

Associated Baptist Press

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July 24, 1995

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Fellowship adopts mission statement, avoids question of denominational future

By Bob Allen

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship adopted a detailed mission statement July 21 describing its role in the shadow of the Southern Baptist Convention.

But some participants at the Fellowship's general assembly July 20-22 called for the four-year-old moderate organization to move beyond the SBC and declare itself a new convention.

The mission statement describes the organization as "a fellowship of Baptist Christians and churches who share a passion for the Great Commission of Jesus Christ and a commitment to Baptist faith and practice."

The Fellowship's mission, the statement says, is "to network, empower and mobilize" Baptists "for effective missions and ministry in the name of Christ."

It enumerates seven priorities, led by "doing global missions in a world without borders."

The Fellowship was chartered in 1991 by opponents of a conservative juggernaut that captured control of the 15 million-member SBC during the 1980s. At first, the Fellowship served mainly to allow moderates to register protest against conservative reforms by channeling money to SBC programs through the Fellowship rather than traditional giving plans.

Gradually, however, as the Fellowship's own alternative programs grew, contributing churches decided to send less of their money to support the SBC. Last year the SBC, in an effort to force a split with the moderates, instructed its agencies no longer to accept gifts from the Fellowship.

This year's general assembly in Fort Worth, Texas, gave attention to a growing sentiment that the Fellowship

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should become a new Baptist convention.

Bill Montgomery, a retired Air Force chaplain from San Antonio, Texas, offered a motion asking the Fellowship to vote on declaring itself a denomination separate from the Southern Baptist Convention in 1996.

Moderator Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler ruled the motion out of order. Parliamentarian Bart Tichenor explained that this year's general assembly could not dictate to next year's meeting.

Crumpler said Montgomery rejected suggested alterations that would have made the motion in order and told the audience her ruling was not intended to stifle debate on the subject.

Despite being rejected, Montgomery's motion apparently succeeded in renewing interest in the question of whether the Fellowship will eventually become a convention.

The Fellowship's new moderator, Pat Anderson of Lakeland, Fla., told reporters he plans to appoint a committee to study the question more fully.

The Southern Baptist Convention has encouraged the Fellowship to withdraw from the SBC. Fellowship leaders say they have no plans to start a new convention but acknowledge the possibility has been discussed informally since the Fellowship's early days.

The general assembly amended the mission statement, the product of a two-year drafting process, twice. One amendment, offered by Ron Serino, a member of Metro Baptist Church in New York City, changed phrasing of a section "affirming our diversity as a gift of God, including but not limited to race, ethnicity and gender."

The original language, "affirming our racial, ethnic and gender diversity as a gift from God," excluded persons including those with handicaps and the aged, Serino told the general assembly. The Fellowship's administrative committee recommended against the change, but the general assembly voted for it by a wide margin.

Some observers said the amended language could open the door for inclusion of gays and lesbians, which most agree would be unpopular with the majority of Fellowship members.

Another amendment to the mission statement added to a commitment to be "inclusive in spirit and in practice" the words "in language." The general assembly debated the amendment before approving it. Critics said it could be interpreted as referring to God as "she," which would "violate the freedom" of Fellowship members who find that offensive.

In other business, the general assembly elected Oklahoma pastor Lavonn Brown moderator-elect. Pat Anderson, a Florida college professor, assumed office as moderator for 1995-96, succeeding retired Woman's Missionary Union executive Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Anderson said his two objectives during his tenure are to place more emphasis on evangelism and "to blur the regional distinctions in the CBF."

The general assembly approved a \$13.3 million budget for 1995-96, including a \$3 million goal for the Fellowship's global missions offering. The budget includes funds for both the Fellowship's own ministries and for various independent ventures such as new theology schools and Associated Baptist Press.

Registration totaled 2,979 for the meeting in the Tarrant County Convention Center, down from the 4,433 registered at last year's meeting in Greensboro, N.C. It was the first general assembly to be held during the summer -- earlier meetings were held in May -- and the meeting site was moved mid-year from Austin. Planners said both factors may have affected attendance.

Fellowship avoids vote on becoming a denomination, but study will follow

By Greg Warner and Bob Allen

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- A motion that would have forced the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to vote on whether to declare itself a denomination died a parliamentary death at the group's general assembly July 21.

But the Fellowship's new moderator, Pat Anderson of Lakeland, Fla., told reporters after the meeting he plans to appoint a committee to study the question more fully.

During the assembly's first business session, Bill Montgomery, a retired Air Force chaplain from San Antonio, Texas, made a motion asking the organization to vote next year to declare itself a denomination separate from the Southern Baptist Convention.

