

as you go *forward*

by Rick Jordan, CBFNC Church Resources Coordinator

When Jesus gave his “Great Commission” found in Matthew 28, he said, “as you go, make disciples.” In other words, as you go about your daily life, be a light, be a witness, be a representative of God’s presence. There are some who are called by God to devote their full-time energies in professional ministry. For most Christians, however, that is not the call.

In this last year, CBFNC has focused on “normal people” who have stories of success and stories of struggle in this call on their lives. These are lay persons who see their jobs as their ministry, use their hobby or volunteer service as an avenue of Christ-centered service, or use their power and influence for Christ-inspired good in their local community. We held “As You Go” conferences around the state and interviewed many persons for *The Gathering* newsletter. We will cap off the year with the “All are Called” Forum, a laity-focused event on the final day of the 2017 CBFNC Annual Gathering, Saturday, April 1.

As I have worked on this year’s emphasis, I have learned several things. Some were hard to hear but bear with me.

1

The priesthood of all believers, as important a doctrine as it is to CBFNC Baptists, needs more attention. If we truly believe that every Christian has a calling and the potential to fulfill that calling, then **we need more ways to affirm the callings and more means to equip.**

Laypersons are too often seen (by clergy and by themselves) as a means to serve the goals of institutional survival or growth, rather than as a means to grow the Kingdom of God off the church property and outside of church programs.

2

Despite the lack of intentional attention to this, **laypersons are “walking the talk” and serving as the presence of Christ in places that a professional minister will not be able to be regularly.** A minister may visit a member in a cancer ward, but the charge nurse over

that ward is being the presence of Christ every day. A minister may visit a college student’s campus and take her out to lunch with her friends. That is awesome! But remember that the college student is that church’s missionary to that campus. A minister may join the Chamber of Commerce, but the business owner is struggling with “presence of Christ” issues every week when it comes to pricing, store hours, and employee support. Many laypersons I talked with do see their vocation as their ministry.

3

Disappointingly, this is not even on the radar screen of many ministers. Several ministers came to the “As You Go” conferences. Most of them came up to me afterwards and said something like, “I had no idea how important this is to my laity. I am going to give

this some deeper thought and action.” Most ministers have so many plates spinning, so many meetings to lead, so many persons to visit, so many messages to prepare. **Affirming, commissioning, and equipping laity gets lost in the shuffle.** Worse, it is not even something that is considered. I contacted several ministers about laypersons that I could interview. Many could not think of even *one* layperson in their church who could speak to the topic of being the presence of Christ in their daily life. There were many who could talk about a mission trip or a leadership role in the church. But outside the church? None. It is not being talked about.

4

This is not on the radar of some laity, however. **They see their vocation as a job that is unrelated to their faith.** They see their hobby as fun time, not as a potential ministry. They see community volunteerism

as a social outlet. Students see the school campus as a place they need to be so that they can eventually go someplace else, not as a mission field. For many laity that I did interview, the mere question, “How has your church equipped you to be an As You Go Christian?”, gave real pause. The dots have not been connected.

5

However, other laypersons share the sentiment of one woman who said, “We long to be affirmed by our ministers and churches!” A businessman said to me, “It is like we are on separate islands. The pastor

always invites me to his island and expects me to show up two or three times a week, but he never comes to my island. He never says, ‘How can I help you be a better Christian witness here?’” I heard a lot of **frustration and even anger that their callings are being ignored or sometimes belittled.** For example, ministers telling jokes about crooked lawyers or car salesmen, when a lawyer and salesman sit in the pew hoping for help rather than pigeonholing.

6

There are few models for affirming, blessing, or commissioning laity. However, over the years, we have found a few and have included them in the **Virtual Resource Library of the CBFNC webpage,**

www.cbfnc.org. Videos of many of the interviews from the As You Go conferences will be in the library soon, along with a discussion guide. These are for a Bible study, a deacon retreat, or a Wednesday night series. We plan to add more resources as we discover them, and, hopefully, more that are created by you and our CBFNC churches.