

Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Greg Warner
Associate Editor: Bob Allen
Phone: (904) 262-6626
Fax: (904) 262-7745

January 24, 1995

In this issue:

- Group organizes to plant 'free and faithful' churches
- 'Significant progress' noted in search for Baylor president
- Missionaries use English classes to open church doors to Czechs

Group organizes to plant 'free and faithful' churches

By Bob Allen

CARTERSVILLE, Ga. (ABP) -- An organization for starting new churches on behalf of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship formed at a meeting Jan. 19-20 in Cartersville, Ga.

A group of church planters sympathetic to the Fellowship voted to establish the "Friends of New Churches," an autonomous corporation designed, according to a purpose statement, "to serve God through the birthing and nurturing of new free-and-faithful Baptist churches."

The group intends to seek recognition as a "friend" of the CBF and apply for funding by the Fellowship, an organization formed in 1991 by moderate Baptists to offer alternative ministries to those provided by the conservative-dominated Southern Baptist Convention.

The 26 participants who convened at Heritage Baptist Church in Cartersville, Ga., were drawn from an informal network of about 45 new churches which affiliate primarily with the Fellowship and in some cases not at all with the SBC.

They advocate the intentional establishing of new Fellowship-affiliated churches, an emphasis they say is lacking in the Fellowship.

"There's a group in the CBF that says, 'We're not a denomination. We don't start new churches.' There's another group that says, 'We're going to do this. Somebody's got to do it.' Now we're here to say, 'We'll help start churches,' " said Will Carter, the pastor of First Fellowship Baptist Church of Knoxville, Tenn., elected as the group's first chairperson.

The organization grew from a network of Fellowship supporters who began meeting and communicating by newsletter in 1993 to discuss common problems facing new CBF churches. The group contends that establishing new churches is essential to the Fellowship's survival in the future.

Unlike the Southern Baptist Convention, which helps fund about 2,000 new churches and missions through its Home Mission Board, the Fellowship offers no funding for the starting of churches in the U.S.

Most churches participating in the Fellowship since its founding in 1991 have been established, moderate

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee

churches that have resisted the conservative juggernaut, which gained control of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1979.

That is not entirely accidental. Some CBF members oppose church-starting efforts because they fear the churches will become too expensive and because they reopen the question of whether the Fellowship -- as its critics allege -- has become a new denomination.

"We have some members of our (global missions) committee who feel if we start talking about starting CBF churches, that means we are a denomination separate from the SBC," said Jack Snell, a Florida pastor who chairs the Fellowship's global missions ministry group. "We have said publicly that is not our intent."

Keith Parks, the Fellowship's global missions coordinator, said the Friends of New Churches helps allay that concern by taking up the church-starting mantle as an autonomous "friend" of the Fellowship.

"I personally think there are some ecclesiological issues that become a problem if, from the (CBF) office in Atlanta, we try to sponsor new churches," Parks said. "Many of our people are concerned about that. Basically we feel churches start churches." The process of planting churches should be centered in the local church as much as possible, Parks said.

The founders of the Friends of New Churches bring a track record for finding creative ways to start churches on a shoestring budget. Such an approach fits well with an organization as small and decentralized as the Fellowship, Parks added.

"Some of the folks who approach us in Atlanta have plans for huge amounts of money, and it wouldn't take but two or three of those to deplete our resources. This group has found ways to do it with a minimal amount of resources," he said.

As a "friend" of the Fellowship, the Friends of New Churches would come to the table alongside other independent "new ventures" funded by the Fellowship in addition to the CBF's own programs. Most offer alternatives to SBC programs.

Other "friends" -- which receive support from the Fellowship but choose their own boards of directors -- include Associated Baptist Press, the Baptist Center for Ethics, the Baptist Joint Committee, Baptists Today newspaper and two seminaries: Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (Va.) and Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

While acknowledging that "obstacles" remain over what types of help the Friends of New Churches can expect from the Fellowship, Will Carter said CBF leaders have already given the group the "support and legitimization" it needs to function.

Another participant at the organizational meeting said while church-planting advocates have been frustrated by ambivalence on the part of the Fellowship, it is understandable.

"I don't want to sound like we're bashing CBF," said Jim Strickland, pastor of Heritage Baptist Church in Cartersville, who convened the meeting. "They're our friends. They will admit they're struggling to know how to get hold of this new-church thing. I wonder if we can help them."

At the organizational meeting, the Friends of New Churches elected four officers and five at-large members to a board of directors.

Along with Carter, the officers are Glynis La Barre, a student at Central Baptist Seminary in Kansas City, Kan., vice chairperson; Jim Potts, a pastor from Raleigh, N.C., secretary, and Susan Parrish, an associate pastor at First Fellowship Baptist Church of Knoxville, Tenn., treasurer.

Board members include Jim Strickland, a pastor in Cartersville, Ga.; Betty Shirley, a pastor's wife from Rock Hill, S.C.; Lynn Wardell, a pastor in Murfreesboro, Tenn.; Charles Cook, a layman from Summerville, Ga., and Henry Green, a pastor in St. Petersburg, Fla.

The Friends adopted a statement of guidelines that prohibit sitting board members from applying for or receiving funds from the organization. Board members will serve limited terms that expire on a rotation basis to be

determined at a future meeting.

Because some of the board members work with churches that could need financial aid in the future, possibly requiring them to resign on short notice, the group elected a "first alternate" to the board of directors. Charles Chandler, a pastor in Richmond, Va., would replace any board member who decides to resign before the group's first annual meeting in July.

One participant said the church-starting emphasis dovetails with another Fellowship emphasis on preparing ministers through theological education.

