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IN THIS ISSUE:

- * Fellowship declines to cut funds for SBC seminaries
- * Cooperative Baptist Fellowship commissions 10 missionaries
- * 'Press toward the mark,' Hull urges Fellowship
- * Blessing, challenge, promise define Fellowship's identity, preachers say
- * New churches called wave of future for Fellowship
- * Fellowship leaves homes behind after Greensboro meeting
- * Mission leaders say Baptists must 'wake up' to pluralistic world
- * Fellowship expands staff, discusses vision for future
- * ABP board elects directors, discusses CBF dependency
- * Religious Liberty Council elects officers, BJC board members

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Fellowship declines to cut funds for SBC seminaries

By Greg Warner

GREENSBORO, N.C. (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship won't end all funding of Southern Baptist seminaries but will encourage participating churches to direct their contributions toward Fellowship-endorsed theological schools.

Angered by the March 9 firing of popular Southern Baptist seminary president Russell Dilday, Fellowship members at their annual meeting debated then defeated a motion to exclude all Southern Baptist seminaries from all Fellowship funding plans.

Although the proposal was endorsed by the group's administrative committee, only about a third of those voting May 7 approved the plan -- far short of the two-thirds necessary for enactment.

However, a less stringent proposal was immediately passed. It suggested that churches dissatisfied with Southern Baptist handling of theological education redirect their Fellowship contributions to the group's Vision 2000 budget, which already excludes all six Southern Baptist seminaries in favor of the moderate organization's own efforts in theological education.

The debate over seminary funding was the only disputed matter in an otherwise quiet Fellowship meeting, which registered 4,337 participants and attracted 6,000 people to the largest session -- fewer than expected.

During the May 5-7 meeting in Greensboro, N.C., the Fellowship appointed 10 new missionaries, adopted a six-month budget and heard reports on its various areas of ministry. Members also worshiped and attended workshops on 104 topics, ranging from self-care for ministers to hospitality evangelism, from desktop publishing to "sister images" in the Bible. An extended pre-assembly institute examined Christian responses

to homosexuality.

The Fellowship was formed in 1990 by Southern Baptist moderates after their unsuccessful 15-year effort to wrest control of the Southern Baptist Convention from fundamental-conservatives. The loose-knit organization sponsors its own missions program and supports a variety of other ministries but also allows participating churches and individuals to send funds to traditional Southern Baptist causes. In 1993 the Fellowship received \$11.2 million from 1,225 churches and 2,510 individuals. Southern Baptist causes received about a fourth of the funds.

Money for the SBC's seminaries is included in two of the Fellowship's three funding plans. Last year Fellowship members sent \$492,037 to the SBC's seminaries, all of which are now controlled by fundamental-conservatives. Another \$268,004 was sent to two new seminaries created by moderates -- Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (Va.) and Truett Seminary at Baylor University.

The school receiving the largest share last year (\$164,871) was Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, an SBC school in Texas where president Russell Dilday was fired recently in a dispute with fundamental-conservative trustees.

Many Fellowship members wanted to respond to the firing in some way. "Because of what happened to Russell Dilday, the hour is now," said Gary Parker, pastor of First Baptist Church in Jefferson City, Mo., who first proposed the action to defund all SBC seminaries.

Nancy Ammerman of Atlanta also argued for the change, noting churches and individuals still could designate money for the SBC schools. Changing the budgets, and thereby directing more money toward Fellowship-sponsored schools and programs, would "make it more clear we have a theological education agenda and mission that we want people to support," she said.

But others argued the Fellowship should not set policy in reaction to SBC actions.

"By withdrawing our support, we are becoming (like) the Southern Baptist Convention by using money as a political tool," said Charles McAdams of Louisville, Ky., a student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, an SBC school.

Removing the SBC seminaries from the budgets, some said, would discourage churches from participating in the Fellowship. "It's going to make it difficult for new churches ... to find an easy entry point to the CBF," said Mike Smith of Memphis, Tenn.

"Although we here understand the choice remains with the local church, we will be painted as excluding churches that do not agree," he said.

Several said changing the budgets was unnecessary because the SBC soon is expected to require all its agencies to refuse Fellowship funds. A vote on such a proposal, now under study, could come as soon as next month during the annual SBC meeting.

Although many top SBC leaders have encouraged the Fellowship to leave the convention, there was no talk of a split during the annual assembly. However, two Fellowship leaders did talk of the relationship between the Fellowship and the SBC.

Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, retired executive director of the SBC Woman's Missionary Union, described her journey from lifelong SBC leader to Fellowship moderator -- the group's highest elected position, a role she assumed during the assembly.

"I lost something that had defined my whole life," she said of the SBC. "I admitted it would not come back. I walked from my past to something that would be my future."

But, she said, Fellowship members are not required to desert their denominational past. "I cannot, I will not, do that," she said.

"The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship must reclaim our past. We must not try to duplicate it. We must not try to hold onto what is no longer there. But we must not build a shrine to it, constantly longing for the 'good old days' that will never come again."

She said Fellowship members have "different pasts, but we do share today."

Fellowship Coordinator Cecil Sherman, the group's chief executive, offered four warnings to members during his report.