Fellowship moderator Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, however, ruled the motion out of order in a business session at the Tarrant County Convention Center in Fort Worth, Texas. Parliamentarian Bart Tichenor explained that, based on Robert's Rules of Order, the motion was "dilatatory" because it wrongfully tried to instruct next year's general assembly to take a specific action.

Asked from the floor if Montgomery's motion would be in order if it were changed to simply instruct the Coordinating Council to study declaring a new denomination, Crumpler responded, "That was not the motion."

Crumpler said Fellowship leaders talked privately with Montgomery at length about problems with the motion's form. "We feel that we've been fair in this," she said.

Speaking to a motion to sustain the chair's ruling, Montgomery told the general assembly "it's time we changed this guise" of existing only as a "fellowship" within or beside the Southern Baptist Convention.

"We are producing a lot of programs that are done primarily by denominations," Montgomery said.

The motion to sustain the ruling passed overwhelmingly by voice vote.

Montgomery's motion called for a one-year study by the council before the 1996 vote.

After ruling the motion out of order July 21, Crumpler later told reporters she would "allow the body to make a motion to make a study" the next day -- the last day of the assembly -- even though CBF procedures don't allow motions to be introduced on the last day.

"We are going to deal with it tomorrow," she said, in order to blunt criticism that leaders were avoiding the issue.

"We don't want anyone who is burning to address this issue going home frustrated," said Crumpler, retired executive director of the SBC Woman's Missionary Union.

"We don't want to leave the impression that we are opposed to this [study]," echoed Cecil Sherman, Fellowship coordinator.

But the next day, Crumpler did not invite a motion, instead telling messengers that CBF leaders will continue to discuss the issue.

Asked why, she later told Associated Baptist Press, "I just changed my mind."

After consulting the parliamentarian, she said, "we felt it was not appropriate for the chair to request that there be a motion to suspend the rules. It is not my place to plant a motion."

Besides, she added, leaders could learn of no one who planned to raise the issue.

The study commissioned by Anderson will be fueled by a recent survey which showed Fellowship members evenly divided on the question of becoming a convention.

Twenty-four percent strongly favor the move, and another 18 percent show some agreement. But 20 percent strongly disapprove of such a move, and another 16 percent show some disagreement. The rest (22 percent) are uncertain.

Anderson's committee will report to the Coordinating Council, the Fellowship's top committee, but the study

will not necessarily result in a vote by the council or the 1996 assembly, the incoming moderator said.

Sherman told Associated Baptist Press the Fellowship is not yet ready to be a convention. "I would be surprised if this group votes to do that next year, but I'd be a lot surprised if this group hasn't done that within 20 years," Sherman said.

A vote this year to become a convention "would make all kinds of havoc," Sherman told reporters. Since only churches, and not individuals can be members of a convention, many Fellowship participants -- such as outgoing moderator Carolyn Crumpler -- would be forced out because their churches have not voted to participate in the CBF.

Requiring churches to vote on participation would sow discord in congregations, leaders say.

George Mason, chairperson of the 1995 general assembly, said the Fellowship should not be forced to adopt "the convention model."

The Fellowship now is "a network of churches" and could remain that or consider other structural models besides a convention, said Mason, pastor of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas. Most Baptists have only known the convention model, and "people fall back on what they have known," he said.

The Fellowship was chartered in 1991 as an alternative for Southern Baptist moderates shut out by the conservative leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Fellowship supports 77 missionaries and a variety of other ministries.

Southern Baptist leaders have encouraged the Fellowship to withdraw from the SBC and have stopped accepting donations from the group.

Montgomery said it is "ineffective and pointless" for Fellowship members to try to remain Southern Baptist when the SBC doesn't want them. "Friends, we just don't have a home to go back to. We need to build our own," he told Fellowship leaders July 20.

Montgomery said he is particularly concerned about chaplains who serve in hospitals, prisons, the military and other roles that require denominational endorsement. Until the Fellowship declares itself a denomination, he said, moderate chaplains must continue to seek the endorsement of the SBC.

So far, however, moderate Baptists have had no problem getting endorsement through the Home Mission Board, which handles the chaplaincy assignment for the SBC, said Ed Beddingfield, who serves on a Fellowship committee studying chaplaincy.

"There has been no one turned down," Beddingfield, a council member from Sylva, N.C., told Associated Baptist Press. "The Home Mission Board has bent over backward."

Although the issue of chaplain endorsement is "dearest to my heart," Montgomery said in an interview, he would support a clean break by the CBF for other reasons, such as to protect retirement funds for moderate ministers.

