

A Report on the IFCA Annual Convention (Part 1)

By PAUL J. SCHARF

During the week of June 28 to July 2, I attended the annual convention of the IFCA International, where I oversaw the exhibit for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.

The theme of this year's convention was "The Soon & Coming King—Biblical Eschatology." General session speakers were Dr. Richard Bargas, executive director of IFCA International; Dr. Thomas Ice, executive director of the Pre-Trib Research Center and professor at Calvary University; Dr. Michael Vlach, who was in the process of moving from The Master's Seminary (where he taught for 15 years) to Shepherds Theological Seminary (where he is now professor of theology); and Dr. Larry Pettegrew, research professor of theology at Shepherds.

"We need to plant flags as IFCA members," Bargas told the crowd of more than 300 that assembled for the first general session on June 28. "We have some convictions."

"The name 'IFCA' means a lot to us," Bargas added during the first business session on June 29, referring back to the adoption of a 2020 "Resolution on Dispensational Theology and Hermeneutics."ⁱ "We didn't do anything new," he stated regarding that resolution. "We just put a flag up to say, 'This is who we are.'"

Bargas said that the IFCA's bold stand has made it more attractive to some who are looking at the options along the ecclesiological landscape—especially those who are "tired of the sliding, tired of the compromise."

But before we delve any further into the substance behind the conference theme, or the messages, resolutions and other developments, I will begin with some basic facts and general observations.

I should make it clear that I am not an individual member of the IFCA, nor do I belong to an IFCA-member church. This was also my first time attending the annual convention—although I have followed it from afar for many years.

I actually have a long history of involvement with the IFCA. The church that I attended after leaving the Lutheran congregation in which I was raised was a member of the IFCA, and I remained there through my years in Bible college.

More recently, I served in ministry for more than 15 years with an IFCA-member organization, and I was also the interim pastor of an IFCA-member church for nearly two years. I've been involved with the Wisconsin Regional meetings on a regular basis—even having the honor of speaking at three of them. Since being appointed to serve with The Friends of Israel in 2018, I have ministered in a number of IFCA churches, and have had an exhibit at the Wisconsin Regional each time it met. I hope to

build on that connection by visiting other regionals in the coming days. Thus, what happens in the IFCA is of great interest to me personally, and attending the annual convention was a homecoming experience, of sorts.

This year's convention met at the Lincoln Marriott Cornhusker in downtown Lincoln, Neb.—situated between the state capitol building and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Memorial Stadium.

If I had to sum up the week in one word, it would be *fellowship*. Attendees had the opportunity to stay busy with conference events from 8 a.m. to roughly 10 p.m. each night—and could join friends at the hotel restaurant even beyond that. Many of those who attended were, of course, pastors and wives, or representatives of other types of ministries and missions. There were abundant opportunities for significant discussions to take place—and I certainly witnessed many in-depth conversations, including occasions of people seeking encouragement and prayer.

This is one of the busiest conferences at which I have exhibited. I learned some new lessons that I believe will help me to become a better exhibitor in the future. There were several times when it was necessary to choose among a variety of workshops or events. I especially learned that it was important for me to control my own schedule—and to take time for adequate exercise and rest.

There were at least 35 exhibitors by my count, and each one that I spoke to thought that their time at the convention was profitable.

The schools represented were: Appalachian Bible College, Bob Jones University, Brookes Bible College, Calvary University, Carolina University, Cedarville University, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Florida Bible College, Montana Bible College, Shepherds Theological Seminary, Southern California Seminary and Tyndale Theological Seminary.

Among the mission agencies exhibiting were ABWE, Adelphos, Biblical Ministries Worldwide, Brazil Gospel Fellowship Mission, Ethnos 360, Fellowship International Mission, ITEM and UIM International.

There were also three IFCA-related church extension ministries on display, along with several other types of ministries and organizations.

I will take up the topic of the conference theme in greater detail in the next installment.

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ⁱ IFCA International; 2 July 2020; <https://www.ifca.org/blog/Advancing%20the%20Cause/2020-resolution-on-dispensational-hermeneutics>; Internet; accessed 8 July 2021.