



Associational Appreciation
J Thompson and Bill Wright
The Columbia Metro Connection Podcast 047
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Columbia Metro Baptist Association at CMBA@ColumbiaMetro.org

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Chris Reinolds: Welcome to the One Priority Podcast, where our goal is starting and strengthening congregations to serve as vital and vibrant missional communities. The One Priority Podcast is sponsored and supported by the Columbia Metro Baptist Association and the almost 100 family churches that support the ministry of the CMBA. Our hosts for this week are George Bullard, Executive Director of the Columbia Metro Baptist Association. And I'm Chris Reinolds, Lead Pastor at Killian Baptist Church.

Chris Reinolds: This week, we're getting the opportunity to spend some time with J Thompson, Pastor at Cedar Creek Baptist Church and our Vice Moderator of the CMBA. And Bill Wright, Associate Pastor at Temple Baptist Church and the moderator on the Visionary Leadership Community. Today, we're taking some time to appreciate the ongoing work of the supporting ministry of the CMBA.

George Bullard: Well, we're really pleased to have our moderator and our vice moderator here with us today. So, Bill Wright, we welcome you as our moderator and a former staff member of the Columbia Metro Baptist Association.

Bill Wright: Thank you, so good to be here with you guys.

George Bullard: And J Thompson is our vice moderator and pastor of a Cedar Creek. We're super pleased to have you and appreciate all your faithfulness over the years in the Association.

J Thompson: A joy to be here.

George Bullard: Yeah, well, great, great. Well, because this is the week of prayer for Baptist associations, is why we wanted to have this special podcast this week. And we want to be sure that people understand that from our concept at the Columbia Metro Baptist Association, that the churches are the association. No longer since we sold the building is the association of building that you can go to. But neither is the association an organization that you affiliate with. It is the churches. We are a family. We are 24-7-365, the Columbia Metro Baptist Association, made up of approximately 95 congregations.

George Bullard: So, I want to start out, Bill, maybe with you. Asking you, how has your experience with the Columbia Metro Baptist Association, and how does it differ from other experiences you may have had with associations? Because of that kind of family and the churches are the association kind of concept.

Bill Wright: Well, I feel like my story might be a little different because I've just been blessed in so many tremendous ways, with being able to be a part of associations that were really working together as the church is. Go back to my conversion, [Tommy Knots 00:00:03:02], the director of missions in Aiken, I was 10 years old. And Tommy came to my home and led me to faith in Christ. And then later, I was able to serve in that association there. And early on, he invested in pastors. I was a younger pastor, and he would invest in us and just love the pastors.

Bill Wright: And then, I was able to serve in Lexington Association. And Johnny and David, and then Marty Price was there at the end. And they just loved on me and encouraged me. And then, if it could get any better, God allowed me to serve the churches in Columbia for 14 years. And I just feel so blessed. The churches of Columbia are so special. They have given so much to my life and ministry. And to be able to walk alongside those churches has just been the greatest joy for me. And I feel so blessed. And really honestly, just if any way I can give back to the churches, that's really what I want to do because they've been so good to me. And I love our churches and the association. I love the diversity of our association, just everything from inner-city churches to suburban churches and rural churches. And it's just a blessing to be a part of Columbia Metro, part of the churches in the association.

George Bullard: Well, great. That's wonderful. And I know from my being here as the Director of the last, little over three years, that you were well loved in the association because of your strong ministry and partnership with churches and impacting churches, so many churches.

George Bullard: J, what's been your experience.

J Thompson: Well, I have sort of a two-chapter approach. I was here from 1980 to 1994. And I was very involved with the association here locally. And went to the upstate for a while and was involved in association work up there. But I think over these last 18 or 19 years, being back in the Columbia Metro Association, it's reminded me of the fact that we need each other. We need each other as brothers and sisters. But we also need each other as brother and sister churches, as we gather together, encourage each other, look to the future together. And I'm thankful that, that has been a focus for us, to be on the same team together, not in competition with one another. But really lifting each other up.

J Thompson: And so, that's been a big part of my experience. And I really just have been blessed, and been blessed by working with you and other DOMs. And just through the years, that I knew I had a friend when I would call out. And it was always a sense of knowing that somebody was in this, with us as a church. And so I'm thankful for that. I really am. And I think that's a great emphasis for our association, particularly.

George Bullard: Well, thank you, J and Bill, both of you all are truly servant supporters and servants in the churches where you are and concerned about the churches. And that's great to hear.

Chris Reynolds: Yeah. And J, you mentioned the future for the ministry of the churches around here. What are some of the things that the two of you are seeing within our family of churches

within the association that gives you hope for the future in and around the ministry that exists here in the Columbia area?

