

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Caribbean-Wide Baptist Conference Held On St. Croix

VIC News / **Published On January 21, 2015 12:54 AM /**

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The 54th Annual West Indies Baptist Fellowship Conference is underway at the Good Hope School Gymnasium on St. Croix through Friday, Jan. 23. Daytime workshops are from 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m., and the evening session begins at 7 p.m.

Organizers invite the community to attend.

The annual gathering is one of Baptist churches from across the West Indies and got its origin from a small group of ministers who met in St. Thomas for "a time of fellowship," according to Pastor Anthony Benjamin, conference chairperson and pastor of St. Croix's Calvary Baptist Church.

Since its inception in 1962, the gathering has brought together the faithful from as nearby as Puerto Rico to as far away as St. Eustatius. Throughout its more than five decades, the conference has been held each year on a different Caribbean island, except in 2003, when it was held in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

And this year, all the Baptist churches on St. Croix have joined together to host the conference again.

According to Pastor Benjamin, the week-long gathering offers morning, afternoon and evening sessions where "all sorts of subject matters are addressed."

"We try to be as pertinent as possible, relative to some of the things that are going on in our world at any given time," he said.

For example, Pastor Benjamin pointed out that Tuesday's sessions centered around "authentic or relevant Christianity."

"That is to say, Christianity suitable for the times in which we live," he explained. "Today we had one session dealing with grief and loss, helping conference-goers cope with the death of a loved one, and more particularly, the death of a spouse."

There was also a session "addressing the matter of widowhood. After the death of a spouse, how does the remaining spouse, whether male or female, deal with that."

Pastor Benjamin said other topics this week will include, "same-sex marriage and ministering to the homosexual, the effective use of technology in the church," and how to engage youth to make a difference within their communities.

Registration

A \$100 conference registration fee is required for persons wishing to attend the daytime sessions and also enjoy breakfast, lunch and dinner meals that are provided. In addition, paid registrants receive a bag with items donated from the Virgin Islands Department of Tourism and other "goodies," the pastor said.

There is no registration fee for persons attending the daytime sessions without meals. The 7 p.m. evening sessions are also without cost.

Pastor Benjamin said this year the conference theme is "Standing Strong in Changing Times." It derives from Scripture found in Ephesians 6:10, which states: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

"We want people to know that in these changing difficult times, there is hope and it is to be found in the Lord," he said.

"Rather than trusting the times and the politicians," he continued, "the focus needs to be on someone bigger. We need to keep the focus on the Lord."

Besides this year, St. Croix has hosted the gathering six previous times, St. Thomas has hosted it 12 times and it has been held once on St. John.

In 2016, the conference will head back to the U.S. mainland for a second time, where it will convene in Ft. Lauderdale.

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