"Beware of a missions/theological education polarization," he said. Voices within the Fellowship argue forcefully for more emphasis on either missions or theological training, he said, but both are needed. "We can do missions for 30 years and run out of any people who think like we do," he warned.

"Beware the 'CBF is liberal' label," he continued. "You are going to hear more of it in the months ahead." Sherman's position on the virgin birth -- which he says is orthodox -- was the target of a recent attack by SBC chief executive Morris Chapman through the SBC official news service. "Some people have a vested interest in making us appear liberal," he said.

Sherman said he will not "bash" back, but neither will he let the Fellowship "get bashed" without responding. "We are not eccentrics. We are not far-out people. We are mainline Baptists who believe the Bible -- always have."

"Beware the pious dodge of neutrality," he added, referring to middle-of-the-road Baptists who try not to take sides in the SBC dispute. "I can understand the people on the other side better than I can understand them," he said.

"If you can watch Grandma get knocked down in front of the K-Mart and somebody steals her purse, and then go back and say, 'You know, Grandma shouldn't be out,' I don't understand you."

"Beware the at-ease-in-Zion attitude in CBF," he concluded. "CBF is getting out of diapers, but ... we have journey to go, we have work to do."

Organizers were disappointed in the attendance in Greensboro, the first Fellowship assembly held in the Atlantic Coast region. Although the area is a stronghold of Fellowship membership, neither registration nor attendance could top last year's meeting in Birmingham, Ala., which registered 5,100 people and attracted about 7,000 to the largest session.

A delay in publicizing the meeting probably hurt, organizers said. Also a \$10 resource fee was charged for the first time.

The \$8.9 million budget adopted at the meeting is for the first six months of 1995, when the Fellowship will shift to a July-to-June budget cycle. The budget anticipates about 63 percent of receipts will go to Fellowship ministries, while about 37 percent will go the SBC causes.

The largest portion of the budget -- \$4.2 million -- will fund the Fellowship's global missions program. Also at the meeting:

-- Patrick Anderson, professor of criminology at Florida Southern College in Lakeland, was chosen moderator-elect to follow Crumpler.

-- Several changes were made in the bylaws governing representation on the Coordinating Council, the Fellowship's top committee, including one change that increases representation of racial and ethnic groups.

-- Ralph Elliott, fired from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1962 after refusing to withdraw his controversial book, "The Message of Genesis," was presented the Whitsitt Courage Award from the Whitsitt Baptist Heritage Society. Walter Shurden, society director and a professor at Mercer University, praised Elliott for "quiet courage" and "championing soul freedom" and said the recognition was "long, long overdue." Critics said Elliott's book questioned the historicity of the first 11 chapters of Genesis.

-30-

-- Photos of Sherman, Elliott and others are available from the Fellowship office in Atlanta.

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
commissions 10 missionaries

By Pam Parry

GREENSBORO, N.C. (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship commissioned 10 missionaries May 6 during its 1994 general assembly here.

All of the missionaries, who will be working in a range of capacities from agriculture to theological education, have previous missions experience.

They include Donald and Carolyn Berry of West Palm Beach, Fla.; Richard and Ellen Burnette, Athens, Ala.; Arville and Shelia Earl, Prairie Village, Kan.; Preston and Nell Green, Van, Texas; and Jerry and Lorraine McAtee, Henderson, N.C.

The Berrys will serve in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, where he will be director of the Institute for Mission and Evangelism at the Baptist Theological Seminary. Donald Berry, assistant professor of religion and philosophy at Palm Beach Atlantic College, also will be professor of missions, evangelism and world religions. Carolyn Berry, a preschool teacher at her church, she will be a church and home worker.

They previously participated in a summer missions project in the Middle East.

The Burnettes have been assigned to The Palaung, Thailand, where they will develop an agricultural ministry. They are familiar with Asian ministry. As college students they both served as journeyman through the Foreign Mission Board. He served in the Philippines, and she was in Japan. They also have participated in a variety of volunteer projects.

The Earls, former FMB missionaries to West Africa, have been assigned to Albania as church planters. They served in Upper Volta from 1980 to 1992. When they returned to the States, she enrolled in Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., and he was associate pastor at Leawood Baptist Church.

The Greens, who previously were FMB missionaries to Senegal, will work in Miami, Fla., with internationals. They were appointed by the FMB in 1986 and served in Dakar, Senegal, until January 1994. Prior to missionary service, he was a child protective services worker and she was a nurse.

The McAtees were assigned to the Middle East; he will be strategic coordinator, and she will be a church and home worker. They have been assigned to the Afro-Asiatic linguistic people group rather than to a country. These people are among the least evangelized of the world.

The McAtees were FMB missionaries from 1976 to 1982, serving in Jordan and Israel.

The new missionaries were challenged by two speakers to take the gospel to the hopeless and downtrodden.

Keith Parks, CBF global missions coordinator, reminded them of people who have never even heard Jesus' name. Parks encouraged the crowd "to take God's perspective of this world." God has done everything; he has given his most precious life through Jesus so that no one must perish, Parks said.

But when God looks down he sees "clusters of talented gifted Christians with resources beyond imagining" and he sees multitudes -- one-fourth of the world -- that have never yet heard the name of Jesus, Parks said.

