

Associated Baptist Press

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EDITOR'S NOTE: In the last paragraph of the July 24 ABP story, "Fellowship adopts mission statement, avoids question of denominational future," please update the final registration figure to 3,015.

Also, photos of the General Assembly are available by request from the Fellowship's offices, phone (800) 352-8741.

Fellowship's mission statement lists priorities, commitments

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Here is a summary of the mission statement of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which was adopted at the Fellowship's recent general assembly in Fort Worth, Texas.

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:

- Doing global missions in a world without borders.
- Championing Baptist principles of faith and practice.
- Affirming our diversity as a gift of God, including but not limited to race, ethnicity and gender.
- Networking Baptist churches and individuals for cooperation, encouragement and exchange of information and ideas.
- Empowering churches through resources more than programs.
- Emphasizing strategic partnerships more than owning institutions.
- Cooperating through new ventures that encourage innovative and creative approaches to missions and ministry for the 21st century.

The document commits the Fellowship to promote the Baptist distinctives of soul freedom, Bible freedom, church freedom and religious freedom.

It lists other commitments to:

-- "Biblically-based global missions," including an affirmation that "Christ calls us to minister redemptively to the spiritual, physical and social needs of individuals and communities."

-- A "resource model" of service to local churches. The Fellowship wants "to be catalysts and enablers, linking churches and individuals to helpful resources, ideas and information," the statement says.

-- A "biblical vision of justice and mercy" in which the call of Christ "extends to every area and relationship of life, both private and public, personal and social."

-- Lifelong theological education for ministers "in an atmosphere of reverence for biblical authority and respect for open inquiry and responsible scholarship."

-- Trustworthiness. "We will organize, make decisions and carry out our mission in ways that earn trust," the statement says.

-- Effectiveness. "We will constantly monitor the effectiveness of our processes and organizational structures in light of our stated mission," the statement promises.

Finally, the statement describes six "initiatives" that emerge from shared commitments and priorities. The initiatives may change "as the Fellowship matures and as needs and conditions change." They are:

-- Global missions, emphasizing innovative approaches and utilizing both career and volunteer missionaries.

-- Resources for churches and church leaders. When the Fellowship is unable to locate existing resources, "we will find ways to create and provide them on a cost-recovery basis," the statement says.

-- Partnership ministries with "other organizations which share our vision, complement our mission and reflect our commitment to Baptist principles."

-- Advocating and modeling Baptist principles of "the centrality of Scripture, the priesthood of all believers, the autonomy of the local church, religious freedom and voluntary cooperation."

-- Working in selected "joint ventures" that "enhance our mission."

-- Fellowship. "This will be a home for free and faithful Baptists," the statement says, providing "encouragement, fellowship and inspiration" as well as exchange of ideas, through national and regional gatherings.

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-- By Bob Allen

Fellowship commissions 16 new missionaries

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- The following 16 new missionaries were commissioned by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship during its 1995 general assembly in Fort Worth July 20-22.

-- Ronnie Adams, minister with singles at First Baptist Church of Plano, Texas, will minister to disadvantaged and displaced persons in New York City.

-- Warren and Karen Hatley of Quitman, Texas, are assigned to an unreached people group in the Middle East. He is a family physician in Quitman. Both are active in First Baptist Church. They have a son, Reed, 12.

-- Bobby and Louise Hendley started their two-year term in April. They work with Open House Ministries in Miami, Fla., to provide long-term disaster relief for victims of Hurricane Andrew. They have a daughter, Madeline.

-- Dwight and Brenda Jackson, former Southern Baptist missionaries to Burundi and Tanzania, are assigned to perform urban ministry in St. Louis, Mo. Since 1988, he has been pastor of Webster Groves Baptist Church in St. Louis.

-- Jim Keith was appointed to a two-year campus ministry internship at California State University in Long Beach, Calif. He is a native of Winston-Salem, N.C., who grew up attending College Park Baptist Church.

-- Lori Knight, a licensed speech pathologist in Dallas, will work two years in a ministry center in Miami. She will teach English as a second language to international students and the homeless, while helping to coordinate volunteer missions effort. She is a member of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas.

-- Tom Pinner, longtime pastor of churches in Virginia and Florida, and his wife, Elnora, will serve two years as hosts for the International Baptist Theological Seminary in the Czech Republic. His career as a pastor spans 37 years, most recently at Seminole Heights Baptist Church in Florida.

-- Rick and Martha Shaw of Gloucester Point, Va., will minister to Albanian people in Macedonia. Since 1988, he has been minister of music, youth and children at Gloucester Point Baptist Church. She directs and teaches in a preschool program.

-- Tamara Tillman, minister of childhood education for First Baptist Church of Dothan, Ala., will work with an unreached people group in the Middle East. She plans to direct a proposed historical information center.

