

Those Who Serve:

March 23 March 30

Opening Prayer

Colin Morrison

Olan Bacon

Communion

Joe Holloway

Kwesi Garvin

Assist

Charles Hall

Joe Burnsed

Assist

Evan Hall

Joe Holloway

Dismiss Services

Olan Bacon

Joe Burnsed



<http://ellabelcofhome.webs.com/>

Ellabell Church of Christ

PO Box 72

Ellabell, GA 31308

Phone 912-858-3283

Ellabell Church of Christ



Speaking Where The Bible Speaks; Silent Where The Bible Is Silent

March 23 2008

FLAVIL YEAKLEY'S "GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS"

by

Dr. Earl D. Edwards, Freed-Hardeman University

On January 19, 2008, Dr. Flavil Yeakley spoke to about 400 church leaders on the campus of Freed-Hardeman University at the invitation of FHU president, Dr. Milton Sewell. Dr. Sewell was among the presidents of Christian Colleges and Universities who had, in 2006, commissioned Dr. Yeakley to do a nationwide research project to provide accurate answers to questions like –

- How many young people who are members of the Churches of Christ when they graduate from high school continue as members after they leave home?
- How many leave the Churches of Christ and join some other religious group?
- How many currently have no religious affiliation?
- How many of those who stay in Churches of Christ fill any church leadership or service roles?
- What is the divorce rate among members of Churches of Christ?
- How many young people in Churches of Christ graduate from high school in the United States each year?
- How many young people in Churches of Christ attend college?
- How many of these attend a Christian college or university?
- What are the differences between those who attend a private Christian college or university and those who attend some other kind of school?

Dr. Yeakley presented a summary of his conclusions to those 400 church leaders in a speech called, "Good News and Bad News." In fact, an amplified version of that speech is now published under the title Good News and Bad A Realistic Assessment of Churches of Christ in the United States 2008 and is now available through the FHU Bible Bookstore (phone 800-342-1869), at \$3.75.

Yeakley's main study groups for his conclusions were survey results from

1. 3,000 current students at brotherhood colleges and universities;
2. 2,000-plus alumni of brotherhood colleges and universities; and
3. 3,000-plus leaders in churches of Christ who gave information about their young people who graduated high school in the 10-year period of 1997-2006.

The following results are only some of the conclusions that Yeakley drew . . . the ones this writer judged to be the most significant ones. Each conclusion listed will be given; along with the page number in Yeakley's published materials.

FIRST, THE "GOOD NEWS"

1. "While churches of Christ have not grown very much since 1980, churches of Christ have not declined as many people have claimed" (page 11). It is not news to us that many who want to change almost everything in churches of Christ have said that we were the most fragmented group and that we are rapidly declining. Yeakley's results deny such. In fact, Yeakley observes that of the fourteen largest religious groups in the United States (all over one million adherents), the following should be said of us:

- A. We are in the *12th position* in number of total "adherents" (counts unbaptized children, etc.) with 1,645,584 (page 4);
- B. "Only the three largest denominations have more congregations in the United States" (page 5);
- C. "Churches of Christ have a presence in more counties than all but four" of the other religious groups (page 7);
- D. "Churches of Christ are more evenly distributed throughout the nation than any other American religious body" (page 9);
- E. "Although 250 religious bodies in America are identified as 'Christian,' only five grew more in number of adherents from 1980 to 2000" (page 10);
- F. "In the last two decades of the 20th century, the churches of Christ grew by 2.8 percent in number of adherents" (page 11);
- G. "[M]ost other religious groups in America have experienced far more fragmentation" than we (page 22), causing us to be regarded as having a "remarkable degree of unity" by other religious groups (page 22);
- H. The lowest retention rates in the study were in congregations where church leaders perceived themselves to be "[m]uch more liberal or progressive" (page 24).

Thus, while we are not as united or as evangelistic as the Lord would have us be (as we will detail in the last part of this article), we are not being accurately described by those who criticize us so frequently. And, in fact, since our *lowest* "retention rate" is among those who think of themselves as "more liberal or progressive," it is clear that that very group constitutes our *biggest* growth/decline problem. That also fits with Yeakley's finding according to which "[t]he six major American religious bodies that grew in the last two decades of the 20th century are much more conservative theologically than the eight that declined" (page 11).

