

**Money, Conflict, and Pastor-less Churches**

**David Waganer, Speaker**

**The Columbia Metro Connection Podcast 029**

**August 2019**

**Columbia Metro Baptist Association at** **CMBA@ColumbiaMetro.org**

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Chris Reinolds: Welcome to the Columbia Metro Connection 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 family churches that support the Ministry of the CMBA. Hosts for this week's episode are George Bullard, the executive director of the Columbia Metro Baptist Association, and I'm Chris Reinolds, certified church consultant and lead pastor at Killian Baptist Church. Joining us this week is David Wagoner, one of the new ministry mobilizers with the CMBA who specializes in stewardship education, interim education for churches, and church opportunities during conflict. David's vast knowledge and experience has given him the ability to look at most church situations and boiled them down to the root issues at hand so a church can resolve the congregational speed bumps and continue down the road of kingdom growth. Let's listen in as we hear from him today.

George Bullard: David, we're very glad to have you with us today. I really appreciate the fact that you're here as one of our empowering congregations ministry mobilizers, because you're doing a really great job of this, but there may be a lot of people who do not know who you are. Give us a little brief background. Who is David Wagner?

David Waganer: That's a good question, you know, and I can answer that in multiple ways. I could answer it that I'm a father of two children, I'm a husband of one wife for 46 years, been a Christian over 50 years and grew up in Oklahoma. Don't hold that against me, I'm a Sooner or all the way, hard to root for orange.

George Bullard: It is, it is.

David Waganer: But you know, it's just part of my background. I've worked with three different state conventions, Baptist conventions in South Carolina, Oklahoma, and then Missouri. Moved back here about 10 years ago, been working with Stewardship Development Association as their executive coordinator until December of 2017 when I took retirement as far as that role was concerned. I've worked with churches throughout my years of service in the denomination. I've worked with about 20 different interim or transitional ministries during that time. So that tells you a little bit, probably more than you wanted to know.

George Bullard: Well, no, you're showing great intelligence. The fact that when you came to retiring, you didn't retire to Oklahoma, you retired to South Carolina.

David Waganer: Well, when grandkids are here, and you're living in Missouri, it made it pretty easy. God prepared the way and opened the door and here we are, and you know, this has become home. This is where we will spend the rest of our life.

Chris Reinolds: Now, David with your extensive experience and your education, it reminds me of like one of the times that we met face to face. I mean it was at George's Congregational Champions retreat, and you made a statement to the group that stuck out to me. And you said that you viewed those experiences and you viewed your education really as a carpenter views his tools. Could you share a little bit about what you meant by that and how that perspective has helped you in preparing for this role in the CMBA?

David Waganer: Well, I'd have to give my father-in-law a lot of credit for even using that imagery because he was quite a carpenter. He had an ability, if he couldn't buy a tool or find a tool, he would make a tool. And he kind of taught me that in working with antiques, which I like to restore, and as a result I began to see that more as who I am in Christ. I'm a believer. God has gifted me with certain spiritual gifts. He's given me the opportunity of having formal education as well as informal, given me life experiences in abundance. And all of those are just kind of different toolboxes that I'm able to pull from in order to meet a need in a church. And I guess the craftiest part is if I don't have the tool, then I have to create the tool. That's what my father-in-law taught me, and he'd be proud that I would even use him as an example of that today.

George Bullard: That's good. Well, you know David, one of your passions as you've already mentioned, is the whole area of stewardship ministry. And this particular topic sometimes feels like almost a third rail in ministry. Jesus talked about finances often, therefore, so should we, but many pastors and church leaders are hesitant to do so because of a fear of touching that particular rail that it might be electrified in the wrong way, you know, and might shock them. So why is that, and what are some practical ways you assist churches in the area of stewardship ministry and stewardship education?