Montgomery said he has no idea how such a vote would turn out. But he added, "I don't see any reason for us to deny what we are right now."

While taking such a stand would scare some churches away from the Fellowship, it would attract others, Montgomery said.

Fellowship leaders defund peace group because of stance on homosexuality

By Greg Warner

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship cut its funding of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America July 20 because of the peace group's stated openness to homosexuals.

"That is not why we funded them in the beginning," said CBF Coordinator Cecil Sherman, noting the peace group recently broadened its agenda beyond "any normal understanding of peace" to welcome gays and lesbians into its fellowship and encourage churches to do likewise.

An allocation of \$7,000 for the Peace Fellowship was deleted from the 1995-96 budget of the CBF Coordinating Council by vote of the council July 20, hours before the Fellowship opened its annual general assembly in Fort Worth, Texas.

"Probably most of the people in this house (CBF) would not choose to fund this organization given their enlarged purpose," Sherman later told reporters.

The peace group said in February that inclusion of gays in society and church is a matter of justice. The Peace Fellowship's recent pronouncement does not signal a new agenda but a logical application of its commitment to peace with justice, Ken Sehested, the group's executive director, said July 22.

"Cecil Sherman is biblically literate; he knows that 'shalom' (the Hebrew word for peace) is a very comprehensive term meaning the well being of creation," Sehested said.

Most participants in the Fellowship's July 20-22 general assembly were unaware of the brewing dispute over the Peace Fellowship's funding. Instead, the motion to delete the funds came from the Coordinating Council's ethics and public policy ministry group, which oversees the allocation. No vote of the assembly was required, since the peace group is not a line item in Fellowship's overall budget.

Joel Snider of Nashville, Tenn., chairman of the ethics and public policy group, told council members July 20 there is "a lack of consensus for support of the total work of the Baptist Peace Fellowship."

When pressed for an explanation, Snider said the defunding was prompted by the Peace Fellowship's February statement welcoming homosexuals.

Snider said the ethics panel is open to funding specific projects of the Peace Fellowship or may renew the original relationship "if there are changes" in the organization. "We do not anticipate that this would be a forever thing," said Snider, pastor of Crieveewood Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn.

Jim Page, an AIDS counselor and member of the ethics panel from Daytona Beach, Fla., said the group struggled over the decision before agreeing on the compromise position to delete the Peace Fellowship as a line item but allow project funding.

Sehested conceded those who agree with the Peace Fellowship on homosexuality "would be a minority" among CBF participants. But he said opposition to homosexuality is more cultural than biblical. Only seven biblical texts mention homosexuality, he said, and they can be honestly interpreted as condemning promiscuous homosexual behavior, not homosexual orientation.

"It is sadly ironic," Sehested said, "that we are being punished because we hold a different conviction than the majority at one point of biblical interpretation. Sound familiar? The impulse to regulate the reading of Scripture is still with us."

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was formed in 1990 by moderates who complained conservative Southern Baptists were trying to require narrow interpretations of Scripture. But many Fellowship participants are concerned an endorsement of homosexuality could divide the group and label it as liberal.

Earlier the American Baptist Churches cut funding for the Peace Fellowship because of the February statement. The funding was restored after the statement was modified slightly.

Sehested said the work of the 10-year-old Peace Fellowship will not suffer because of the loss of \$7,000, which represents 3.7 percent of the organization's \$187,000 annual budget. He said the Memphis, Tenn.-based

organization "will continue to relate to the Fellowship in whatever way we can."

Noting that the Southern Baptist Convention only last month renounced the racism that contributed to its formation in 1845, Sehested predicted: "At the end of the next century, our descendants will be as puzzled at our dilemma (over homosexuality) as we are looking back at our Southern Baptist ancestors and saying "How in the world could they use Scripture to justify slavery?"

In other action, the Coordinating Council:

-- Approved spending \$105,000 to hire seven part-time field representatives for an 18-month trial period. The representatives would promote the work of the Fellowship in churches east of the Mississippi River.

-- Distributed \$9 million in surplus mission funds among 13 missions-related reserve accounts, with the largest portions going to missionary support (\$3 million) and new-church loans (\$1.5 million). The reserve funds will help ensure that money is available to support a missionary force that could triple to more than 240 by the year 2000, the council was told.

-- Approved funding for various conferences covering such topics as evangelism, church-state relations and biblical interpretation.

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Campolo urges Fellowship to turn mourning into 'party'

By Mark Wingfield

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- If the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is going to amount to anything, it must shed the clothes of mourning and throw a party celebrating the joy of the kingdom of God, Tony Campolo said July 21.