-- Mich and Pat Tosan of Richmond, Va., will minister to Iranian people in the United States. A native of Iran, he is scheduled to graduate from Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond in December. He currently is minister to internationals at Bon Air Baptist Church.

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Fellowship elects 37 to Coordinating Council

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship elected 37 members to its Coordinating Council at the group's July 20-22 General Assembly in Fort Worth, Texas.

The 76-member council is the organization's top decision-making body.

Elected to ex-officio council posts were moderator Pat Anderson of Lakeland, Fla.; immediate past moderator Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler of Cincinnati, Ohio; moderator-elect Lavonn Brown of Norman, Okla.; and recorder Cindy Johnson of Gaithersburg, Md.

Three at-large members joined the council: Molly Marshall of Missouri, Troy Daniel of Mississippi and Jan DeWitt of Wisconsin.

Most of the new members were elected to three-year terms representing geographical areas. Elected to terms expiring in 1998 were: James Walters and Robert White of Alabama; Ray Higgins of Arkansas; Tim Wyles of Arizona; Larry Hamm of the Central region; Felix Zeigler of Florida; Bob Potts and Betty Snyder of Georgia; Carol Davis Younger of Kansas; Greg Brooks of Kentucky; Welton Gaddy of Louisiana; Lois McCullars of Missouri; Jane Allison of Mississippi; Harvey Poovey and Ed Vick of North Carolina; Jean Meredith of the Northeast region; Preston Calliston of South Carolina; Larry Dipboye of Tennessee; Millie Bishop, Stephen Nash, Noah Rodriguez, Robert Wiggins and Yoo Jong Yoon of Texas, and Catherine Johnson and Robert Whitten of Virginia.

The following persons were elected to unfinished two-year terms: Mark Sanders of Georgia, Joe Hairston of Washington, D.C., Cheryl Rash Jones of the Mid-Atlantic region, Hyo Young Kim of Texas and Jose H.O. Oliveras of Puerto Rico.

John Barnett of Kentucky and Pat Cates of North Carolina were chosen to serve out unfinished one-year terms expiring in 1996.

Also elected at the general assembly were trustees of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Foundation. Elected to terms expiring in 1988 were Steve Tondera of Alabama, W. Lee Burge of Georgia, Carolyn Crumpler of Ohio, Ben Murphy of Tennessee and Ophelia Humphrey and Jerold McBride of Texas.

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Texas CLC, Fellowship team up to produce curriculum on violence

By Laura Horne

DALLAS (ABP) -- With Americans reeling under the impact of violence in society, the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship have released a major new curriculum, "Violence: A Christian Response," to help individuals and churches respond to violence.

"To find a person today who has not been impacted by violence is difficult," said Phil Strickland, director of the Texas Baptist moral concerns agency. "The obvious key is prevention, and the local churches are vital to preventing violence and abuse."

"I keep hearing people say that child, spouse and elder abuse are not present in our churches," Strickland continued. "Unfortunately, that is not true. Abuse is present even in our churches, so we must deal with it."

"Violence: A Christian Response" is a resource developed in a joint effort between the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's ethics and public policy ministry group.

In the curriculum's introduction, former president Jimmy Carter says, "By working together and drawing on excellent resources such as this study book, we can support each other in answering God's highest call: to live together in harmony and peace."

The material contains extensive curriculum with study helps for each topic.

Part 1 of the material addresses "Violence in American Culture." It includes lessons on youth violence, violence in the media, poverty and violence, racism and violence and peacemaking practices. The section on racism and violence includes testimonials from persons of different ethnic backgrounds.

Part 2 of the material discusses "Violence in American Families." It includes units on child abuse, spouse abuse and elder abuse. Abridged versions of several of the topics in brochure form are also included in the curriculum. Designed for wide distribution, the brochures are also available in bulk and cover such topics as "Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect," "Protecting our Children from Abuse" and "Child Abuse and Legal Implications."

"This is one of the most extensive bodies of material that we have ever been involved in producing," Strickland said, noting that 31 writers worked on the project.

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Former missionaries to Vietnam welcome normalizing of relations

By Mark Baggett

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- "When the news came, we sat in front of the television for hours and hurt," remembers Betty Merrell of the fall of South Vietnam in the spring of 1975. Months before, she and husband, Rondal, and sons Dan and Tim had left Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) on furlough as missionaries. They watched and wondered about the fate of fellow missionaries and tens of thousands of panic-stricken refugees clogging airports and seaports to escape the communist onslaught.

Not until last month did the former Southern Baptist missionaries to Vietnam and their families get a chance to hold their reunion, a happy, tearful, and moving retreat in the Smoky Mountains. Now, with President Clinton's announcement of the reopening of full diplomatic relations with Vietnam, they anticipate doors to missions work opening once again.

