our local church. Nursery. Sunday School. Hospitality ministries. Counseling. Hospital visitation, etc. But this commitment assumes the above. This commitment is a call to go to another level, to another context. The church is not an end but a means. If all we do is serve in the context of our relationships with each other, how will we reach the multitudes in the world with whom we currently do not

have a relationship? We need to reach out to lost people by coming out of our comfort zone and getting involved in *another context*.

For some, another context locally: with the homeless in Scioto County, or at the Union Mission; reaching the Hispanic population in our area; reaching non-churched elderly; hospice care; teaching English to internationals; helping drug addicts.

For others, another context internationally: A team from WBC is heading to Brazil next November; perhaps further involvement in the Sagar Island, or in Ukraine, or elsewhere.

The question is, what gifts and skills and experiences has the Lord given you that He desires to use in 2011 to bring the hope of Christ to hurting people in another context?

5. *Commit your life to a multiplying community.* Don't just go to church in 2011. Resolve to live your life in vital connection with your church this year. Take advantage of its ministries. Contribute to them. Look for ways to serve with your brothers and sisters in reaching the lost in this community and beyond.

Let me finish by laying before you some needs we have as a church and some potential ways for you to demonstrate your commitment to this multiplying community. We need...

-Nursery workers. I hope you're thankful for the little ones God has sent our way. Here's a way to show your thankfulness, by caring for them.

-People to visit the non-church family members whose kids are coming to Kids Club

-People to follow up visitors, with a home visit or an invitation to your home

-People to do follow up with those who receive help from our Food Pantry. Many of these who receive physical food from us are in need of spiritual food, and in many cases are open to talk about it. But we need workers who will invest time with them.

-People to help clean our facility. In order to put our money towards ministries rather than buildings, we are currently using volunteers to clean this building. We need more volunteers so that our facility will reflect well on our excellent Savior.

-Technology people. We'd like to revamp our video projection capabilities in the auditorium. The equipment and installation is one need. But we also need qualified and committed workers who can prepare the software and use the equipment each week.

-People who are good at promoting (in the right sense of the word). We need to get the word out about what's available at WBC. Every week sermons are preached, Sunday School lessons are taught, God-honoring music is presented, children's ministries occur, and every week there are *empty seats*.

We're not interested in promoting ourselves. God despises the proud. But we are commanded to share Christ and His precious Word with those around us. And they won't benefit from what they don't know about.

I'll be honest. I'm not very good at promoting things. But some of you are, and we need you. We need you to get the word out. We need you to help us think of new ways to mobilize the Body so as to reach more people with the gospel in this community.

To God be the glory for what He has done and is doing to prepare a people at WBC that reflect the likeness of His Son!