"I think what we are talking about is the very hope of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship," said Bob Hoggard, pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church in Woodstock, Ga. "Where are these young people going to if ... not free and faithful churches?"

"We can train all kinds of folks in these new seminaries and they have no place to serve," Strickland added.

Larry Lewis, president of the SBC Home Mission Board, was unavailable for comment. Bob Banks, executive vice president at the HMB's Atlanta offices, said he had not heard about the new organization, so it would be "inappropriate" for him to comment.

-30-

'Significant progress' noted in search for Baylor president

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- The regents of Baylor University are making "significant progress" in their search for a new president of the Baptist school in Waco, Texas, the board's chairman reported following two days of meetings Jan. 19-20.

Baylor board chairman Gale Galloway of Austin, Texas, said the 36-member board of regents is in the process of narrowing a candidate pool to determine who will receive "further serious consideration" to succeed current President Herbert Reynolds, who is scheduled to retire May 31.

The board's recent two-day meeting, which included two executive sessions, was preceded by two meetings with advisory groups of faculty, staff, students, alumni and others to help provide the regents with "a strong sense of what our Baylor constituencies are advising concerning our presidential search," said Galloway.

The board appeared to be ready to elect a president in November but left a called two-day meeting reportedly deadlocked over the nomination of Thomas Corts, president of Samford University. Sources said opposition to Corts arose over a lack of ties to Texas and questions about where his loyalties lie in Southern Baptist Convention politics.

"The board is striving mightily to identify the leader who will continue Baylor's tradition of offering the finest in academic programs within a nurturing Christian community," Galloway said.

-30-

-- By ABP staff

Missionaries use English classes to open church doors to Czechs

By Greg Warner

LITOMERICE, the Czech Republic (ABP) --- Language is often a barrier to missions work overseas. But for missionaries Kevin and Jan Rutledge it has become a bridge across cultures.

When the Rutledges began serving as Baptist missionaries in the Czech Republic two years ago, their first task was to learn the Czech language. They're still learning, but in the meantime they are teaching their own native tongue -- English -- to eager Czechs. The response has been "unbelievable," said Kevin Rutledge.

A year ago the Rutledges began teaching English to 40 Czechs in the tiny Baptist church in Litomerice, north of Prague. Now, Rutledge said, the classes attract 140 people a week, mostly non-Christians. Not only are they learning English, they also hear the gospel message, he said.

"People will do just about anything to learn English," Rutledge said. "They will listen to you share your faith as well. ... A lot of people have questions about Jesus and about what Baptists believe. We are glad to be sharing our faith."

"I used to be afraid to go inside a church," said student Gabriela Palychova. "Now I see that these Baptists are not bad like the communists taught us to believe."

The Czech Baptist Union is tiny by Western standards -- 2,000 believers worshipping in 25 churches and 25 mission points.

The English course, which meets two days a week for 10 weeks, is one of several methods Baptists are using to make their churches accessible to Czechs, who traditionally view Baptists with suspicion. Concerts, programs for orphans and special services for friends of Christians are also being used effectively, Rutledge said.

The Rutledges are missionaries of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an Atlanta-based organization of moderate Southern Baptists that sponsors 52 missionaries, most in Europe.

As in most other East European countries, Americans are welcomed in the Czech Republic, Rutledge said. "People are very friendly and appreciative of our speaking Czech," he added. But Americans are rare in Litomerice. "Four Americans live in our town of 30,000. Three of them are CBF missionaries."

Kevin, from Charlotte, N.C., and Jan, from Orlando, Fla., were both English teachers in Germany and later missionaries of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Poland before being appointed by the Fellowship in January 1993.

The Rutledges were invited by the Czech Baptist Union to teach English as a second language (ESL) at the Litomerice church.

"We wouldn't have come without the invitation of the Czech Baptist Union," Rutledge explained. "We spent over a year learning the language and listening to what Baptists really wanted to do here in Litomerice before starting classes. They really wanted to serve the community. They wanted to use ESL as a means of telling people about Jesus and involving them in church."

"We didn't want to bring in some three-point plan of evangelism for this country," he said. "We followed the lead of what our Czech friends wanted. They know how to win people to Christ. We wanted to do that, too."

"We are glad the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship sent the Rutledges to us," said Jan Pospisil, pastor of the Litomerice church. "They have been a great help in being a witness to our community."

Learning English is fashionable in Eastern Europe, as well as other parts of the world, where English is increasingly recognized as the international language. People doing business internationally, working in tourism, or pursuing graduate studies find English essential, mission leaders say.

About half of those enrolled in the Rutledges' classes are high school students studying to become English

teachers themselves. "In our experience here, 90 percent of all new believers are young people," Rutledge said. "We're in the best place in the world!"

The number of Christians allowed in the classes is limited to guarantee interaction between believers and non-believers.

Classes meet in a former monastery next door to the church. The monastery, donated to the church by the city, is being restored for a variety of uses by the Baptist congregation. A team of volunteers from First Baptist Church of Jonesboro, Ark., helped in the restoration, said Keith Parks, global missions coordinator for the Fellowship.

Both Parks and Rutledge see English instruction as an open door for Christian churches. "What Kevin and Jan are doing is an excellent example of what people can do to use their other gifts in missions," said Parks. Another Fellowship missionary couple is teaching English in a more formal setting in Poland, he added.

"Churches can be started anywhere there are ESL classes," said Rutledge. "Imagine one ESL class in each bloc high-rise in every Eastern European country. Wouldn't that be something?"

-30-

-- Photos available from Associated Baptist Press

END