Campolo, a popular author and sociology professor at Eastern College near Philadelphia, Pa., delivered a keynote address at the Fellowship's general assembly in Fort Worth, Texas.

"If this movement is going to take up wings, we've got to make it into a party," said Campolo, an American Baptist. "The kingdom of God is going to make it regardless of whether this group makes it, the Southern Baptist Convention makes it or the American Baptist Churches make it."

Campolo illustrated the joy of Christianity with a story involving a trip he took to Hawaii several years ago.

Due to the change in time zones, he awoke at 3:30 in the morning on his first day there and went to an all-night diner to eat. While there, he overheard a conversation between a group of prostitutes and heard one woman say the next day was her 39th birthday, yet she had never had a birthday party.

Campolo and the diner manager later agreed to throw a surprise birthday party for the woman the next night. The woman was overwhelmed by the gesture, he said, and so was the diner manager.

At one point, Campolo led the group in a prayer -- odd, he said, "but it seemed like the right thing to do."

Realizing for the first time that Campolo was a minister, the diner manager asked him, "What kind of church do you belong to?"

"I belong to the kind of church that throws birthday parties for whores at 3:30 in the morning," Campolo happily replied.

He applied the story in his speech by saying, "That is the kind of church Jesus came to create. I don't know where we got this other one."

The Kingdom of God calls for radical discipleship, Campolo said.

"Being a Christian isn't just holding the right political and theological positions," he said. "Being a Christian is a lifestyle."

He offered four illustrations of radical discipleship he believes are needed today:

-- Declaring that God calls both men and women to ministry.

"I can't believe there's any group around right now who would deny to women the right to be ordained to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ," Campolo said. He cited the Scripture passage from Galatians 3:28 that says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

He also cited the passage from Joel 2:28 that says, "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams and your young men will see visions."

"There is no indication in Scripture that it's only men who get the gifts of the Spirit," Campolo declared. "If you want to deny women the right to preach, you deny that the power of the Holy Spirit is alive and at work in the world today."

-- Accepting homosexuals as people loved by God regardless of what one believes about the morality of homosexuality.

Campolo said he cannot find biblical justification for accepting same-sex sexual relationships. But he declared, "I refuse to buy into any ideology that bashes gays and lesbians."

His wife, on the other hand, does not see a biblical mandate against same-sex relationships. They have agreed to disagree, he said.

"The fact that you have a strong difference of opinion on a theological difference is no grounds for divorce," he said.

Homosexuals are people loved by God, just as God loves prostitutes and everyone else, since all are sinners, Campolo said. He quoted Romans 8:39, which says, "Nothing shall separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

But most homosexuals aren't likely to get any help developing a closer relationship with God because church people hardly will talk to them, he said. Most homosexuals "wouldn't set foot in a church because they are convinced they would be shunned."

While he cannot give his approval to same-sex relations, "I'm here to lend my disapproval to a church that has stopped loving people Jesus will never stop loving," Campolo declared.

-- Calling youth to greater commitment and sacrifice.

"We've got to say to a generation of young people that to be Christian is to refuse to give in to the middle-class lifestyle," Campolo asserted.

For example, most parents urge their children to stay in school so they can go to college, so they can get a job, so they can make lots of money, he said.

Young people should stay in school and should go to college, he agreed. But he added: "The purpose of an education is not to get a lot of stuff. The purpose of an education is to be equipped to give yourself in service to others.

"To be a follower of Jesus is to live simply, to use your resources to respond to the needs of others," Campolo said.

"We will lose this generation of young people not because we have asked too much of them but because we have asked too little of them," he predicted.

-- Embracing lifestyles of sacrifice.

The modern church and modern Christians in the United States have wrongly combined the appeals of materialism and the gospel, Campolo said. "We spend billions of dollars on buildings to honor somebody who says, 'I do not dwell in buildings built by men.'"

If Jesus had a choice between buying stained glass windows and feeding the world's hungry, he would always choose to feed the hungry, Campolo said.

He quoted 1 John 3:17, which says, "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God dwell in him?"

"I believe all the stuff you're supposed to believe in," Campolo said. "But let me tell you this people, believing is not enough. You have to devote your lives to Jesus Christ."

Campolo called for commitment to "the Jesus who says: 'I gave my life for you. Will you give your life for

me?"

In another major address, Bill Leonard, a professor at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., preached a sermon titled "Joy: The Irony of it All."

"It dawned on me recently that besides Jesus, the thing that holds me to the gospel is the irony of it all," Leonard said. "To open the pages of the Holy Scriptures or to read the history of the church is to come to terms with the amazing irony of divine grace."