"God in his love and wisdom has fixed" it in such a way that the only way they will hear "will be determined in the hearts of people like us," he said.

"God has invested his richest resource his saving grace ... in your heart. Don't squander God's grace.

"I ask you tonight, what did God save you for. What is your place in bringing this one-fourth of the world to the knowledge of Christ."

Mike Massar, pastor of First Baptist Church, Clemson, S.C., said today's church needs to start talking about hell again because people are living in it. Jesus spent a lot of time preaching and teaching about hell, Massar said, adding "it was very personal to him."

Retelling the story of Jonah, Massar said, "I want to take you to hell and back. The story of Jonah is a tragic story, because Jonah goes (to hell) and he never returns. Jonah's story just might be our story."

After Jonah finally delivered God's message to the people of Ninevah, Jonah became angry because God decided to spare them. Jonah wanted God to punish them, Jonah's story ends on this tragic note because he doesn't learn the lesson God is trying to teach him: God is not perfectly just or fair because if he was "we would all be in serious trouble."

"Jonah ends his life tromping off into a hell of his own choosing. This story is important for us. Our lives will become tragedies if we don't go to hell for heaven's sake. We need to go into hell holes. We have to reach people there.

"We can't receive grace until we give it away. ... We need to go to those hell holes around us because that is where the gospel needs to be preached."

-30-

'Press toward the mark,'
Hull urges Fellowship

By Marv Knox and Larry Chesser

GREENSBORO, N.C. (ABP) — If the young Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is to fulfill its potential, it must maintain its focus on Christ, Bill Hull told participants in the Fellowship's 1994 general assembly May 5-7 in Greensboro, N.C.

Hull, provost of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., delivered four addresses that illustrated the meeting's theme, "Pressing Toward the Mark."

The theme was based on a passage from the Apostle Paul's letter to the early Christians known as the Philippians: "But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Paul's personal motivating formula provides "our best chance for making a new beginning among Baptists today," Hull told the Fellowship crowd.

The apostle riveted his attention on a single focus, Hull said. "He lived out a calling to make Christ available to every person, regardless of race, gender or ideology."

As the three-year-old Fellowship begins to understand its own sense of mission, it would do well to affirm Paul's broad vision of the gospel, he added. "Paul realized his movement would have to transcend the Jew/Gentile impasse. He realized his gospel must not be trapped on either side of the 'culture war' of his day."

Hull insisted that same concept should empower the Fellowship, which emerged because moderate Southern Baptists grew disaffected with the rightward shift of their denomination.

"Is everything we do animated by the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord," not by a goal of winning a "denominational war"? he asked. "Can Christ transcend the conservative/liberal debate that has been brewing for 400 years in the post-Enlightenment age? Until we can say, 'This one thing I do -- attain Christ,' we are not ready to do anything else."

Unfortunately, that focus can be blurred by backward glances to the past, which pose two problems, Hull reported.

"First of all, the road out of yesterday is littered with the wreckage of our defeats. We collect bitter memories of angry confrontations, of painful ruptures, of cowardly betrayals," he said.

Equally dangerous is "a string of unbroken successes that may fill the heart with complacency and pride and plant there the subtle suggestion that we have learned the best way to do everything."

The Fellowship must avoid both pitfalls and follow the example of Paul, who never was distracted by either achievements or failures, Hull said. "Every success or failure slips into oblivion the moment it is past."

Is the Fellowship ready to build a new future? he asked. "Can we learn to retell our story, not as a recital of our traditions, our precedents, our customs or our achievements, but can we learn to retell our story as the saga of how Christ has claimed us for himself, taught us to be sufficient in his strength and has given us contentment, whether we are abased or we abound? Only as we learn to live out of his past for us rather than our past for him will we be ready."

In moving forward, the Fellowship and all Christians must avoid a "growing casualness" that hinders progress, he warned.

During a service which focused on appointing five new missionary couples, Hull challenged Fellowship members to follow God with Paul's relentless pursuit of perfection.

Paul's radical intensity sprung from his conviction that Christ claimed him, even though he had fallen short of God's glory, Hull said. Paul also realized life leads somewhere, and a prize is to be won, he added.

The Fellowship must examine its own intensity factor, he stressed, asking, "Are we standing flat-footed or running on tiptoe as a people bound for the Promised Land?"

The solution is to go out with "holy boldness" and let passion impel the mission, he said.

Such was the boldness and passion of the Baptist who started the modern missions movement 200 years ago, William Carey of England, Hull said.

Carey challenged fellow Baptists, urging them, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God," Hull reminded.

"Baptists became a poised and purposeful people who took the new world by storm," he said, because Carey created "a revolution of rising expectation." They weren't content to squabble over the fine points of doctrine but chose to fulfill Christ's command to spread the gospel to the whole world, he added.

Those early Baptists developed an ability still needed today, "the power to live in the future-perfect tense -- to live today as if tomorrow already is started."

Paul lived that way too, Hull stressed, noting the apostle realized the end of the world could come at any time and that what Christ said was true, "The kingdom of God is at hand."

Such an understanding gave both Carey and Paul the ability and willingness to make room for change and to press for completion of the tasks Christ had given them, Hull said.

