

Send Conference prior to SBC Annual Meeting in Nashville draws thousands to learn, worship

NASHVILLE (BP and local reports) – Worship led by vocalists Michael W. Smith and CeCe Winans, a sermon from Tony Evans, and a concert by Crowder kicked off the Send Conference 2021 on the evening of June 13 at Music City Center in Nashville. Attendance was estimated at 10,000.

According to the event's webpage, the Send Conference is sponsored by Southern Baptists' International Mission Board in Richmond, Va., and North American Mission Board in Alpharetta, Ga. It is a two-day gathering of pastors, families, and churches across North America learning and celebrating what it means to be on mission together for the sake of the Gospel.

The Send Conference is being held prior to the convening of the Southern Baptist Convention 2021 Annual Meeting June 15 in the same facility. A prayer session led by Robby Gallaty, pastor of Long Hollow Church in nearby Hendersonville, Tenn., was held before the conference started.

Gallaty exhorted pastors to return to the basic spiritual practices of seeking intentional silence and solitude and listening to the Holy Spirit's still, small whisper. "We cannot sermonize our way out of this current moment, so we need to be in tune with the God who tells us to lean in and rest," he said.

Evans, founder and senior *pastor* of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, drew parallels between his son Jonathan's tenure as a fullback with Nashville's National Football League team, the Tennessee Titans, and the notion of two teams running in

opposite directions with opposite goals – a metaphor for the nation's current political and cultural divides.



Evans. (BP photo)

Acknowledging the racial tensions and class conflicts of the day, Evans petitioned Christians to be the “third team” on the field of life: officials who are “on the field, not of the field.” Evans also said referees know they may be booed by angry parties on both teams, but they understand they are not meant to be liked and rather simply abide by the rulebook that dictates the game.

“The real problem arises when the officiating authorities start wearing opposing team jerseys because it is then that they lose their third-party authority in the game,” Evans said. “We carry Kingdom authority as His officials, but many people are so heavenly-minded that they’re not helpful on earth while others are so earthly-minded that they’re no help to heaven.

“Our true calling is not to be part-time saints but fulltime Christians pulling heaven down to earth as true reflections of the ‘imago Dei’ [image of God]. We have watched our nation decline because there aren’t enough accurate reflections of

Christ invading the culture.”

Evans reminded attendees that fans don’t pay to see a huddle, but rather the execution of the play discussed in the huddle. The Send Conference, he said, is like a huddle. The question is, according to Evans: Would those gathered go out and score, or just be happy with having had a private conversation?

In an aside dedicated to ongoing race relations discussions in the church, Evans reminded pastors that there is no segregation in the call to be crucified alongside Christ. “God is not colorblind, but neither is He blind to color,” he said. “We are of every tribe and nation and God sees us, but the only subject of the Bible is the glory of God and the advancement of His Kingdom.

“We are never to allow the politics of men to break up our togetherness, so stand together as the Lord sends you.”



Chitwood (left) and Ezell. (BP photo)

Speaking briefly after Evans delivered his message, NAMB President Kevin Ezell and IMB President Paul Chitwood emphasized the importance of the conference theme of

“Together.”

“We intend to do this together,” Ezell said, “and I am so grateful for [Chitwood] and all of our IMB missionaries and I know at the same time you are very thankful and supportive of our NAMB planters and missionaries who are all over North America.”

The two mission entity leaders encouraged the audience to pray for missionaries. “It’s not about IMB sweater vests or NAMB socks,” Chitwood said. “It’s about those beautiful feet that are taking the Gospel to our nation and to the nations. We praise the Lord for every one of them who are out on the front lines, here and far, who are serving.”

The night came to a close with Christian contemporary music artist Crowder leading a worshipful celebration of unity and Kingdom-mindedness. Crowder expressed his delight, after the long pause in live concerts because of the COVID-19 pandemic, in simply singing what he “church music” with what he described as a very large choir singing along to familiar songs.

The 2021 Send Conference can be live streamed at <https://www.sendconference.com/>.