The American Heritage Dictionary defines irony as "incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs," he continued. Reflecting on that definition, Leonard proclaimed, "Christ's resurrection, like no other event, illustrates ultimate irony."

"Grace doesn't always come as we think it should or fit neatly into our plans," Leonard said. He related a story about as a youth of 10 or 11 "taking my first drink from a 'colored' water fountain."

"The cool, clear water was barely down my throat when I realized it tasted the same as our 'white' water."

"That was a beginning of sorts," added Leonard, who now is one of the few white members of an African American congregation in Birmingham.

Grace "is like a seed," Leonard said. "Who knows where it may spring up with a little water?"

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-- Bob Allen contributed to this story.

General assembly meets missionaries via video

By Marv Knox

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- In a world of options, Louise Hendley, Mich Tosan and Martha Shaw felt they had no choice but to become missionaries.

They were among 16 missionaries commissioned by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship during its 1995 general assembly in Fort Worth July 20-22.

"It was like a fire in my bones. ... I have to do this," Hendley said, describing how she felt the moment God called her to be a missionary.

"From the instant Christ saved me, Christ called me to be a missionary," added Tosan on a videotape which presented the new missionaries to about 3,100 participants in the Fellowship meeting.

And although Shaw felt totally inadequate to travel around the globe with the gospel message, she heard God telling her, "Yes, Martha, you can do that," she recalled.

The Fellowship's 16 new missionaries comprise the four-year-old organization's largest class of incoming missions workers, reported Global Missions Coordinator Keith Parks. They bring the Fellowship's total missions force to 71 missionaries serving across the United States and throughout the world.

Those missionaries serve in "a world without borders," Parks stressed.

The Fellowship does not assign "home" or "foreign" missionaries, but rather targets "people groups" comprised of people who share common language and ethnic identity, he explained. Consequently, many of the Fellowship's missionaries do not have geographic assignments but rather minister to specific groups of people, wherever they live.

God led the Fellowship to develop "a concept of missions tailored to the day in which we live," Parks said. The focus on people groups allows the Fellowship to "find a niche in reaching people" which does not compete with other missions organizations, but targets people who never have heard the Christian gospel, he stressed.

"One out of four people on planet Earth live in those parts that haven't heard," he said. Yet only one-half of

1 percent of Christian missions funds and a tiny fraction of missionaries have been dedicated to reaching those people.

"We're intent on making a mark for God in that dark part of the world," Parks said. "We're focusing on a world that is hard, difficult and dangerous, that has been neglected for generations."

Still, Parks described the Fellowship's missions program as a rocket set to launch "into an orbit where Baptist missions has never dared to go before."

In the three years since the Fellowship last met in Fort Worth, the number of its career missionaries has grown from four to 77, he said. Three years ago, the Fellowship didn't count missions volunteers, but it had 781 in the first six months of this year, he added.

Fellowship supporters are "growing faster than we ever imagined," and the Woman's Missionary Union recently agreed to work with the Fellowship to prepare and distribute missions education materials, he said. The Fellowship also is starting a new prayer emphasis, Prayer Vanguard, which will send volunteers to fields of unreached people groups and pray for mission opportunities among them.

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Baptist Center for Ethics speaker decries chasm between faith, work

By Marv Knox

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Christians must bridge the chasm between their faith and the workplace, businessman John Castle believes.

Castle took his message to a luncheon sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics during the 1995 assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in Fort Worth July 21.

"The role of faith in the workplace has been diminished," said Castle, senior vice president of EDS, a Dallas-based electronics data firm. "A great chasm has developed, but it can be bridged."

The chasm developed because of the notion that "man is the pinnacle of all that is," which came about during the modern scientific era, he noted. "Ours is the first civilization that has no idea of a higher authority" than human beings.

Consequently, Christians have divided their lives into sacred and secular segments, he said. They have seen faith as a personal dimension of their lives, comprised of "soft stuff" that is irrelevant to business. And they have allowed power and success to shape the values of the business world.

"We have compartmentalized religion," he asserted. "We've reserved our faith for Sundays."

As a result, Christians have failed to treat God as supreme and have relegated God to family and the individual portions of their lives, he said.

But the climate of the business world is changing, Castle said. And ironically, the new climate is more conducive to integrating the personal dimension of people's lives into their roles in the marketplace, he added.

"We're moving away from the assembly line," he noted, and moving toward "systems thinking," which incorporates the thoughts, attitudes and feelings of workers into the process of work.

In addition, a new generation of business leaders is adopting a style of management that rejects intimidation as a method for motivation, he noted. Rather, it sees "leaders as servants, who empower workers."