David Waganer: Well I think the fear on the part of some church leaders and pastors, sometimes it goes to a root problem in their own life, spiritually, where maybe they are not good stewards. I've had two instances in the years of serving churches where a staff member or pastor, were not strong givers. And I was approached by laypeople saying we've got a spiritual problem here. And I thought they were talking about one in my life, and then they poured this out on me. And how do you respond to that? And I respond directly. I mean I go and share scripture. I give time for a person, rearrange your life. And one case it worked well. The guy rearranged his life and put it in order. In the other case, I would have to say I left that ministry before it was ever corrected totally. And I can't speak for it today, but so I think there's a fear on the part of some pastors just from their own life being under the scope.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

David Waganer: Also, sometimes they haven't been trained to speak on the subject of stewardship. And stewardship for me is more than money. It's all of life. In fact, I would put everything that I do under the umbrella of steward. If I'm not being a good steward in one area of my life, and I'm a good steward in finance, then I've really missed the mark because it's all of it, all of it being put under the Lord.

Chris Reinolds: So is that really the most helpful way to go about starting that process of this very practical conversation, is by connecting with church members and understanding that all of life is stewardship?

David Waganer: That's a big part of it. I mean you, the part of the question that I've been asked is how would I help churches? I could help churches from a budget standpoint, that comes easy. But more than that, I could help out with the stewardship education process to put that in place year round, that where they have, not every week, but they have an ongoing process of developing believers as givers. As we have an older generation getting to a point where they're dying and they're no longer a part of the big base of giving, if a church is not developing stewards, there's going to be a shortfall, which we're experiencing right now in many of our churches.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

David Waganer: So you know, that can be a part of accounting, we can help with that, putting into practice a good accounting procedure. Anything dealing with stewardship has been my passion, I guess for 30 years, in denominational work. But before that, even as a pastor, we'd create stewardship programs for churches and that was just, that's part of who I am.

George Bullard: Well, you know, David, moving beyond that, that whole area of stewardship and looking at your overall role with the association and the way that you're assisting me in such a great way. You know, some would say that you got caught with all the fun stuff. That you've got stewardship, you've got conflict mediation, you've got interim pastoral ministry and those kinds of things. Either you have unique gift or…

 So tell us about some of the other roles that you're involved in and things you've been doing in this first four months that you've been with us.

David Waganer: Well, I would say you know me well, rather than to say you just tried to stack the deck against me, because you know that stewardship is my heart. I work well with conflicts. Some people say I can create more than I can correct. In a kidding kind of way they say that. I've never been afraid of conflict. I remember going to a conflict training one time and we were taught in that training if conflict is occurring, the best way to handle it is step in the middle of it. And I remember at a college football game at the University of Oklahoma, stepping between two men and they were about to swing at each other, swing their fists at each other. And I said to one of them, "You get on the other side of your wife, you get on the side of your wife right now."

 And I stepped back and my son, who at the time was probably 17 or 18, said, "Dad, you could've got killed." And I said, "But I didn't." And both wives turned around and thanked me for stepping in because they were about to be ushered out. They were about to that point. And I've done that in church work as well. Sometimes it’s staff members, sometimes it's leaders that disagree on direction of the church. I'm not afraid of conflict. I really look at it as a crossroads for a church. So that's a part of what I'm working with.

George Bullard: You know, I'd have to say about that, in one of my pastorates, I actually had my deacon chairman and my vice chairman of deacons with their fists cocked in the middle of a deacon's meeting. They were ready to go and I had to step right in physically, in the middle of them.

David Waganer: And it's amazing what can happen when you diffuse. That's really what I was doing, diffusing a situation that was about to become deadly.

George Bullard: A lot of your work with us thus far has though been in things related to interim ministry. So what are some of the things you're doing there that would benefit many of our churches?