He urged Fellowship Baptists to make room for change, "not based on a belief that everything will turn out OK, but that 'he who began a good work in you will see it through to completion.'"

To do so, they must focus on the future, he said, challenging them with a question, "Are we living only out of our yesterdays, or do we go for a goal where a prize awaits?"

-30-

-- A photo is available from the Fellowship office in Atlanta.

Blessing, challenge, promise define
Fellowship's identity, preachers say

By Marv Knox

GREENSBORO, N.C. (ABP) -- God's previous blessing, present challenge and future promise define the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's identity and mission, preachers proclaimed during the Fellowship's 1994 general assembly.

Modern-day Baptists -- especially members of the three-year-old Fellowship, which emerged out of moderate opposition to the Southern Baptist Convention's rightward shift -- can be compared to the ancient Hebrew people, said Julie Pennington-Russell, pastor of Nineteenth Avenue Baptist Church in San Francisco.

The weary Hebrews spent five decades in captive exile, faithfully retelling the stories of their glory years, when the prophet Isaiah chastised them, recalled Pennington-Russell.

The prophet criticized them, "not for lack of hope or lack of faith, but for lack of imagination," she said. "They rehearsed the old stories so long they left no possibility God might visit them in a new way."

In hard times, people often look back to better days, she observed. "How often do you find yourself looking over your shoulder, back to days when you were younger and your flesh was firmer and the sun shined brighter and the world was kinder and perhaps God was nearer?"

Looking back is not necessarily bad, she declared. "But we don't set up house there. We don't live in the past, because God does not live in the past.

"God is wonderfully, powerfully present. And what was good for you 10, 20 years ago, or what was good for a church or even a denomination 20 years ago, may not be what is needed most today from the hand of God."

However, people are skittish about the new and the unseen, Pennington-Russell said.

"God's new thing is unexplored, untested, potentially unsafe and altogether beyond our control, and that scares us to death," she said. "So we cling to what we know and ultimately settle for certitude when we might have had transformation."

That's unfortunate, she added, because when people give God freedom, God gives people courage as well as their own freedom to discover new purposes.

"Christ does it still, in lives like yours and mine," she said.

Now is the time to explore God's exciting purposes, stressed Hardy Clemons, the Fellowship's outgoing moderator and pastor of First Baptist Church of Greenville, S.C.

Fellowship Baptists live in a "time in parentheses," Clemons said, explaining they live between two distinct eras in Baptist history.

"We are called to be the people of this particular parenthesis," he said.

Fellowship Baptists have been called by many names, he said. They have labeled themselves "moderates," "progressives" and similar titles. And their critics have called them "liberals," "atheists," "rattlesnakes," "skunks" and more.

"Whatever flag we fly, we are seeking to be the ancient church in a new context," he reported. "Whatever else we are, we must be the people of God" who "take the Bible and faith seriously and follow God rather than man-made religion."

The Fellowship's primary goal is to be "people who respond as disciples and who seek to become like Jesus Christ," Clemons stressed.

Another vital goal is to "build strong churches who serve and worship God," which is the most important task Christians do, he added. "It is important to recognize the local church is more important than any network and that networks strengthen churches."

The Fellowship and affiliated churches additionally need to teach tithing and "invest in what God's trying to do"; support and do local missions; engage in theological education, not just in seminaries but also "in life, in our churches, our Sunday schools and our breakfast tables"; and embrace a global vision of Christianity, he asserted.

All this requires stretching beyond the moment and looking to the future, becoming "people of eternity," Clemons said. "We are called to plant some trees we will never sit under. We are called to plant some trees whose fruit we will never eat."

Such fruit -- or the evidence of the Fellowship's labors -- ultimately will validate its existence, according to William A. Jones, pastor of Bethany Baptist Church in Brooklyn, N.Y., and founder of the National Black Pastors' Conference.

He reminded Fellowship participants of the story of the apostles Peter and John, who healed a crippled man, subsequently were accused of wrongdoing by the religious authorities and later were acquitted when the healed man appeared with them in court.

Comparing the apostles' healing ministry and its consequences to the ministries of the Fellowship, Jones warned: "Excellency of work always draws fire and criticism. ... Nobody will be concerned about this Fellowship unless you decide to emulate the Master."

But he also offered consolation. "Once your work is pure, you won't have to worry with the critics, (although) they'll always be around. ... If your commitment is pure, you don't have to worry about these people. Let your work speak for itself."

Just as the apostles were tried for healing the crippled man, "the church of the living God is yet on trial," Jones insisted. "There are foes in every town, city and nation."

And just as the healed man provided evidence of the apostles' godliness, the church today must exhibit evidence of its faithfulness to God, he said.

"Despite what the critics say, let us declare that the church of the living God has her evidence -- hearts of one accord, sweet communion, help for the helpless, food for the hungry and water for the thirsty, and salvation for the sinners. Down through the centuries, the church of the living God has marched, and we will march on."

-30-

-- Larry Chesser contributed to this story.

-- Photos of Pennington-Russell (3213 #17) and Clemons (3194 #24) are available from the Fellowship office in Atlanta.