Businesses also are recognizing that workers perform better when the larger sphere of their lives overlaps with work, he added. "This is humanizing the workplace; people are bringing their whole selves to work."

For example, many businesses now provide day care for workers' children, offer fitness opportunities at the workplace and recognize how their practices and policies impact the local community for good or ill, he said.

Christians must participate in this trend, so that they do a better job of ministering to and sharing their faith

with their co-workers, Castle insisted.

"As we become more ourselves in the workplace, it will be easier to integrate faith in the workplace," he predicted.

As an illustration, he told about a senior-level EDS manager who not only provided corporate resources for an employee who had a family crisis, but also pledged to pray for the employee and her family. He also noted the sight of employees bowing for prayer before eating in the company cafeteria is not uncommon.

"I once would have called these 'little things that make a difference,'" he said. "But even 'little things' are not little. They are significant."

Castle called for a joint effort between clergy and laypeople to impact workplaces and marketplaces in their communities.

"Join the struggle," he urged ministers. "Come to the workplace and visit your members. ... It means a lot; it's an encouragement."

He also pleaded for ministers to help laypeople "understand the gospel and how to use it in the workplace."

"The Bible teaches us to deny self and to sacrifice," he pointed out. "All this seems out of place in the workplace. We need help to see how we can be faithful in the workplace."

In addition, churches and ministers need to help laypeople develop more spiritual discipline, he said. An emphasis on group prayer, Bible study and accountability to other Christians "makes a tremendous difference in lives and ultimately in the workplace," he added.

Ministers also must search the Scriptures to help lay workers see stories and ideas that provide solid examples for "how we can integrate faith and work," he noted.

And Christians must be patient as they seek to build bridges over the chasm of faith and work, Castle cautioned. "It takes time to impact the corporate culture. We need creativity, loyalty and motivation not generated by fear."

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Church poor steward of grace, author tells conference crowd

By Mark Wingfield

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Grace is the only thing the church has an exclusive franchise on, yet grace is the one thing the church doesn't do well, according to author and pastor Gordon MacDonald.

MacDonald, pastor of Grace Chapel, a non-denominational church in Lexington, Mass., led a one-day seminar on spiritual renewal in the church July 20. The conference was offered prior to the general assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The modern church faces increasing competition for people's time from a variety of secular and religious organizations, MacDonald explained. "The prime competitor to your church is not another church but all the other organizations in your community who are now doing the work of the church."

But these organizations cannot duplicate everything the church should be doing, he said. "The only thing the church has an exclusive franchise on is the one thing it doesn't do well: grace."

MacDonald talked about a period several years ago when he was out of the ministry due to a personal crisis. He said he often went to worship on Sundays longing for a message, even a prayer, that would touch his pain. Yet often he left just as empty as he had come, he said, because the worship leaders made no preparation to administer God's grace that day.

The church's No. 1 purpose should be "to take a broken person, cover them with forgiveness and make them

whole again," he said.

Throughout the seminar, MacDonald compared the teachings of Jesus with the teachings of modern business analysts such as Peter Drucker to talk about "break points" in world history.

The modern Christian church faces a breaking point today, MacDonald said, because it is operating on organizational principles developed during the last great "sea change" in civilization, the "Age of Revolution," which began around 1790. He described "sea changes" as periods when "whole cultures and peoples begin to think in different ways," resulting in paradigm shifts.

Under this old paradigm, or way of understanding, people gathered into large church buildings to hear information. But the "sea change" currently underway as society heads toward the "Age of Knowledge" has changed the playing field, MacDonald said.

"People don't have to come to a place to get their information anymore," he explained.

For example, the average layperson can access unlimited theological resources through books and on-line services today, giving instant access to information ministers formerly learned only in seminary, he said.

Also, the television church has removed the requirement that people must go to a specific church building to get information from the church, he added.

This dramatic societal change affects not only the church but virtually every aspect of life, MacDonald said. Thus, people to whom the church ministers are facing the stress and uncertainty of overwhelming change in their jobs, families and communities.

"Renewal in the modern church is telling people we're in a storm and it's probably not going to change," he said.

The answer to coping with this change is found in Jesus' words to his disciples in Matthew 24, MacDonald said, citing three admonitions:

-- "Live knowing that at any time history can come to an end and that the only thing that lasts through all this change is the health of the soul."

-- "Serve faithfully the master and do the work of the kingdom."

-- "Focus your attention on the helpless."

But to even get a hearing with most people today, the church must develop new ways of ministry, MacDonald said. Much of what the traditional church does is based on 18th and 19th century models that either no longer work or will not work much longer, he said.

Churches must engage in serious soul-searching and strategic planning to renew their ministries, he suggested.