"I am excited (about the normalizing of relations) because of the spiritual dimensions," said Betty Merrell, director of special missions projects at Woman's Missionary Union in Birmingham, Ala. "It will open doors for missions, as well as for trade and commerce. It's what we've been praying for, because we remember what a response there was before we left. But I caution that even as Christians can go back in, everyone else can, too."

Southern Baptists first sent missionaries to Vietnam in 1959. When the three dozen workers left in 1975, they had begun almost 50 congregations with some 3,000 members, established a seminary, started publications, and met many physical needs, according to a recent issue of *The Commission*, the Foreign Mission Board's magazine. Today, only a few Southern Baptists serve there, with limited ministry objectives.

The Merrells left Vietnam in July 1974, after serving there 10 years, when their boys were in the ninth and seventh grades. They actually resigned from the Foreign Mission Board that fall, before the fall of Saigon, when Ron accepted the call as pastor to Temple Hills Baptist Church in the Washington, D.C., area. But they still felt part of the larger missionary "family" in Vietnam when they heard the news, Betty said.

"We had crated up our things before we left on furlough, expecting Saigon to fall eventually," she said. "But we could not imagine it would happen in the spring of 1975. We watched on television and ached because we were not there. We had a feeling of emptiness, of 'that's where we want to be,' a feeling of being separated from your family. Those who were there hurt in a different way."

The June reunion brought a sense of closure and an opportunity to hear others' stories, in many cases for the first time. In fact, many of the stories are collected in a book, *Stories That Won't Go Away: Women in Vietnam, 1959-1975*, compiled by Betty J. Merrell and Priscilla Tunnell and published by New Hope, a publishing division of WMU.

"One thing we learned through the book was that we didn't have time to tell these stories; everybody was bearing their own burdens," said Betty. "One Vietnamese man, who now lives in Atlanta, said he was surprised to hear these stories and the grief and pain felt by the missionaries because we would not talk about it then. The Vietnamese were experiencing their own grief and pain, and we didn't want to burden them with ours."

The Merrells heard stories of those who chose to stay, including Pastor Chanh, who started the first Vietnamese Baptist Church (Grace Baptist) and a lay pastor, Mr. Hao, who sent his family to America in various stages but chose to stay himself. An elderly man, he was sent to a rehabilitation camp to work, several miles from the city. The picture of a 70-year-old man riding a bicycle for several miles to and from work -- and other scenes -- linger with Merrell and the other missionaries.

Despite the "pioneerish" standard of living and the daily struggles of getting water or fighting bugs and diseases, Betty Merrell remembers Vietnam for the wonderful relationships, even in war time.

"A reporter asked me, 'How does love operate in a climate of hate?'" she said. "I answered that I had never experienced a climate of hate, but I guess I couldn't convince the reporter. Her headline was 'Love in a climate of hate.' The people in the war had their jobs, but there wasn't an intense hatred between the Vietnamese and the Americans."

She said she grieves when she thinks of one story that hasn't been told: the way American GIs worked to help the Vietnamese, digging wells, pulling teeth. Despite images of American soldiers terrorizing Vietnamese villages, Betty Merrell said she remembers the GIs bringing 500 orphans from a refugee center to a military base, where they had bought two toys from the Philippines for every child to celebrate Christmas. She remembers going to villages with American GIs and being welcomed.

The Vietnamese people and their absolute loyalty as friends made it easier for the missionaries to adjust.

"If you gained a friend among the Vietnamese, he was your friend for life," said Ron Merrell, now pastor at First Baptist Church in Fultondale, Ala. "They would tell you to stay inside because the Viet Cong were coming through. Sure enough, the next morning there would be pamphlets at our doorstep, saying Americans shouldn't be involved in Southeast Asia. But otherwise, they wouldn't bother you."

Both Ron and Betty would love to go back to Vietnam, as would their fellow missionary friends. "Most of us said we would go back in the flip of a finger," Betty said. Ron, who has long supported the normalizing of

relations, said the social ministries that were performed by missionaries did not threaten aims of the North Vietnamese government.

"If they will let missionaries come back in under social ministries to teach and help train people, they will see we were there to help people, not to oppose the government," he said. "You couldn't evangelize openly, but if they ask you why you're a Christian, you could refer them to the Vietnamese Baptist Church. All we can do there represents what we as Southern Baptists stand for."

According to a Foreign Mission Board news release, several Southern Baptist workers currently serve in Vietnam through Cooperative Services International, a division of the board based in Richmond, Va., but it is unlikely the country will be open to traditional missionaries in the near future.

Betty said she thinks of her 10 years in Vietnam in terms of what God gave them to survive: "God gave us two gifts: an intense love for the country and its people at a time when the circumstances demanded it, and a unique love for each other. God knew we needed those two things."

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