2. We are doing a better job of educating/training our young people than we had thought. The claim is made that "a large majority of young people in Churches of Christ who attend college do not go to a Christian school, but a large majority of those who go to a public institution have dropped out of the church by the time they graduate" (page 15). Following are some of Yeakley's conclusions regarding our young people who go off to college/university.

- A. "Eighty percent of young people in Churches of Christ who graduate from high school go on to attend college" (page 12). This is higher than the national average.
- B. "More than 30 percent of college-bound high school graduates from Churches of Christ" do attend a brotherhood college or university (pages 16-17). This is *much higher* than the previously estimated 15 percent.
- C. Whereas previous studies/estimates had indicated that "55 percent of young people were staying in Churches of Christ and 45 percent were leaving," Yeakley found that when one follows those leaving a few more years, he finds that 12 percent of those leaving "then returned" (page 14). This brings the 55 percent up to 67 percent of our total number of young people.

- D. In the study of "alumni who were members of the Churches of Christ when they enrolled at a Christian college or university," he found that 83.5 percent are still in Churches of Christ. Only 6.5 percent have gone to "some other religious group" (page 15); and he

found that "being active in a local congregation" while in college or university was very important in the retention process (page 17).

E. Retention rates were "much higher when members of the Churches of Christ married other members of the Churches of Christ" (page 18). Obviously, being in a "Christian school" raises the likelihood of marrying in Christ.

F. "*Among young people* in the Churches of Christ who graduated from high school in the past 10 years, *only 4.2 percent have divorced*. In the general population throughout the nation, *8.1 percent of those who graduated* from high school in the past 10 years have already married and divorced" (page 19; emphasis mine-E.E.).

G. For those who were members of Churches of Christ when they enrolled in a "Christian school," a survey among alumni found that the divorce rate was only 6.9 percent . . . which is "far fewer than the national average" (pages 19-20).

So, things in the church and among our young people aren't nearly as negative as they have been pictured by some among us.

SECOND, THE "BAD NEWS"

- 1) Of the seven billion people in the world, 70 percent do not call themselves "Christians," and many fewer are "New Testament Christians." They need the Gospel (page 26).
- 2) Though we haven't declined in Churches of Christ, we haven't grown significantly either (page 26).
- 3) Our slow growth hasn't kept pace with the population growth (page 26) – most of our growth has been in "U.S. and Mission Field states" (page 27). We must pick up the pace by planting more churches.
- 4) Our greatest declines have been "where we have the greatest concentration of congregations" (page 27). So, obviously, larger established churches need to build a fire under lethargic members.
- 5) Though we haven't divided as much as charged, we do have more division than God desires (cf. John 17). God help us to follow His Word so that we can more effectively LIVE TOGETHER.

6) Though "local churches, Christian homes, Christian schools and Christian young people are doing something right" (page 20), we need to send more of our young people to FAITHFUL Christian schools and train them even better while they are there.

CONCLUSION

The brotherhood owes Brother Yeakley for the work he has done. We ought to thank God for him and be careful to learn what we can from his studies in order to glorify our God even more in this generation than we have in the past one. God help us that it may be so. (Thanks to Brother Edwards for this information! Were you surprised? I was. -JH)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

April 6-we are meeting at 3:00 pm at the Bryan County Health Center
Social – not today as in the calendar. Our social will be the 30th, next week. Postponed as today is Easter

Cans-save cans – we are trying to buy bicycles for the missionaries in India
Medicine Bottles-Remember to save prescription bottles for African Christian Hospitals.

Labels-Remember the labels we are saving

Food Pantry-Remember the Pantry as you shop

Change Jar-proceeds go to the Mothers' Day Appeal for Raintree Village Meetings-next Sunday, the 30th

SOCIAL POSTPONED A WEEK, IT WILL BE THE 30th

That's Next Sunday!!