A starting point is to ask, "What is the core thing, the one thing your church should be doing?" he said. From this new foundation, the church can be rebuilt, shedding traditions that are ineffective and renewing the biblical mission of the congregation, he said.

Change confronts churches at every turn, speaker says

By Mark Wingfield

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- The Christian church faces change in every direction, pastor and author Gordon MacDonald said in a July 20 seminar.

Gordon, pastor of Grace Chapel in Lexington, Mass., outlined 10 examples of these changes in a presentation sponsored by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship prior to its general assembly in Fort Worth, Texas:

-- Economics. "Economic realities are going to make it impossible for churches to operate in the future the way they have," MacDonald said. He cited increasing costs of property, insurance and personnel to suggest that the model of every church having its own building and a paid pastor may not endure.

-- Technology. "Technology makes it possible for the average layperson to get as much information as the pastor has with a seminary degree," he said.

-- Relational realignment. "The nuclear family is almost a non-existent dinosaur in many parts of the country," MacDonald said. Yet the simple assertion that getting right with God will restore the nuclear family is wrong, he added, because the nuclear family is not even the model of biblical times.

-- Growing hostility of communities. Neighborhoods and communities are increasingly turning inward in a defensive posture, MacDonald said. And at the same time, as revenue available through taxation becomes tighter, more communities are asking why the church should get a free ride.

-- Generational segmentation. At least five distinct generations are alive today, MacDonald said. And each sends and receives information in different ways. This is seen most clearly in different tastes in music styles, he said. "How many churches are on the verge of dividing over music?"

-- 1990s version of spirituality. Old ideas of religion are changing as people look to a broader understanding of spirituality, he explained.

-- Exhaustion. Many Christians drop out of church today because they are simply exhausted from heavy job and family responsibilities, MacDonald said. He explained that in the 1950s, a family could achieve a middle-class living standard with a total of 43 hours of employment per week. Today, it takes an average of 96 hours of family employment per week to achieve the same standard, he said.

-- Trust quotient. The modern culture is driven by cynicism and suspicion, MacDonald said.

-- Population mobility. Due to an increasingly mobile society, 60 percent to 70 percent of an urban congregation can turn over in a 30-month period, he reported.

-- Consumerism. The old model of church was built on the idea that people would remain loyal to church and denomination, MacDonald said. But the modern reality is that people shop around frequently, seeking the place that best meets their current needs.

-- Single-issue mentality. "There is a tendency to find one issue and make it a litmus test," he said, citing the contemporary issues of abortion and conservative politics. "Pastors have people in their congregations who are not concerned about whether you're preaching the gospel but what you think of Bill Clinton," he said.

Whitsitt Award winner takes 'moderates' to task

By Stan Haste

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Baptist iconoclast Will Campbell called Southern Baptist "moderates" to task in Fort Worth, Texas, when he declared, "If Jesus Christ had been a moderate, he never would have been crucified."

Receiving the 1995 Courage Award from the William H. Whitsitt Baptist Heritage Society, the noted farmer-theologian asked, "Have we considered that the dreadfully misnamed fundamentalist takeover is a judgment of God on the rest of us?"

"We do have a creed today," he said, "and it begins, 'My God can whip your God.'"

During the presentation of the award, Whitsitt Society President Loyd Allen cited Campbell for his outspoken advocacy for the poor, particularly for poor African Americans in his native Mississippi. Allen, a fellow Mississippian who teaches church history at Mississippi College, said Campbell stands in a long tradition of Baptist prophets assailed during their lifetimes as radicals.

Campbell sought to disavow the designation, however, replying: "Jesus Christ was a radical and for that he died. I'm an old man now and have not been killed."

The Yale Divinity School-trained Campbell, who earned an undergraduate degree at Wake Forest University, related that the best theology he ever learned was the table grace offered by his farmer father before every meal, when he pled for mercy, forgiveness and grace to live life in service to others.

"True soul freedom can never be found in any institution," he declared. "Never trust them. Never bow your knee to them."

In another address, Baptist historian William Estep reviewed Baptist contributions to the triumph of separation of church and state over state-sanctioned religion in early American history.

Estep, professor emeritus of church history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, cited Roger Williams, Isaac Backus and John Leland as towering figures in the long battle for disestablishment of religion during the nation's colonial period.

He also assailed a "revisionist history" in America today that seeks to rewrite the record in favor of "accommodationism."

Warning such views "cannot be trusted," Estep said accommodationism is a "polemical belief with an historical gloss."

What plagues contemporary Baptists, he said, is forgetfulness of their first principles.

