

**Starting and Strengthening Congregations**

**George Bullard, Speaker**

**The Columbia Metro Connection Podcast 001**

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Chris Reinolds: Welcome to the Columbia Metro Connection. A podcast where you can go to get valuable, relevant and quality resources for you and your congregation. The Columbia Metro Connection is sponsored and supported by the Columbia Metro Baptist Association and the almost 100-member churches that support the ministry of the CMBA. Hosts for this week's episode are George Bullard, the director of missions at Columbia Metro Baptist Association, strategic leadership coach, lead missiologist and virtuoso of all things church-related. JayWill Wilson, teaching pastor at Generation Church, urban missionary and radio host at Urban City Radio.

 I'm Chris Reinolds, lead pastor at Killian Baptist Church and founder of [www.ChrisReinolds.com](http://www.ChrisReinolds.com). We want to welcome you to the flagship episode of the Columbia Metro Connection. The place to go to get Kingdom resources for you and your congregation.

 Well personally, I cannot express how excited I am to be able to sit down with you guys and do the show. I know it's something that we've been talking about since I think it was somewhere in October. George, I can't thank you enough for inviting me to be a part of that.

JayWill Wilson: I think this is a great opportunity not just for us to get together and fellowship but for our association to get together and get to know each other and just talk about different ministries together.

Chris Reinolds: Absolutely.

JayWill Wilson: So, I think this is a great opportunity.

George Bullard: I think it is too. Of all the people I could have gotten together with, you two are one of them.

JayWill Wilson: Is that a compliment or what?

George Bullard: I do want to tell you though, my vision for this podcast is that we could provide timely helpful information for pastors, staff, persons and lay leaders in our congregations. My strong desire is that all congregations will be captured by God's empowering vision for them and continually journey towards their full Kingdom potential. Time is the most precious commodity of the 21st century. All of us would like to have more money but the reality is that time is more precious than money. So, these approximately 20 to 22-minute podcasts are intended to help leaders learn something positive that will enhance their ministry by investing just a few minutes.

 The medium of podcast means they can learn wherever they are if their schedule does not allow them the time to get together with others in a face to face setting.

Chris Reinolds: I agree. One of the most discouraging realities I think pastors face is the isolation that comes whenever you're sitting in the senior chair. And so, having some sort of resource that speaks directly to pastors and be able to help them as they're seeking to do ministry out in the field I think it's incredibly beneficial.

JayWill Wilson: It give us a chance to reveal the fact that we aren't perfect. Sometimes we're looked at as the people to give all the answers and have all the solutions. At the end of the day, we're just sick people who need the same medicine we're passing out.

Chris Reinolds: Absolutely. That is exactly the case, which is why I'm excited and thrilled to be partnered up with what you're doing George within the Columbia Metro area. Now, for our listeners who may be new to the Columbia Metro area, George is our newly elected, I want to make sure that I get this right because it's a long one, associational director of missions for the Columbia Metro Baptist Association.

JayWill Wilson: Now I bet you can't say that five times fast.

Chris Reinolds: I don't think I can say that.

JayWill Wilson: So, George, when did you come on?

George Bullard: You know guys, time flies when you're having fun or when you're in the center of God's will for your life and you love what you do. I started way back on July the first of last year. I've been in this role for more than six months as we are sitting down together taping this podcast.

Chris Reinolds: Now, your role as far as your perception of the role of director of missions is a little bit of a different take. When you were elected, one of the things that you did was you delivered a speech that really highlighted each one of those differences. For this first episode, we'd like to take some time to interview you so that people can hear the different approach to your methodology.

George Bullard: I must admit guys. I think I do have a different perspective on the role of the Baptist Association. For one thing, I grew up in the home of an associational director of missions. My father three times during his life served as an associational director of missions. Along the way, one of my mentors was a really funny guy named Russell Bennett, who was also a person who understood deeply associationalism and would carry the title of missiologist—someone who knows about missions and the kinds of things that we need to be doing. He had a statement that went something like this, "You know there are churches and there are associations. Then the ungodly are not so, and those are our state conventions and our Southern Baptist national agencies."

 Here's what he meant. A congregation is a spiritual organism. It's a living, breathing, moving, dynamic, ever-changing organism. An association is also a spiritual organism and closest in character in nature to that of congregations. A state convention and national agencies are organizations. Their role is an important one of programs, projects and events, but they do not have a primary family or solution or wisdom relationship with congregations. Their relationship is more of acquaintance. They would say, “I know a few churches as friends. I have a few churches I know well.” They're more into the broad scale or the deep scope and they're more about providing information and knowledge but not really getting to the point of full wisdom that you get when you sense, smell, taste and hear congregations.

JayWill Wilson: Now George, some people may interpret that in a way that you're not meaning. You're not saying that there's something wrong with the state and national convention, right?

