

Pastor Says Recession Is Good Time for Revival

Recessions are a good time for revival, California pastor Rick Warren told delegates this morning at the Assemblies of God (AG) biennial General Council being held this week in Orlando, Fla.

“Bad times are good times for churches because people will turn to the Lord when things are going bad,” he said. “When things are going great they ignore God.”

He said revival hit his congregation in April, when the church saw 1,600 people come to Christ in that month alone. He said more than 1,000 people were baptized, and 2,600 people participated in the church’s monthly membership class, which typically draws 100 people.

“We have the potential, if we are ready, to see genuine spiritual revival in our local churches “if we are prepared for it,” said Warren, who for years has financially supported the Pentecostal denomination’s church-planting efforts.

He said that preparation begins with personal spiritual renewal among church leaders. Drawing from a passage in Exodus 4 that describes God’s appearing to Moses in a burning bush and asking him to lay down his staff, Warren challenged pastors to give God what was in their hands and allow Him to do the miraculous through them.

“When God told Moses to lay down his staff, He was saying, ‘I want you to lay down your influence, your identity and your income. When you pick it back up, it’s Mine,’” Warren said, noting that after that point, Moses’ staff was called the rod of God.

“God said, ‘If you give it to Me, I will make it come alive,’”

Warren added.

During a question-and-answer session after his talk, Warren said revival historically has gone through five stages: personal renewal; relational revival marked by repentance and reconciliation; a renewal of vision that causes ministries to rediscover their purpose; structural renewal to accommodate growth and cultural renewal, which happens as a result of the other phases.

He said revivals that stop after personal and relational renewal often fizzle out.

Warren said his congregation seeks to influence the culture through a series of civil forums, which most notably include his interviews with 2008 presidential candidates Barack Obama and John McCain. More recent forums have focused on AIDS and remembering the Holocaust.

But Warren said “nothing matters more” than reaching people with the gospel message.

“If you want the blessing of God on your life, if you want the anointing of God on your life, if you want the power of God on your life, you must care about what God cares about most,” Warren said. “What does God care about most? It ain’t politics. It isn’t changing American culture. It’s He wants His lost children found.”

Warren did not address the controversy that erupted in April over statements he made distancing himself from Christians who advocated for Proposition 8, which banned gay marriage in California.

He told attendees they could believe only 10 percent of what they heard about him. When he was later asked about how he handles criticism, he encouraged the crowd to learn from honest critiques but to forget false accusations.

Some 30,000 people gathered this week for the 60 million-member denomination's 53rd General Council meeting, which ends tonight with a teen Fine Arts Festival.