

A Benediction

A benediction, according to Mr. Webster's dictionary, is: "(1) a blessing; (2) an expression of good wishes; or, (3) an invocation of divine blessing, usually at the end of a church service." If you are Baptist, you already knew the part about it coming at the end of the service. We have traditionally practiced the benediction as an act of closure. I personally recall a very meaningful "benediction" in my own life and ministry. I was leaving my home church—the place where I had asked Christ into my life; the place where I was baptized; the place where I grew up; and, the place where I had served as student minister and associate pastor—to move on to another place of ministry. It was an emotionally-charged time. In spite of the emotions, I held myself together pretty well—right up to the benediction. The benediction, in this case, was in written form. It was a notebook, filled with prayers for me and my ministry written by the students in our youth group. Some were scriptural ("*The Lord bless you and keep you...*"); some were confessional (*Lord, please help Bro. Mike forgive me for the all the stuff I did at camp last summer...*); and, some were directed toward my family ("*Lord, please help Bro. Day be a better parent than he was a youth minister.*") The prayers varied, to be certain. But in every case they served as a word of blessing, an expression of good wishes, and a prayer for God's guidance and blessing in my life.

This month, we have opportunity to "pronounce a benediction" for the ministry and work of David and Susan Rouse, who have served for six years as Operations Manager and Office Manager at the Mid-South Baptist Conference Center. David has accepted the invitation of the Kentucky Baptist Convention to serve as Director of the Jonathan Creek Baptist Assembly in Hardin, Kentucky. He will assume those new responsibilities on April 1, 2007. Susan will remain in Cordova until the end of the school year and will assist us in the necessary transitions at the Conference Center until April 30, 2007. And, now, the benediction:

We are grateful... for the faithful service of David and Susan Rouse. They have not had the easiest of jobs, but they have worked hard to meet every challenge and advance the work of the Mid-South Baptist Conference Center.

We are glad... that God is expanding and enlarging the scope of David's work and ministry through this new opportunity. And, we are not surprised. David is an extraordinarily talented and gifted young man with tremendous management skills and a heart for camping and conference center ministries. It is evident that God is moving him to a "larger arena of ministry" and that he will have opportunity to touch many more lives for Christ.

We are praying... that God's presence and blessing will be evident in the Rouse household and the Mid-South Baptist Association during these days of transition. They are days of both excitement and challenge as we prepare for future ministry, consider new opportunities and manage leadership transition. It is a time to pray for the Rouse Family and for our Association. A word of "benediction" found in Hebrews 13:20-21 seems especially appropriate for these days.

"May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Please join us in praying that God will bless David and Susan with everything they need for a smooth transition and effectiveness in ministry. Please join us in praying that God will bless MSBA with clear direction as we attempt to do what is pleasing to Him through the Mid-South Baptist Conference Center.

Bro. Mike