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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Pastor urges Anglicans to unite and care for poor

Saturday, November 12, 2005
 By Ann Rodgers, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Rev. Rick Warren, arguably the world's most influential Protestant pastor, challenged 2,400 theologically conservative Anglicans to care for the poor and avoid disputes over church property.

Dr. Warren, a Southern Baptist pastor in an affluent California suburb, confessed that he had completely missed the high importance that the Bible places on care for the poor until his best-selling book, "The Purpose-Driven Life," began to bring in millions of dollars. He discovered it when he asked God what he should do with all the money.

"How did I miss this thing on poverty?" he said. "I went to Bible school and seminary and got a doctorate. How did I miss 2,000 verses in the Bible?"

His audience from the Anglican Communion Network consisted of people who have considered themselves spiritually related to the Archbishop of Canterbury, England, but who cannot accept the theologically liberal direction of the Episcopal Church in the United States.

Because of his work to fight AIDS in Africa, Dr. Warren is close to several African archbishops at the meeting who have declared that their relationship with the Episcopal Church is impaired or broken because of the U.S. church's acceptance of an actively gay bishop. Some American attendees included clergy who had lost their pastoral licenses and parishioners who faced losing buildings in disputes with more liberal bishops.

Dr. Warren showed sympathy for their theological convictions, citing Bible verses intended to comfort those who are persecuted for their faith. But he warned against spending time and energy fighting over property.

He noted that, on principle, his own Saddleback Church in California did not erect its own building until it was 15 years old with 10,000 in weekly attendance. He cited 500 churches in his multi-denominational Purpose-Driven Network that lost their buildings in Hurricane Katrina but continue in ministry.

"God is not interested in your possessions and your property. He is interested in you ... Jesus did not die for buildings, he died for people," Dr. Warren said.

"This is a chance to rethink the direction of your congregation. You don't have to have a building to grow a church."

He urged the churches to join a "new reformation" to spread the Christian faith and use the resources of "the universal, worldwide church of Jesus Christ in all of its local expressions" to help the poorest of the poor. He predicted that the meeting, which brought affluent Americans together with archbishops from some of the poorest nations on earth, would be viewed by history as a turning point.

"History is in the making here. You know it and I know it. I am privileged to be here to watch it," he said.

In an interview, he said he was praying for "God to bring good out of bad" in the Anglican troubles. He expressed support for the theologically conservative Anglicans, saying they were standing for biblical truth. But he called for all Christians to work together despite their differences.



Tony Tye, Post-Gazette

The Rev. Rick Warren, best-selling author of "The Purpose-Driven Life," speaks yesterday at Hope and A Future, a conference of the Anglican Communion Network, at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center, Downtown.

"It really doesn't matter what your label is. If you love Jesus, we're on the same team," he said.

He said that God uses many churches and traditions to meet broad and varied spiritual needs.

"Now I don't agree with everything in everybody's denomination, including my own. I don't agree with everything that Catholics do or Pentecostals do, but what binds us together is so much stronger than what divides us," he said.

"I really do feel that these people are brothers and sisters in God's family. I am looking to build bridges with the Orthodox Church, looking to build bridges with the Catholic Church, with the Anglican church, and say 'What can we do together that we have been unable to do by ourselves?'"

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