George Bullard: Well, not in theory. Now, I know some state conventions and some national agencies that are a little weird from time-to-time. But state conventions and national agencies are very important as a part of an integrative strategy to fulfill the Great Commission and the spirit of the Great Commandment. No part of our three-dimensional denominational structure is better than another. Each, at their best and that's a very important phrase, “at their best,” has a unique and distinct role that contributes to the work of God's Kingdom.

Chris Reinolds: I think that that's an accurate assessment. One of the things that you mentioned in your speech that you gave is that associations are really the foundation for the primary missional and fellowship relationship of churches with one another in the fulfillment of the Great Commission and the spirit of the Great Commandment.

 If you could, explain a little bit of what that means whenever you talk about that associations are the foundation for primary missional and fellowship relationships of churches and their desire to be obedient to Jesus’ commands.

George Bullard: All right, using that phrase I introduced a minute ago because associations are at their best closest in character nature to congregations and closest geographically, they have a 24/7/365 relationship with congregations. That means every day of the week, every week of the year, they have a close relationship with congregations. They can experience a full and deep relationship. Did you know that churches join and are members of a local Baptist association but churches only affiliate with their state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention? The relationship is totally different. That is why we call associations a family, solutions, and wisdom relationship.

Chris Reinolds: If I could, I have a little bit of a follow up from what you just said there. A couple of months ago, I was able to attend a conference that you have been doing for I guess several years now, and it's called the Congregational Champions Retreat. In that retreat you talked about some of these things, and specifically you mentioned the importance of building a familial style or atmosphere among the churches where we begin to rely on one another for strength and encouragement, support and even some ideas.

 This is counterintuitive from my experiences in associations. Is this sort of the direction that you desire to see our local association go towards?

George Bullard: It certainly is Chris. Churches-in-association, and I may be overusing this phrase, but I think it's important to say, at their best, and we are striving to be at our best in the Columbia Metro Baptists Association, have an interdependent relationship with one another. The synergy of such a relationship allows for greater Kingdom progress within the fellowship area of the association and throughout our nation and the world.

JayWill Wilson: Now, in your speech when you were elected last summer, one of the last statements that you made was, "We could stay busy, or we could stay focused on gospel essentials." Can you please explain that statement?

George Bullard: Sure. It's very easy for us as Baptists to stay busy. In fact, the humorous Will Rogers used to say, “he was tired of his taxes paying for roads to be built for Baptists to tear down going to meetings.” Too often even associations, like churches, simply try to keep busy doing many good things. I believe the urgency of the Good News of Jesus Christ would have us focus on gospel essentials. What's the main thing and keeping the main thing the main thing.

 Additionally, from a human and business perspective, did you know that over the years North American society has taken a word that for three or four hundred years was a singular word, the word “priority” and turned into a plural word—priorities. When they made it plural word, that diluted our focus. I'm trying to lead our association to have what I call our one priority. The way I state it is starting and strengthening congregations to serve as vital and vibrant missional communities. Things that we've been doing that do not fit that priority quite frankly we're going to try to eliminate unless there is some key reason to keep doing them. Empowering congregations to be more vital and vibrant missional communities is what we want to seek to accentuate.

JayWill Wilson: Now that sounds like a great idea. What are our strategies to fill our one priority?

George Bullard: We're trying to play out and roll out some strategies and right now we're saying that there are seven that we're going to focus on. A little bit of a long list but let me move into it here. First is what we call [*Empowering Congregations*](http://www.columbiametro.org/cmba-overview/empowering-congregations/). This is sort of foundational for us where we're focusing on the vitality and vibrancy of our congregations and we consider this our key beginning strategy.

 Second is [*Multiplying Congregations*](http://www.columbiametro.org/cmba-overview/multiplying-congregations/). Again, my family was involved a lot in planting new congregations. New congregations strategically situated for the lost, the unchurched, de-churched and the under-churched are one of the best means of evangelism and new member recruitment. Our associational fellowship area is expected to increase in population by 200,000 people in less than 25 years. Many new congregational expressions and evangelism efforts are going to be needed in our context.

 A third one, we call [*Transforming Congregations*](http://www.columbiametro.org/cmba-overview/transforming-congregations/), which is what I've spent a lot of my last 40 years devoting myself to what I call [*FaithSoaring* Churches](http://www.columbiametro.org/category/faithsoaring-churches/). So, many of our congregations and our association need to move from just staying busy to where they are soaring with faith. Fourth is [*Developing Leadership*](http://www.columbiametro.org/cmba-overview/developing-leadership/). We have a particularly unique situation here in the Columbia Metro Baptist Association in that when you consider the population in our primary core county, Richland County, we are now a majority-minority demographically. We need mature, motivated and insightful leadership that is multicultural and helps create an intercultural leadership base for our diverse setting.

