



Hopeful Imagination

Mike Queen, Jayne Davis

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Christian congregations, like just about everything else in our culture, are undergoing tremendous change. That's not a huge revelation. Almost everyone involved with congregations agrees with that statement, because we live with that reality. One of the central changes for congregations today is that they are no longer the center of social and cultural life in most communities. Today, depending on where you live, churches are somewhere between slightly off center and all the way at the margins of centers of social influence in their communities. Perhaps no group of churches has experienced this shift more dramatically than "Old First" churches. Another change is that denominational organizations are no longer the repository of all resources, services, and expertise that congregations need to be effective. Often, the true "experts" are not denominational organizations, but other congregations. The best denominational organizations see their task, primarily, as cultivating a network of churches and ministry partners and connecting them to one another as a community of mutual learning and resourcing. With these changes in mind, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina (CBFNC) partnered with First Baptist Church Wilmington and others in 2010 to produce the first "Hopeful Imagination" conference. The centerpiece of the conference was telling the story of FBC Wilmington in the words of its leaders. It was a story of how an "Old First" church adapted to our changing times and managed not only to survive, but also to thrive. In addition to the resource of the FBC story, we brought in other leaders who made contributions to the corporate learning. Teams of congregational leaders attended the conference, listened to the stories, and returned home to apply their learning in their own congregations and communities.



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