David Waganer: Well, I try to help committees with some training about how to go about the process of calling a transitional or interim pastor. You know, in that process sometimes a committee's not too open. They think they have all the answers and they'll get a few months in and then they realize they need a little bit of help. But I've received a lot of different training... you're training, concerning interim ministry, transitional ministry. I've been a transitional pastor multiple times, been through the intentional interim training, so I've had a lot of different tools to draw from. Now I like to work with, you know, churches that want the help. I can help them understand the process. I can help them with resumes and some of that as well.

Chris Reinolds: That's the thing is, with the interim ministry, you know the pastor is important, but there are some that would say that the interim ministry is almost more important in certain degrees. And just as important, because without those interims there's a necessary gap that's there, but they also do more than just fill in the gap. There's a greater opportunity there for them.

David Waganer: You know, there's different phases of interim ministry. You can go in and just be the interim supply preacher and really, other than pulpit care, have very little influence in bringing about the changes that might be needed before any pastor is called. That's not my strength area. My strength area is to get into trenches and work with a church, but some people are gifted to be the pulpiteer and not want the hands-on experience. Then you have the transitional process where you really go in and you, you know, really try to get the input of the people. You do some observing, some reading of their history and pull together some things that you can work on to better prepare the church for calling a pastor. I've had one particular pastor that comes to my mind, in a county seat here in South Carolina, that I helped the church and he said the church was better prepared for calling the pastor than any church he had ever served.

David Waganer: And that to me was a compliment. But on the other side of that, I had a layperson write me a note saying this, "It must be difficult to go into a church as a transitional person knowing your intent is to replace yourself." And I thought, well, that's right on.

Chris Reinolds: Yeah, that's right.

David Waganer: That's exactly it. But it is a lonely life as a result of that because I've found that we've usually joined the church where we've served. When you're through, you have to move on. You can't go back. I mean, repeatedly, you can't keep those friendships strong. Maybe one or two here and there, but you don't want to be a hazard to the next guy. That's not the reason why you went there and worked in the trenches. You've tried to lay a platform that he could build his ministry on.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

David Waganer: And so you know, that's a part of the difficulty in working with churches too. Recently I was contacted by a church about serving as a transitional pastor. It was a fairly easy decision for me to say, "Not right now," because I find that trying to help pastors help churches in the interim period, doing some training fits where I am in life right now better than taking on another transitional ministry. Not saying I won't, but right now it's not the right time.

Chris Reinolds: How long does a church…how long would you recommend for a church, or does it vary, for them to have an interim period?

David Waganer: I have done them in three months and I would say I didn't finish my job, but the church was already further along than they should have been when they went into an interim ministry. I've gone, I've stayed as long as 15 months or so, maybe 18, I don't recommend it. I like to work with a nine to 12 month period, because I think there comes a point where you need to get out and let the next ministry take place. But it depends on the church. Some people would say conflict is not a time to be working with a church in transition. I would disagree with that.

George Bullard: I would too, yes.

David Waganer: Because I would say what a great time to do this.

George Bullard: Yeah, it is.

David Waganer: But you know I would differ with some of the training that I've been given.

George Bullard: Much better than them going ahead and calling the next pastor and making that pastor the sacrificial lamb. You know?

David Waganer: Then the next guy comes. I mean to lay a platform for the next ministry, that it brings great satisfaction when that ministry gets off the ground running and they don't have to deal with all the trench work you've dealt with, all the stuff that's been swept under the rug that, you know, you need to clean it up.

George Bullard: Well, what happens, David, though, if a church has some issues when a pastor leaves and they don't deal with them and they call the next pastor immediately?

David Waganer: Well, the big thing is you become the interim. The next guy becomes the interim pastor in one way or another. Not to say that he can't truly become pastor, but in looking back on one particular experience in my life, I went to a church after they had had a supply, each week a different supply for a year, and they had a situation of improper conduct on the part of the pastor’s wife while he was there. They never dealt with that. So when I went there, I quickly became aware I was the interim. I was really the interim. They had to work them through their hurts, their heartaches, and I ended up staying there 18 months.

