

Conference encourages love and unity in divisive times

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BROWNWOOD—Seeking justice, demonstrating mercy and humbly following Christ are key aspects of living as the people of God, speakers at the 2020 Micah 6:8 Conference told listeners.

“Our congregations need to be on the frontlines, because we see passages [like Micah 6:8] that say ‘do justice, love mercy,’” Jeremy Everett, executive director at the Baylor University Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty, told participants at the conference, hosted by the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission and Howard Payne University. “It’s a part of our faith to help others.”

Conference participants gathered both in-person and online for the Oct. 26-27 event to learn about engaging with issues such as racial inequality and gender gaps from a biblical perspective.

Meeting challenges in 2020

Katie Frugé, director of hunger and care ministries at the CLC, explained ways Texas Baptists and churches around the state have stepped up to face the difficult challenges in 2020.

The CLC was born out of concern for racial justice and reconciliation 70 years ago, and it has returned to its roots, responding to the recent deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor—African Americans killed in 2020.

She also described how the CLC has been involved in important COVID-19

relief work, including the distribution of food to more 1.3 million individuals through the Texas Baptist Hunger Offering. Texas Baptists also hosted about 4,000 Zoom meetings and 174 webinars to guide pastors and churches in response to the pandemic's challenges, she reported.

"We learned that, while physically distant, we needed to remain emotionally close to each other, and the CLC needed to meet the needs of emotional connection for people," she said. "We have confidence that the work of the CLC will continue to be relevant and powerful."

Director of ethics and justice commissioned

David Sanchez, recently named director of ethics and justice for the CLC, was commissioned to his new position during the conference. Sanchez, a graduate of HPU, spoke of his call to ministry and his journey to serving with the CLC.



Cory Hines (left), president of Howard Payne University, presents David Sanchez, director of ethics and justice at the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, with a

certificate of commissioning while CLC Director Gus Reyes (seated) applauds.

“There were times I was sure God was pulling me in one direction, only for him to open a door somewhere else,” he said. “As long as I’m sure God is going to use me and I’m moving in that direction, God will steer me in the right direction.”

His father Daniel Sanchez, distinguished professor of missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary joined HPU President Cory Hines and Gary Gramling, dean of HPU’s School of Christian Studies, in delivering charges to the newly commissioned director.

During the conference, speakers discussed various social issues and how Christians can address them from a biblical viewpoint, with a particular emphasis on how COVID-19 has affected them.

During Everett’s session on hunger in Texas, he encouraged Christians and churches to look for ways to help others and move past social and economic differences. He explained that it is only through everyone’s cooperation that significant problems like hunger will be solved.

“We have to realize that no one organization can end hunger. Some people think it’s the church’s job, or the government’s job, or the nonprofit’s job. We all need each other to end these big problems,” he said.

Calls for unity

Without exception, speakers called for unity and a commitment to God’s will over politics and personal identity.

In addition to Everett, speakers included Mark Grace, chief of mission and

ministry at Baylor Scott & White Health; Kathryn Freeman, former CLC director of public policy; and Gus Reyes, CLC director.

Grace discussed disparities in health care and the deepening divide in health care, emphasizing that providing for the health of others should not be a controversial issue for believers.

“It seems that often racial, economic and linguistic lines are more important to us than the example that the gospel gives us,” he said.

He encouraged conference participants to examine their own privileges—whether racial, economic or otherwise—and ask how they can lift up others who do not share those privileges.

During the upcoming 87th Texas Legislative Session, key issues will include COVID-19 policies, payday and auto loans, and race relations, Reyes said. He encouraged those in attendance to seek out their representatives and make their voices heard.

Above all, he urged conference participants to stick to the principles of Micah 6:8 and see beyond politics to the people behind them.

“I hope you will be kind in your heart to people who do not agree with you. I have a friend named Samuel Rodriguez who says that Christians don’t follow the agenda of the elephant or the donkey; we follow the agenda of the lamb. That agenda instructs me to love my neighbor,” Reyes said. “If we’re ever going to pull this country together, we’re going to need to figure out how to follow Jesus’ agenda and love our neighbors.”