New churches called wave
of future for Fellowship

By Bob Allen

GREENSBORO, N.C. (ABP) -- Deacon Ed Hinson served faithfully for many years at First Baptist Church in Rock Hill, S.C. When the congregation elected a new pastor he considered to be a fundamentalist, he lost more than a vote. He lost a home.

The new pastor's authoritarian style contrasted sharply with the old, democratic method of decision-making, Hinson said. Deacons who once enjoyed frank, collegial discussions at their meetings were told they now must submit any questions two weeks in advance.

Disenfranchised by the change, Hinson and his wife began looking at other churches, only to find nothing in their community resembling the old "moderate" Southern Baptist church they had known. At one point, they considered switching denominations. Then they discovered The NewKirk.

Last year, Oakland Avenue Baptist Church in Rock Hill voted to sponsor a mission congregation to provide an explicitly non-fundamentalist Baptist witness as an alternative to Southern Baptist churches firmly under the influence of the 15 million-member denomination's fundamental-conservative leadership.

The NewKirk, which in Old Gaelic is "new church," was established on St. Valentine's Day in 1993 as an affiliate of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Historically, the three-year-old Fellowship has appealed primarily to established moderate churches looking for alternatives to the SBC's traditional missions and theological education programs.

But a growing number of churches are affiliating with the Fellowship from their inception, and a rising chorus of advocates insists that the organization's future lies more in intentional planting of new CBF churches than in wooing tradition-bound churches out of the SBC.

"The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's future is not going to depend a great deal on the old churches that have been doing it the same way for 250 years. There is going to have to be some new birth," Harold Shirley, pastor of The NewKirk, told a gathering of current and prospective church planters meeting in a breakout session at the Fellowship's May 5-7 general assembly in Greensboro, N.C.

Even in the Bible Belt, where Southern Baptist congregations are plentiful, "there will be places where there is no free church," Shirley said.

Fellowship members are showing "more and more interest in new church starts," said Jack Snell, pastor of Hendricks Avenue Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla., and chair of the group's global missions ministry group. But, he added, consensus is lacking on how far the Fellowship should go to address the needs of fledgling congregations.

"We are in a very fluid stage as it applies to new church starts," Snell said. Some members of the Coordinating Council, the group elected to process and set the group's agenda between annual sessions, believe it is a high priority, while others believe the Fellowship ought to concentrate its limited resources on

global missions and theological education.

The missions which choose to route their contributions through the Fellowship do so at a price. The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board plows massive dollars into new work through salary supplements for mission pastors and other aid administered by Baptist state conventions. Those grants come with stipulations, including that the churches which receive them must reciprocate by contributing a percentage of their offerings to SBC work undesignated through the convention's Cooperative Program of unified budget support.

Fellowship people decry the loss of autonomy attached to acceptance of denominational aid, but most acknowledge the Fellowship cannot afford to match such a heavy financial commitment. "We have come out of a full-service convention," said Snell. "We need to learn to do more of this ourselves rather than depending on someone to help us and then put a hook in it to tell us how to do it."

But those in the field say they need more help from the Fellowship than they have received to date.

Will Carter, pastor of First Fellowship Church in Knoxville, Tenn., said he received "encouragement but no funds" 14 months ago when he approached Fellowship leaders about start-up help for the new CBF congregation.

At the time the church was unaware other missions faced similar difficulties. A letter was circulated prior to last year's general assembly in Birmingham announcing a meeting to discuss planting CBF churches. Responses rolled in and 26 such churches were represented at the Birmingham meeting.

In the past 12 months, the tally of known Fellowship missions and new churches grew to 31, and the indications from additional networking at the Greensboro meeting were the total might exceed 40. "They're rising," said Carter.

Although his church has been able to get over the hump on its own with local sponsorship, other Fellowship mission ventures might not be so fortunate, Carter said. In those cases, he advocated limited Fellowship funding. "I don't want welfare -- to be dependent -- but the help to get started," Carter said.

"I believe this is missions," he said.

Even in the absence of funding, the Fellowship can help mission churches by networking and providing counsel to church planters working in isolation, other church planters said.

"We have already been told by our association and state, 'Don't come to us for anything,'" said Laura Myers Schultz, who is leading a new church start in suburban St. Louis, Mo.

"As a group, we're looking for some handles to grab," Schultz said.

Fellowship leaders say they are sympathetic but encourage church planters to be patient.

"We are trying to find new paradigms," said Snell. "It is not easy to do. It's easy when we're in the heat of battle to fall back on familiar ways."

The church planters say existing Southern Baptist churches greet them with suspicion, but they are not about wooing away satisfied members of SBC congregations. "There are people in every community that are frustrated, dropped out, disillusioned, inactive," said Carter. Those people, he added, are prime prospects for "free and faithful" Fellowship churches.

-30-

Fellowship leaves homes behind
after Greensboro meeting

By Bob Allen

GREENSBORO, N.C. (ABP) -- Conventions come and go in Greensboro, N.C., but for seven families in the Adams-Dorsett neighborhood in northeast Greensboro, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's 1994 general assembly was a turning point.