Bill Wright: [crosstalk] Yeah. Okay. I was jumping in...

Chris Reynolds: You good.

Bill Wright: A couple of things for me that have just been really neat, first of all, is... and it builds on the family type concept of churches working together. Churches that are existing churches that are dealing with challenges that are part of the times we're living in, part of the location, maybe, the church is located in. And then seeing churches come together to help encourage, come alongside, to encourage, to love, to pray, to offer any way possible to serve alongside. It's just been such a blessing. And I've had the privilege just recently, to be a part of a group that was meeting with one of our sister churches. And just the spirit there, that we're there to support, to love, to join arms together as a family or churches. And that's been really special to me because I do have a history with a lot of these churches and love the area.

Bill Wright: And then the other thing that's just excited me, because for so long, I would cut through Decker Boulevard, and I would just... God just grabbed hold of my heart and just said, these people from all over the world, Lord, you bring in people that not necessarily they live there, but they work here and all. Just, Lord, what do we do with them? I remember eating in a restaurant in Decker with my son, my oldest son, who's in Detroit now. And it was a Vietnamese restaurant. And God just grabbed my heart and said, who's trying to reach these folks? [crosstalk] God, you brought the world to us, and who's trying to reach?

Bill Wright: And then, to see some of the things. And I love Ryan Dupree, his leadership. And I've always said it behind his back, say it to his face, I think he's the most knowledgeable person in our state, when it comes to international work. Can just have such a wonderful heart, God's gifted him. And just to see some of that, it almost moves me to tears when I think about it. Because I know that's something that Jesus really smiles at, when we're collectively reaching out to reach the people that he is just brought here from all over the world. So those are the two things off the top of my head.

Chris Reynolds: I agree with you. I think that that is a definite strong characteristic of our association of churches here. That they do see it as a family endeavor to reach every avenue and all peoples, all nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, to see them come together is incredibly encouraging and that non-competitive spirit is something that is uplifting for me, personal as well, so...

Chris Reynolds: What about you, J? What are some of the things that you see that, in and around the ministry here, that are exciting to you?

J Thompson: Well, the very fact that we're having this meeting is encouraging. I think that we've increased our connectivity, which increases availability, which opens up a lot of doors for us to be in the same focus together about things. I get together with several pastors. They call me up and they say, "Hey, how you doing? And let's go eat and talk." And we talk about what the Lord is doing. And so, I think, particularly in these last few years, I've seen a greater openness, a greater receptivity about who we are as an association. I think we're defining that better. We are beginning to see that this is a team effort. That we are coming together. That we're not in

competition. That we're all about the kingdom's work, about the kingdom's message. And so, that's one of the main encouragements that I see right there.

J Thompson: And like I said, the very fact that we're having this meeting, I think we've increased our visibility to our churches. And we've given greater accessibility to them to say, wait a minute, we can work together on this. We don't have to be at odds about anything. We don't have to be little islands, all strong out there. We can come together and share our hearts and share a vision together. So I like the idea that we're better connected than, I think, ever before.

George Bullard: Oh, good, good, good. Well, both of you guys served on the Visionary of Leadership Community and have for several years, which is really our administrative team. But we've named it, the Visionary Leadership Community because we're trying to lead forward with God's empowering vision for us as an association. What are some things that you all have experienced, that we've been doing in and through the Visionary Leadership Community Center to help empower our family of congregations, that you think are our folks need to know about? J, why don't you go first this time?

J Thompson: Okay, I'll go first. Well, I think that going back to some of the ideas I raised a minute ago, I think there's a certain accessibility that we have now to various resources that we encourage the churches about. It's always encouraging to hear about different opportunities, like the grant program that we've come up with recently. The ministries that churches can use to empower them to be about God's business in their own location right there. So that's certainly one of those things. And I think having a sense of vision that has been well casted in our association, that we do want to establish and strengthen churches. And we want to help churches with their missional engagement in their communities.

J Thompson: And I like, not only the concept, but the reality of the way that's playing out, and how we're helping congregations to look in the mirror and to say, "Hey, this is where we are. And these are the things that we need." And I think coming together in our visionary group helps us to address those things, and to bring those issues up. And to have great discussion and have some action that would enable our local congregations.

George Bullard: Good, good.