Chris Reinolds: Wow.

David Waganer: So you know, it was, you either deal with it on the front end, so you can call a pastor who could come and be effective, or you're calling a pastor who's going to become your interim, that you really wanted to be your pastor.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

David Waganer: A few exceptions to that. Sometimes you can work through it in the first six or eight months at the interim things and then you move on to being the pastor that you were called to be.

Chris Reinolds: Now, these are two different skill sets. I mean, would you say that these are two different skill sets? There's a difference between someone called to be the traditional pastor versus those called to be the interim. What sort of different skill sets do we see present between those two?

David Waganer: Well, an interim or a transitional, or whatever we want to call that person, needs to realize they're not there for the long haul. Which allows them the freedom to deal with some things that as a new pastor you might not want to deal with. But if you don't deal with them, then it begins to fester and it keeps coming up. So the skill set for me is that, first of all, God's gifted me with discernment. So I can walk into a situation and within a short while understand the needs. That's a good thing, but it's also a bad thing.

 It's good in the sense that you know what you need to address. It's bad because sometimes you come across as pretty judgmental. You know, harsh and you know, my wife sometimes has to pull me back in.

Chris Reinolds: She has to soften you?

David Waganer: Yeah soften me with that. But I think there's similar gift sets but one is temporary, able to address the things without the fear of, you know, the financial thing being pulled out from underneath them. Because usually transitional or interim would not be full time. They would have another position or maybe they'd be retired or semi-retired and able to take that on for... But their livelihood would not be dependent upon that source of income.

Chris Reinolds: Right. So what would you say to the pastor that has been called to a church that didn't have an interim, and now he finds himself without these skills and in need of walking through these transition processes? How would you give encouragement to them?

David Waganer: Bring in a consultant that could help him through that process, either privately, or have the church call a consultant in to help him work through that. It would take his hands off of it directly and allow them to deal with that process. So you know, most transitional pastors that I know would have that skill to be able to walk in and do the consulting part of the transition. You wouldn't want somebody with no experience.

Chris Reinolds: So essentially they would call you.

David Waganer: I'd gladly work them through the preliminary parts of that. If they wanted more extended then we'd have to have a conversation on that line, because I have an agreement with the association that I work with the church so far, and then it would be up to the church to work that out with me. Is that fair to say?

George Bullard: It's fair to say, absolutely. Yeah. The services that David Waganer provides are basic services, general services, so he can help as many congregations as possible. There are times that he and other people that work for us, like Robert Grant that we're going to hear on another podcast on another day, that the church says we need you for a longer period of time. And that's a different kind of situation.

Chris Reinolds: Well, if there was somebody that wanted to be able to reach out to you, either services related to the stewardship or education or interim, transitional church ministry, conflict mediation, and ministerial ordination, how could they get in contact with you?

David Waganer: Well, the first contact would be with the association with George. At least that would be the preferred. We've had recently, one church contact me directly. I went back through George because that's the avenue that we prefer. He knows how many churches that I could work with in a given amount of time that we've agreed to. And I, you know, I will give more of myself than what's required because I believe in putting yourself into these young pastors in many cases that need somebody just to breathe some truth that only life experience can give.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

David Waganer: I like to do that.

George Bullard: Yeah, I'd recommend that people just call us directly at (803) 619-7110, and if they want to talk to me to get David referred to you, then the extension is extension 1, or they can send an email to CMBA@Columbiametro.org. And we'll pick up on that and have David connect with you as soon as possible.

Chris Reinolds: That's great. Well, thank you so much for being with us, David.

David Waganer: Thank you, thank you. Look forward to it.

Chris Reinolds: And to all of our listeners, thank you for joining with us and please be sure to check out the show notes for more detailed information about today's show. Also, if you found this podcast helpful for you and your ministry, share it with others so we can get the word out about what God is doing. 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 in the Columbia Metro Baptist Association.