



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**July 1, 2017**

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***CBA's International Convention Bolsters  
Industry-Strengthening Initiatives***  
***UNITE 2017 attracts retailers, suppliers, publishers, and authors***

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLO. – CBA's UNITE 2017, formerly known as the International Christian Retail Show, took place June 27-30 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Representatives from all aspects of the Christian retail industry, including retailers, publishers, distributors, authors and service providers gathered for face-to-face opportunities at the event co-sponsored by HarperCollins Christian Publishing and Ingram/Spring Arbor.

For 67 years, CBA has helped its members by leading the industry in analyzing critical issues, developing industry-wide strategic direction, and providing highly-valued business solutions, such as data tools and intelligence, industry research, and retail consulting and training.

The exhibit floor is a hub of UNITE where products are shared, transactions are made, deals are signed, and relationships are forged. In addition to an exhibit floor, the convention featured destination areas for international rights and licensing sales, dedicated space for up-and-coming smaller exhibitors, and Showcase Suites for larger, more customized presentations by exhibitors.

Two major initiatives from CBA received an enthusiastic positive response during UNITE 2017. The first is Retail Academy Online, a training program in which CBA has partnered with world-renowned retail training company, the Friedman Group, to offer robust online training at affordable rates for retailers.

The second major initiative is the result of a partnership among CBA, The Parable Group, and The Covenant Group, in which CBA's store-locator website, [ChristianStores.org](http://ChristianStores.org), will enable customers to locate a Christian retail store near them, see the in-stock inventory for stores using CROSS:SCAN, and then either visit the store, reserve the product for in-store pick-up, or purchase and ship online. The Get It Local Today program is scheduled to launch this year and offers retailers without advanced online capabilities a way to offer omnichannel options, entering into the customer journey and allowing customers to discover or purchase the way the customer chooses—either in-store or online.

Both initiatives are possible due to collaboration within the industry, proof positive of CBA President Curtis Risky's constant reminder of the value of unity. "We need to look out for the



needs of our fellow industry members because the health and success of the whole industry means health and success for individual companies,” he said.

Embodying the idea of unity, UNITE 2017 officially kicked off June 27 with CBA’s annual worship service. Attendees were led in worship by southern gospel group The Collingsworth Family with beautiful harmonies and exceptional musicianship across numerous classical instruments. Then backed by a full band, eclectic modern worship leader Ricardo Sanchez concluded the night with a set that mixed familiar worship favorites with new songs. The distinct flavors of the groups exemplified the diversity of the overarching genre of Christian music sold in today’s retail stores. Author Mary DeMuth spoke from the heart as she shared her personal story and focused on encouraging the convention-goers.

During the official opening of the exhibit areas, which included a ceremony with a free breakfast and ribbon-cutting, Risky welcomed everyone with a word about unity and this year’s theme, “Envision the Legacy,” pointing retailers to Galatians 6:10. “We know it’s been a tough year,” Risky acknowledged, “but what we do today creates a legacy tomorrow.” CBA Board Chair Sue Smith added her word of welcome, stating, “God goes with you today as you start business.”

A major focus for the 2017 convention was training opportunities for retailers. Offering both a foundational track and an advanced track, CBA’s Retail Academy, an intensive pre-convention day of training, provided diverse sessions covering an array of relevant topics, including digital marketing, inventory management, customer experience and leadership strategy. Speakers included The Friedman Group’s Wendi Swanson, Carpentree’s Sherry Morris and The Parable Group’s Erik Ernstrom, among others. While this year’s session leaders acknowledged the ongoing challenges facing the Christian retail industry, they also provided tactical tools attendees could implement in their stores. “Changing times require even the most fundamental of things,” noted Morris during her session, *Gift & Specialty Buying: Making Gift Campaigns Work*.

Specifically for authors, an Author Boot Camp featured a variety of afternoon sessions and a lively Q&A discussion with an engaging author panel. Keynote speaker Cynthia Rucht, literary agent for Books & Such Literary Management and a best-selling author, shared tips for finding and pitching agents and publishers. “We’re always happy to be anywhere where there are people talking about books, and especially where there are authors,” said Robin Cutler, director of IngramSpark, Ingram’s self-publishing arm, which sponsored the event.

New this year, a “Rep Arouns” session provided a fun and efficient way for attendees to learn about an array of new product offerings in a short period of time. After some brief presentations on overarching trends in areas like Christian fiction and children’s products, tables of retailers enjoyed fast presentations by 14 representatives rotating among the tables with products ranging from greeting cards and stuffed animals to new book titles.

On June 29, convention-goers gathered for the Envision the Legacy Banquet, an evening of inspiration, entertainment, and award presentations honoring leaders and innovators in the Christian



retail industry. Over a free dinner, author and Fellowship of Companies for Christ International President and CEO Terence Chatmon delivered the keynote address challenging attendees to pursue a “legacy life” with intentionality, starting in their own homes. Illusionists Adrian Van Vactor and Rod Robison performed *Unmasking the Masquerade On Stage!*, engaging audience members and bewildering those gathered with mind-bending entertainment. The performers shared that many are misled by psychics and those claiming to have supernatural powers, so they have dedicated their work to pointing to Jesus Christ and debunking myths that lead people astray. Van Vactor shared his personal testimony revealing that he came to know the Lord through Christian media. “You are throwing a lifeline of truth to people who are drowning in a sea of deception,” Robison encouraged the industry representatives. “Keep your focus on people whose lives you are affecting.”

During the convention, CBA announced two international directorships that will guide the industry in its work in South Korea and India.

Leading Korean publishing executive Kyungtae Noh, CEO of Urim Books, has been named the new director of CBA Korea, which has been re-launched. Noh recognizes the need for leadership among the Christian publishing and retailing communities in Korea and volunteered to step into leadership to demonstrate and promote unity to further the Gospel message.

Brother C.V. Vadavana of Truth/Sathyam Ministries has been named the director of CBA India. He and CBA President Risky announced an agreement to work together to expand ministry and Christian-product distribution in India. During a meeting June 30 at UNITE 2017, Vadavana and Risky discussed with a group of publishers opportunities to bring Christian businesses and a rights-and-licensing sales event to the World Christian Expo in Mumbai, India, in November 2018.

Risky said CBA’s annual convention continues to demonstrate the value of face-to-face interactions and the need for the entire industry to work together toward solutions that will benefit all.

“When God’s people work together, the Good News we have to share can be distributed far and wide for the glory of His name,” Risky said. “We must remember that we are here to serve a higher purpose, and when we do, I believe He will work through us.”

**CBA, the Association for Christian Retail**, is the global trade association for Christian-product providers and distributors. It supplies vital connections, information, education, and encouragement to help Christian resource providers reach all people.

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