Bill Wright: Well for me, not double-dipping on some of the stuff I've already talked about, but I think one of the things is, in my opinion, we're doing the best job ever of sharing the story. And that's an example, kind of like, what J was talking about. But just to give an example back to when I served on the staff... And I know, George, you'd find this to be true too, that you have the privilege to go to one of the churches of Columbia Metro. And you share just a thimble full of what God is doing in the churches. Because if not, it's the best three hours people ever had in church. But you share a thimble full, and then people tell you, "Gosh, I didn't know that this was going on." And all I could think about was my word. If I'd just tell you, not even 25% of what God is doing, it would just be unbelievable. So I think we're doing the best job of sharing that story of what God is doing through the churches.

Bill Wright: And to me, having served with the association, also local church pastor and [inaudible] staff, it's easy sometimes to be focused on what I'm involved with, the community I'm involved in, the things that I'm doing. And it's so refreshing, like when we come to the meetings, to see a big picture view of the playing field, if you will. To see where God's at work over here and over there. And so, I would say that to me, the thing that just makes me want to shout the

most is that sharing that story of just what the churches are doing and what God is doing through the churches, all over Columbia, Metro. So easily, that would be for me.

Chris Reynolds: And one of the ways in which that's being done more often, is through Julia Bell, she's writing a lot of stories about what's going on in the local ministries around our association. And it's incredible. It's been incredibly enlightening for me, and I'm sure for many others.

Chris Reynolds: But both Bill and J, I'm sure that there are some local churches that have sort of kept their distance, pastors, church leaders, from the association for any number of reasons. Maybe based on that previous bad experience at this association in years gone by, maybe in their experience in another association, maybe just unfamiliarity with what the association is. However, if there's one encouragement that you two could give those pastors, those churches, those church leaders, about the importance of getting involved in our association of churches, what would that be? Either one of you.

J Thompson: I think it's sometimes what we say about the gospel, it's one beggar to another beggar where he's found bread. And I think as churches, we all have needs. And sometimes, if I can be bold enough to say it, pastors have a little pride about them, "I can handle this, I can do this, I don't need anybody. It's just me and the Lord. And get out of my way, I can make this happen." And I think you got to die to that. I think you got to say, "Wait a minute, we're in this together." Let me encourage you that you've got a friend. Let me encourage you that there's somebody that will laugh with you and cry with you and pray with you. And that's just the facts.

J Thompson: And when we come together in our visionary meetings, particularly, with the pandemic going on, it's so great to hear about how other congregations are dealing with the situation. Everybody's dealing with it differently. And I want to tell you, I've learned a lot from my brother and sisters in the other congregations that have helped me in how we've managed this thing. And so, just know that, that encouragement there... iron sharpens iron. And I would even, maybe, retranslate that a little bit, and say iron sharpens iron, so one church sharpens another. And so that would be my encouragement, right there.

Bill Wright: I think clearly around the family-type theme that we've talked about today, that for me, the value, so much of the association of churches, is that I have partners. I have brothers and sisters in Christ that I learned very quickly, I might not be the brightest light bulb in the package, but very early in ministry, I learned I'm not good at everything. So when I try to do everything and act like I'm the one that knows everything, then I'm the limiting factor. So it's just so good to know that there are brothers and sisters that are there, that God has gifted in ways that I'm not gifted. That they can be of encouragement to me, can be a source of resource, counsel and wisdom, partnering together. To me, the value of that makes it just tremendous for me. There's not a time that I come to something together, as we get together as the churches.

Bill Wright: And like J said, it's been a challenge during all of this time with the COVID-19 and all. But even in those times, even when we've been able to get together, I come away learning something. I come away being inspired about something that God's about. But that fellowship and the resource that's available, it's well worth the investment in my opinion. And if we're serious about... And I know we are, I don't mean to say it like that. But we're serious about reaching and making disciples. That's what we're about.

Chris Reynolds: That's right.

Bill Wright: And if we're going to do that, we've got to join arms. And we've got to work together because we're not going to be able to do it by ourselves. And God never intended for us to do it by ourselves. But we need to join arms. And the Association of Churches gives, in my opinion, the best opportunity for doing that with actual boots on the ground in the local area and beyond.

George Bullard: Well, there's no doubt about the fact that no one church is going to reach all of those Midlands nor be the launching pad for the world alone. [crosstalk] We need one another, and we need that strength, as J said, of iron sharpening iron in terms of what happens even in churches.

George Bullard: Well, Bill and J, we appreciate you being with us today and sharing some of the thoughts and ideas that you have. I want to remind people that we have a singular priority, and that is to start in strengthened congregations to serve as vital and vibrant missional communities. And that's what we want to give our full heart, soul, mind, and strength to as a family of congregations in the Midlands. Thank you very much today.

J Thompson: Thank you for having us.

Bill Wright: Thank you so much. A blessing to be with you guys today.

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, 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.