Chris Reinolds: Now, all this information is a lot to chew on and especially for our listeners, they're just hearing this information for the first time. I know that you've given many talks and had many conversations. We want to make sure that they know that all this information is going to be available in the show notes, also with links so they can check out that information as well.

 Those are just four of the strategies. I think you said seven strategies

George Bullard: I did.

Chris Reinolds: Now, that's more than what most associations are doing or will do

 through probably their lifetime. How can we accomplish that, how can there still be more things?

George Bullard: The good news about that and maybe the unfortunate news about that is that our association is a five-talent association. God has given us a lot of resources and abilities and availability. And so, to do any less than three more beyond these first four is kind of like turning our back on God, and we can't do that. I really do need to add three of what I would call supporting strategies.

 If I could the fifth one is what we call [*Impacting Communities*](http://www.columbiametro.org/cmba-overview/impacting-communities/). We must help more congregations to more often get outside their church buildings and engage in a compassion revolution that offers the opportunity to engage in good works in ways that the Good News can be authentically shared.

Chris Reinolds: I like that, compassion revolution.

JayWill Wilson: Yeah, I like that.

George Bullard: We've got a guy coming in January that we'll talk about in a minute that's going to talk about the compassion revolution. Six is [*Collegiate Ministry*](http://www.columbiametro.org/cmba-overview/collegiate-ministries/). If you think about it, including the residential and commuter students, our associational area has close to 50,000 people enrolled in higher education. That's an increase from around 35,000 people just about 15 years ago. Already, one-fourth of our congregations are involved with these students and their campuses. We must continue to focus on this strategy.

 There is a final one and that's the seventh and we call it [*Missional Partnerships*](http://www.columbiametro.org/cmba-overview/missional-partnerships/). This involves what our congregations do beyond the fellowship area of our association. We are a resourcing association. We need to do our part to impact our nation and our world with the unconditional love of God through Jesus Christ.

JayWill Wilson: That's awesome. When do we get started with this? I want my congregation to be a part of this. How can we get plugged into it?

Chris Reinolds: I have to say JayWill, our congregation here at Killian we've already began sort of benefiting from these [[*Transforming Congregations*](http://www.columbiametro.org/cmba-overview/missional-partnerships/)](http://www.columbiametro.org/cmba-overview/transforming-congregations/) strategy because we're doing a church revitalization here. I suspect that I'm probably not the only one that's already started benefiting from it, I'm sure there are others as well.

George Bullard: Yeah. Right you are, Chris. You already are benefiting. We've had some time to be together in conferences and individually to help you move forward already at Killian and you're doing a great job, we appreciate it. It honors our Lord.

 What you've experienced this far I hope is only the beginning. The best really is yet to come. We'll be introducing new parts of these seven strategies every month during 2018. One avenue to do this is what we're going to be calling Vision Tuesdays. These will take place eight times per year generally on the third Tuesday of the month and if you want to know more information about it, I urge people already to go to our website at columbiametro.org to see about these Vision Tuesdays and what we'll be offering.

JayWill Wilson: This is a lot of information and my head is kind of spinning by now. I really hope more churches get involved—my church gets involved. I hope God really uses this for such a big challenge. It's going to be great.

George Bullard: Well, JayWill and Chris, it is certainly my hope that we follow God's lead into the mission field all around us.

Chris Reinolds: Well, I hate to curb you guys' enthusiasm as we seek to progress forward and discuss all those various ways in which we can engage the mission field that is around us, but at this point we've run out of time for this initial episode of our podcast.

JayWill Wilson: Now, one last thing. George, do you know anything about our future podcast?

George Bullard: Well, I kind of alluded to it a little while ago but when we have our first Vision Tuesday on January 16th, our guest speaker will be John Daugherty who is director of Operation Inasmuch that can be found online at [www.OperationInasmuch.org](http://www.OperationInasmuch.org). He'll be speaking about how we go about creating a compassion revolution through ministry engagements in our diverse communities and neighborhoods throughout our association and we'll be piloting some of the things that he'll be suggesting to us in the fall of 2018 and then hopefully having a full-blown compassion revolution experience in the spring of 2019.

 By the way, a little trivia here, reservations are going to be required for that Vision Tuesday because we're going to have a free catered lunch provided by the Southern Mutual Church Insurance Company.

JayWill Wilson: So, don't show up if you haven't reserved.

George Bullard: That's right, that's right. But see our website for more information or connect with our Facebook page would be the thing to do.

Chris Reinolds: All right. Well our time really is up but if you're interested in connecting with any of us through Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, then be sure to check out the show notes from today's episode and all the applicable links will be there. Also, if you have found this podcast helpful to you or your ministry, could you please go over to iTunes and leave a review and a rating so that we can get the word out about what God is doing in the Columbia Metro area. Until next time, from all of us at the Columbia Metro Connection, we thank you for listening and urge you to share this podcast with everyone you know. It's the good news about the Good News from the Columbia Metro Baptist Association.