



*THE MESSAGE BOARD*  
A Newsletter from  
A. Roy Medley, General Secretary



Personal Reflections

Volume 27 – July 6, 2009

**Biennial Wrap-Up**

Pasadena was the perfect setting for our 2009 Biennial. The weather was a chamber of commerce picture postcard, the art deco Civic Center was beautiful and felt just right, and the Mission Fair site was ample in size—even with our constructing playhouses for ministries with children in need.

Some of the comments I have been receiving rank 2009 as one of the best Biennials in a long time. Here are some comments: *“It was a wonderful time that was good for my soul.” “The setting and facilities were beautiful. The worship sessions were powerful. I wish everyone could have experienced them.” “Congratulations on the Biennial. I sent Jeff Savage a Facebook note saying that, to my taste, it was the best in the last decade.”*

Indeed, there was a wonderful spirit present from the beginning as we were both challenged and inspired to be the hands and feet of Christ.

I was personally blown away when Rick Warren just showed up on Sunday night to worship with us, having learned we were in town. Given his schedule and the demands upon him, I think that must be most unusual. So, it was great to welcome him, together with our other non-ABC guests: David Coffey, president of BWA; Jerome del Pino, General Secretary of the United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry; and Jimmy Allen of the New Baptist Covenant. As we were waiting backstage for him to go on to preach, Coffey leaned over to me and said, *“Roy, I love the diversity of American Baptists that you have here in attendance and on the program.”* The presence of all of our guests was a wonderful affirmation of our life and ministry as American Baptists.

My take is that overall this Biennial had a little bit of everything that makes a Biennial memorable.

**There was memorable worship and preaching** which time and again hit the mark. David Coffey challenged us to consider the area of influence that Jesus has given each of us, then to imagine his footsteps in those places, and then to place our own steps in his. Robin Smith urged us to remember that our lives are like gold in that, when the dross is swept away in the refiner’s fire, we serve as a more perfect mirror to reflect the face of Christ. Kirk Byron Jones challenged us “to stretch out our hand” and allow God to use us in new and imaginative ways. The response by our youth and others to Nick Vujicic’s altar call was powerful. And again, for me, some of the best moments were when we were addressed by three of our younger pastors: Marisol Martinez, Marie Onwubuariri, and Edward Rogers.

**The pre-Biennial event** with Leonard Sweet was according to many “a home-run.” He seriously challenged the blind following of US corporate culture for renewal of the church. He was, as always, creative, edgy and stimulating in his remarks and even in his form of presentation.

**There was action.** Not everything was talking. We actually did practice being the hands and feet of Christ. American Baptist Women’s Ministries beat their financial goal of \$250,000 by over \$100,000 for underwriting ministries focused on human trafficking. In the Mission Fair, American Baptists put together emergency personal kits that will be distributed by Church World Service to disaster victims, and we even had sawing, hammering and painting going on as we constructed the playhouses mentioned earlier.

**There was fun,** including being welcomed by a mariachi band during our opening session and enjoying a multi-cultural festival on Saturday. The Mission Fair featured many different musical groups, as well as the usual displays and the two work projects.

**There was the new,** especially for those who participated in the Mission Summit track. Their positive feedback and suggestions that will help us further develop this style of doing Biennial for 2011 in Puerto Rico.

**And there was drama** with the defeat of the proposed Bylaw changes. From the feedback Mary Hulst and I were receiving as we spent time with our churches across the country this past year, we knew that there were serious questions in the minds of many about the overall downsizing of the boards and our commitment to representation and diversity. There were also voiced concerns about the greater autonomy of the program boards. As we move forward, I think it is helpful to consider this vote much like a first reading at the General Board. We have received feedback that our efforts need further work, and this gives us the opportunity to work to revise them in order to bring as many people on board as possible. And to aid us in our work, we have significant written feedback from the delegates to the Biennial. We will share these with you later.

In the meantime, there are several things in the proposed Bylaws that we can already begin to implement. We can continue to plan the 2011 Biennial as a Mission Summit, and we can structure our General Board meetings to be more like a mission table. We have already begun the practice of having a representative from the caucuses meet with us—and that will continue. And we can move forward with establishing the leadership pool. During this time the program boards will have the opportunity to fully flesh out the proposed changes in their Bylaws for delegates to see and study before they meet in 2011 in Puerto Rico.

**Wrapping this up,** for me this Biennial was best summed up in a brief interview with a reporter. As we were discussing what was happening at the Biennial, it was clear that he was looking for something controversial to highlight. Shaking his head, he remarked that there wasn’t much to play up about our meeting. *“That,”* I said, *“is exactly what is the news here. A mainline denomination has met and has focused on being the hands and feet of Christ and has not spent its whole meeting embroiled in internal controversies.”* I guess peace, reconciliation and missional focus just don’t make the journalistic threshold of interest. More the pity.

*American Baptists Serving as the Hands and Feet of Christ*

Office of the General Secretary • American Baptist Churches USA • PO Box 851 • Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851

800-ABC-3USA, extension 2274 • Roy.Medley@abc-usa.org

[www.abc-usa.org](http://www.abc-usa.org)