This year, for the first time, the three-year-old Fellowship preceded its annual business-and-worship

session with a mission project. About 100 Fellowship members arrived early for the May 5-7 general assembly to participate in a four-day building blitz sponsored with Habitat for Humanity.

"We feel like this is the best way to leave behind a tangible symbol in Greensboro we Baptists have been here," said Randall Lolley, pastor of First Baptist Church in Greensboro. Lolley was liaison between the Fellowship and the Greensboro Habitat affiliate.

The blitz produced seven homes that will comprise a new neighborhood with 39 residents. The homeowners hail from five countries: Vietnam, Mexico, Nigeria, Guatemala and the United States.

Fellowship participants comprised about one third of the 250-300 Habitat volunteers during the four-day blitz, said Cathy Cooper-Ruske, director of the Greensboro Habitat affiliate.

It was the first "blitz build" for the Greensboro Habitat, which has built 67 homes since 1988, said Cooper-Ruske.

In the four days, the volunteers completed framing, siding, roofing and windows and doors on seven single-family homes. Local Habitat volunteers will finish out the homes, completing their work in September, Cooper-Ruske predicted.

Most of the volunteers had little construction experience, said Jim Clantz, a general contractor overseeing construction of one of the homes. "I am always amazed at how fast they will pick these things up," said Clantz, a member of First Baptist Church of Greensboro.

"It's fun," said Hugh Smith, a first-time volunteer from First Baptist Church of Bolivar, Mo. "You meet a lot of interesting people."

Regional and national Cooperative Baptist Fellowship groups sponsored construction of two of the seven houses, while Fellowship volunteers provided labor for a third. Other homes were sponsored by Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Methodist churches.

"It's a genuine ecumenical effort," Lolley said, adding "it's the first time I know of" such a diverse group of sponsors worked together in a Habitat project.

Habitat for Humanity founder Millard Fuller said the organization provides "a new, creative way to share the gospel of Jesus Christ."

"We are in the kingdom business," Fuller said at the Fellowship's opening session.

"We always need to be as creative as we know how to be to share God's love in new ways, ... so that we will share the good news of Jesus Christ with as many people as we possibly can," he said.

"I submit to you that every house that is built ... is a sermon about God's love," Fuller said "Every one of those houses is a light shining out in the community for everyone to see."

Fuller, a self-made millionaire and lawyer, founded Habitat for Humanity International in 1976. After a personal crisis, he donated his total wealth and possessions to charity. He developed Habitat's concepts while searching for a new focus in association with Koinonia Partners, a Christian community near Americus, Ga., founded by Clarence Jordan, former professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Habitat's most visible promoter is former president Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist who also supports the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Habitat homeowners must have dependent children, work or receive disability but earn less than \$19,950, demonstrate a track record of meeting financial obligations, live in inadequate housing and donate at least 300 hours of "sweat equity" in volunteer labor of nearly every aspect of construction of their home.

Volunteer labor and donated materials keep building costs low. Habitat provides interest-free, 20-to-25-year mortgages. House payments are deposited into a revolving fund supporting construction of more houses.

Mission leaders say Baptists
must 'wake up' to pluralistic world

By Michael Clingenpeel

GREENSBORO, N.C. (ABP) -- If Baptists are to have an effective witness in the world they must learn to relate to people of all religions, say experts in missions and world religions.

"We can no longer be Southern Baptists isolated in a corner of the United States if we are to relate effectively," said Keith Parks, global missions coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. "Missionaries must have respect for and knowledge of other religions and Christian groups."

Charles Kimball, professor of religion at Furman University agreed. "We must be intentional about looking for ways to be cooperative with people of other religions."

Parks and Kimball made their comments at a workshop session on Baptist missions and cultural pluralism during the general assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in Greensboro, N.C.

The two leaders agreed that American Christians are waking up to the different religious traditions all around them. Rapid mobility and better communications have contributed to this increased awareness.

Both described living in neighborhoods in the South populated by people of other faiths. Kimball lives in Greer, S.C.; Parks in Atlanta. "Pluralism is here amidst us in the United States," said Kimball.

This pluralism means Christians need to engage in missions, and that opportunities to do so will be greater than ever. In addition to proclamation, missions strategy now and into the next century must include study and tolerance of other religions, cooperation with other Christian groups and deeds "in the name of Jesus Christ."

Kimball, who describes himself as "an ecumenically-oriented Baptist," preached tolerance as a path to dialogue. "If we can think the golden rule, we should treat Muslims as we would want them to treat us."

Parks warned that many Americans have made tolerance "the highest good," sometimes at the expense of biblical truth. But he suggested that tolerance and deep commitment to Christian truth are not mutually exclusive. "I believe Jesus was tolerant and passionate about what he believed, and that is the model we should imitate."

Cooperation is an important ingredient in missions strategy in a pluralistic world, according to Parks. Citing the small number of missionaries in many regions of the world, Parks said "the only way to reach the unreached parts of the world is through other Christian groups."

"Christ is Lord" is the central confession of Christian believers, "those who believe that are our brothers and sisters," said Parks.

Kimball urged his audience to find practical, visible ways to "provide the cup of cold water" in places where there is little Christian witness. "It is extremely important to look for ways to engage in ministries of reconciliation and hope in the name of Jesus Christ."

