

Looking at Ups and Downs

"Seek the peace of the city .. and pray to the Lord for it, for in its peace you will have peace."

-- Jeremiah 29:7 (NKJV)

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As a part of the Ministry of Encouragement we launched in mid-January, I have visited with 69 pastors and ministers in the Shoals. In addition, my wife and I have visited the Sunday services of some 40 Shoals churches.

From this exposure I have to ministers and churches across the Shoals, I have done an informal assessment of the state of health of Shoals churches. I am aware that there are exceptions in both the "strengths" and "area of needed improvement" sections. These are my views and they do not necessarily represent the views of anyone else.

Current strengths of the church in the Shoals:

Overall, I believe the church of the Shoals is in a better state of health than it has been in at least 20 years. The "coming together" of the Quad-Cities on the RSA project and new leadership in our governments is positioning our area, including the churches, for greater growth. Now to some of the specifics I have observed regarding the churches that are encouraging.

- * The church in the Shoals is more united than it's been in 100 years. Many are praying, meeting and working together.
- * A kingdom agenda is emerging among the churches. There is more emphasis on the advancement of the Kingdom of God and less on individual churches.
- * The Shoals "pulpit" is now healthier. The word is going forth in power and conviction.
- * Renewal is moving into the mainstream of Shoals churches and denominations. No longer is contemporary worship, "power encounters" and the ministry of the Holy Spirit seen only in the Charismatic and Pentecostal churches.
- * Marketplace ministry is emerging as people of God in business and commerce are seeing themselves as ministers and their work as ministry.
- * Christ's church is becoming more and more a "house of prayer." All-night prayer meetings, concerts of prayer, prayer conferences and 24/7 prayer gatherings are taking place.
- * We are beginning to get a "handle on the land." The Tennessee River Prayer Initiative and other "spiritual mapping" projects have increased our awareness of land issues and the consequences of what happened on the land in the past.

Areas where the church of the Shoals need to improve -- again from my perspective:

- * We are not making any significant progress in the church coming together across racial and ethnic lines. There is still much suspicion, hurt and distrust.
- * Sectarianism and denominationalism is still alive in pockets. Some groups are still "doing their own thing" with little regard for others.
- * In some circles, there is still too much attention given to buildings, institutions, traditions and "wineskins" and not enough to relationships and the reality of Jesus Christ. I believe there is too much emphasis on "the gathered church" and not enough emphasis on "the extended church."
- * There seems to be little interest and activity in the fields of outreach and personal evangelism. Across the board, we are ineffective in reaching the unreached and the unchurched and there are many of both.
- * Kingdom resources or, if you prefer, God's money is still tied up in the Shoals.

Many of us believe that God is "positioning" things in the Shoals for a major breakthrough and a season of city and area transformation.

We must cooperate.