Some 400 participants in the third annual meeting of the Whitsitt Society also witnessed an historical impersonation of the colonial Virginia Baptist pastor John Leland by Fred Anderson, executive director of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society.

Leland's long and vigorous efforts on behalf of separation of church and state are credited with persuading James Madison, "father of the Constitution," to append a Bill of Rights to the body of the nation's founding document.

The Bill of Rights opens with the declaration, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus enshrining what Baptists labored nearly two centuries to achieve.

Prior to the annual meeting, directors of the Whitsitt Society elected officers for 1995-96. They are Carolyn Blevins of Carson-Newman College, president; Bill Leonard of Samford University, vice president and president-elect; Walker Knight of Decatur, Ga., secretary; and Walter Shurden of Mercer University, treasurer.

Ayres, Clemons elected to RLC leadership posts

By Larry Chesser

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Texas laywoman Patricia Ayres and South Carolina pastor Hardy Clemons were elected co-chairpersons of the Religious Liberty Council at the organization's annual meeting July 21.

Ayres and Clemons were elected to positions vacated by two founding members of the RLC -- Abner McCall, who died recently, and Grady Cothen, who resigned as co-chairman because of health reasons. Continuing to serve as the organization's third co-chairperson is Gardner Taylor, pastor emeritus of Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, N.Y.

The RLC was formed in 1989 as an auxiliary of the Baptist Joint Committee, a Washington, D.C.-based religious liberty agency. The RLC provides representation on the BJC board for Baptists who support the BJC individually, through their churches and through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Ayres, a member of the BJC board, and Clemons, pastor of First Baptist Church, Greenville, S.C., are both past moderators of the CBF.

The RLC elected three new BJC board members and re-elected two others during the July 21 meeting. Elected to three-year terms are Carole Shields of Florida, Bart Tichenor of Missouri and Lynn Bergfalk of Washington, D.C. Re-elected to three-year terms are Marian Grant of North Carolina and Jean Woodward of Virginia.

During its session, the RLC paid tribute to McCall and heard a written challenge from Cothen, who was unable to attend.

Foy Valentine, an RLC vice chairman and trustee of the Center for Christian Ethics in Dallas, saluted McCall for his faith, brilliance, courage and integrity.

"His mind was the gift of God, but his honing of his mind on behalf of causes" such as the RLC is something for which McCall deserves credit, Valentine said.

"Not only was he smart, he had smarts," he added.

Valentine said McCall demonstrated courage in opposing "fundamentalist" efforts to gain control of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"When most Baptist bishops were tongue-tied and hamstrung and straddling the fence from underneath, Abner was courageous in the extreme," he said.

BJC Executive Director James Dunn highlighted McCall's role founding the RLC.

Before the BJC was "banished" by the SBC, Dunn said, "Abner saw the day coming ... and said we've got to have a support group of some kind. In fact the term he used that first time was a 'booster band.'"

Bill Wilson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Waynesboro, Va., read Cothen written statement to the RLC.

Cothen's statement described the free exercise of religion and the separation of church and state as an overriding concern for Baptists.

"The Lord will work with some group to propagate the gospel," he wrote. "If, however, the fundamentalists -- religious and political-- manage to shackle religion with governmental 'aid' or partnership, or government with religious control, we will enter another millennium of the dark ages.

"This is one battle that must be won, whatever the cost."

In addition to the BJC board members elected at the meeting, RLC representatives to the BJC are Sarah Frances Anders of Louisiana (chairwoman of the BJC); Bill Crosby of Kentucky; Ayres, Phil Strickland and Babs Morrison of Texas; Ann Quattlebaum of South Carolina; Cecil Sherman of Georgia; and Wilson.

Southwestern still in good standing with regional accrediting agency

By Jim Jones

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, placed on probation by a major accrediting agency this year, is still in good standing with another of its major accrediting agencies, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

"Southwestern remains a member in good standing," David Carter, associate executive director of the Southern Association's Commission on Colleges, said July 21.

The Association of Theological Schools, based in Pittsburgh, placed the seminary on two-year probation in January, after questions arose about last year's firing of Russell Dilday, then president of the seminary.

The Southern Association, based in Decatur, Ga., received questions about the governance of the school and sent a team to the campus in spring 1994 and twice this year, Carter said in a telephone interview. He declined to specify the nature of the questions.

After a June 26 meeting, the Criteria and Reports Committee of the Southern Association's Commission on Colleges declared that no sanctions of any kind are necessary for the Fort Worth seminary.

"All I can say is that we were authorized to visit the campus to look at matters related to the governance of the seminary," Carter said.

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-- Reprinted from the Fort Worth Star-Telegram

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