All other strategies eventually lead to proclamation of the message, said Parks and Kimball. "Beyond the ministries we perform, there is a message to declare."

"I've not encountered any other religion in my experience that has an answer to the problem of sin that we have in Jesus Christ."

Fellowship expands staff,
discusses vision for future

By Mark Wingfield

GREENSBORO, N.C. (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship continued to expand its staff while seeking to clearly define its identity during the May 3-4 meeting of the group's Coordinating Council.

The Coordinating Council -- composed of about 80 representatives from cooperating state and regional organizations -- conducted business for two days prior to this year's general assembly in Greensboro, N.C.

Council members approved the creation of two new professional staff positions, in addition to the six already existing in the Fellowship's headquarters.

Two years ago, the Fellowship had only a couple of secretarial staff members working out of a small office. Today the organization has a coordinator, three missions administrators, a communications coordinator and a financial coordinator. A search is underway for a previously approved missions education coordinator.

One of the new professional positions will be a regional representative relating to the states west of the Mississippi River. The other will be a Christian education coordinator.

Fellowship Coordinator Cecil Sherman said the regional representative is necessary to balance the attention the Fellowship's Atlanta-based staff devotes particularly to Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Louisiana and Arkansas. The representative also will work in Kansas, New Mexico, Arizona and California.

The Fellowship is growing faster east of the Mississippi River than west of the river, Sherman said. However, even though less than one fourth of Fellowship-supporting churches are located in the West, one third of the contributions come from those western churches.

Sherman said he wants to move quickly in establishing this position, probably by July 1. Although not precipitated by the firing of Russell Dilday as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, dismay over the firing provides a good impetus for devoting more attention to the west quickly, he said.

Although admitting it is an unusual procedure he doesn't want to make a pattern, Sherman said he already has identified someone for the position. But he declined to name that person until he notifies his current employer.

Associated Baptist Press learned the candidate is Bill Bruster, pastor of First Baptist Church of Abilene, Texas. Bruster acknowledged he had been approached about the job.

"No decision has been made on my part," he said. "The job has been created and people have talked to me about it."

Leaders of the council's theological education group also reported they may propose adding a staff position within the next year.

"There is not a future for us without theological education," said Walter Shurden, co-chair of the theological education ministry group.

Sherman echoed that sentiment, saying "theological education is becoming a tremendous need."

The Fellowship faces a unique challenge in this regard, however, because the organization has shunned starting institutions and agencies that it owns and controls. Instead, the Fellowship has determined to give support to like-minded institutions.

"We have no ownership in theological education, nor do I anticipate any," Sherman said.

But the Fellowship must strongly influence the availability of quality theological education, he said. "If we don't have schools that turn out people who understand what it means to be a Baptist as we do, we will eventually be extinct."

Sherman said he will propose the collection of a one-time offering for theological education, which

would be used to provide seed money for a variety of existing and forming theological schools.

Missions is the one area the Fellowship has some direct control over, Sherman said, because the group now appoints its own missionaries.

"Missions was and is our largest investment," he said. "This is our unique, our singular service. This is what we do for the churches that they can't do for themselves."

Beyond that clear identification, however, the coordinating council continued to struggle with defining the identity of the three-year-old organization of Southern Baptist moderates.

The council spent considerable time discussing a draft proposal of a document which will outline the Fellowship's mission statement, vision for the future and a set of core values. A visioning and growth task force has been developing these documents. Based on discussion from the coordinating council, the task force will rework the documents and make another presentation sometime within the next year.

Task force chairman John Tyler of Missouri said it could be 1996 before the final documents are implemented.

One of the struggles facing the Fellowship in developing such documents is walking the fine line between having a theologically based statement and a confessional statement, which many council members said they want to avoid.

Among the many positives and negatives expressed about the draft documents, council members expressed the most satisfaction with the proposed core values. These seven values express the passion and convictions that launched the Fellowship, several speakers declared.

The seven core values, as proposed in the draft, say the Fellowship will:

- Exist primarily to serve local Baptist churches.
- Be "people-inclusive" and not intervene in God's work by imposing "arbitrarily derived human standards of acceptability."
- Value diversity.
- Disperse governing power among the constituents so that "no person or group of persons shall possess nominative or appointive powers that could prove harmful to our form of governance or destroy trust."
- Value innovation and creativity.
- Rely primarily on partnerships, networks and alliances rather than creating institutions to develop and deliver resources to local churches.
- Be "lean and efficient, yet robust and effective."

The proposed mission statement, which almost certainly will be revised further, says: "The mission of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is to revitalize the Baptist vision by offering creative and innovative ways for Baptist individuals and churches to cooperate freely, faithfully and joyfully in sharing the gospel in their communities and throughout the world."

-30-

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story is reprinted with permission from Baptist Press. Two corrections were made since the story was first issued May 6. They are in the second and sixth paragraphs.

ABP board elects directors,
discusses CBF dependency

By Herb Hollinger

GREENSBORO, N.C. (ABP) -- The election of five new directors and a struggle with the growing financial dependence on the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship were among items of business at the semiannual meeting of Associated Baptist Press May 5 in Greensboro, N.C.

The 20-member board of directors met just prior to the CBF's general assembly May 5-7. The CBF is a three-year-old group of moderate Baptists which is critical of SBC leadership.

ABP is a news service created in 1990 by several state Baptist paper editors and others after two Baptist Press editors were fired by the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention. Baptist Press is the daily news service of the SBC.

The five new directors included a special representative from the Baptist General Association of Virginia, one of three state conventions which contribute financially to ABP.

Michael Clingenpeel, editor of the Religious Herald of Virginia, fills a one-year term as a special director nominated by the state convention but elected by the ABP board.

Virginia officials had asked for representation. At the May 5 meeting, ABP directors agreed to consider extending a similar special director's slot to the other two state conventions which contribute financially: -- Texas and North Carolina.

Earlier ABP invited the CBF to nominate a director but the organization has chosen not to exercise that option.

New directors elected to ABP's board include Robin Johnson, Atlanta; Phil Lineberger, Tyler, Texas; Jimmy Nickell, Kansas City, Mo.; and C. Edwin Vick, Raleigh, N.C.

ABP's self-perpetuating board also re-elected six directors for terms ending in 1997 -- Hugh Greene, Jacksonville, Fla.; Dan Hobbs, Norman, Okla.; Marv Knox, Middletown, Ky.; Jeff Mobley, Nashville; Joe Turner, Clemson, S.C.; and Ralph Walls, Churchville, Md.

The matter of financial dependency on CBF apparently is troublesome to the directors. Presently, CBF contributions account for 50 percent of ABP budgeted income, or about \$120,000.

"We wanted to whittle away at that CBF percentage but it hasn't happened," Carl Kell, Western Kentucky University communications professor, said. Kell noted that just a couple of years ago the percentage was about 30 "but now it's up to 50."

R. G. Puckett, board chairman and editor of the Biblical Recorder of North Carolina, was quick to defend the news service's claim of independence despite the CBF gifts. "We are not a subsidiary of the CBF. We just happen to be meeting at the same time (as the CBF)," Puckett told the board.

A \$100,000 fund solicitation campaign, approved at the board's last meeting, was to help "spread out revenue sources to support this organization." But, Kell said, fund-raising is difficult and some potential contributors say they give through CBF since it supports the news service.

Greg Warner, executive editor, told the directors the news service's biggest challenges were in fund-raising and "diversifying our support." Warner said "we want to be more self-sufficient and they (CBF) want us to be." Since CBF is changing its budget to be program-based, instead of percentage, Warner said ABP will be making a presentation each year for a specific dollar amount in the budget.

In addition to CBF, the state conventions of Texas, North Carolina and Virginia contribute an additional 30 percent to the budget while church contributions compose about 10 percent, the same as fees paid by organizations which subscribe.

Because of the costs involved, a review of the 1993 books was made by two Jacksonville, Fla., accountants instead of an audit. Although the news service's books appeared to be in order, directors voted to have a yearly "standard" audit, beginning in 1994 to be paid out of 1995 budgeted funds.

In other action, Puckett named three members to a new budget, finance and investment committee: Dan Hobbs, Norman, Okla.; Bob Stephenson, Oklahoma City; and Catherine Allen, Birmingham, Ala.

Also, Allen was asked to try to find professionals in the field of securing grants; an awards presentation scheduled for the fall meeting was postponed; an intern program is scheduled to begin in the summer of 1995; the fall 1994 meeting is scheduled for Nashville in October pending facility arrangements; and several routine administrative matters were approved.

Religious Liberty Council elects
officers, BJC board members

GREENSBORO, N.C. (ABP) -- The Religious Liberty Council -- an advisory/support organization of the Baptist Joint Committee -- elected one new representative and re-elected 11 others during its annual meeting May 6.

The election of Babs Baugh Morrison of San Antonio, Texas, brings to 12 the number of RLC representatives on the board of the Washington-based religious-liberty agency.

Re-elected to three-year terms are Sarah Francis Anders, Pineville, La., chairwoman of the BJC; Patricia Ayres, Austin, Texas; Bill Crosby, Erlanger, Ky.; and Phil Strickland, Dallas.

Re-elected to two-year terms are Ann Quattlebaum, Greenville, S.C.; Cecil Sherman, Atlanta; and Bill Wilson, Waynesboro, Va.

Serving one-year terms are Homer Carter, Rockville, Md.; John Gilbert, Poplar Bluff, Mo.; Marian Grant, Raleigh, N.C.; and Jean Woodward, Richmond, Va.

Also re-elected were the RLC's three co-chairmen: Grady Cothen, former president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board; Abner McCall, former president of Baylor University; and Gardner Taylor, pastor emeritus of Concord Baptist Church, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Elected as honorary vice chairpersons of the RLC were Alma Hunt, former president of the Woman's Missionary Union; Darold Morgan, former president of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board; Julian Pentecost, former editor of the Religious Herald, newsjournal of the Baptist General Association of Virginia; and Foy Valentine, former executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Announcing the vice chairperson nominations, chairman Lee Berg said the RLC nominating committee wanted "to honor and call on four lifelong friends of the Baptist Joint Committee and of religious liberty."

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-- By Larry Chesser

***** END *****