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## *In this issue:*

- Fellowship appoints council for endorsement of chaplains
- Lawmakers postpone markup because of Jewish holidays
- Reggie McNeal: "We have churches more worldly than the culture"
- Maturational growth can be hardest to accomplish
- Church size often dictates pastor's responsibilities
- Texas pastor calls for cease-fire in music wars
- Church's Agape Meal cooks up 'soul' food

## **Fellowship appoints council for endorsement of chaplains**

By Bob Allen

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship began a process to endorse chaplains for industry and the armed forces and launched networks to build influence among Hispanic and Asian communities at a meeting of the group's Coordinating Council Oct. 16-18.

The Fellowship, which formed in 1991, voted at its general assembly this summer to declare itself an endorsing body for chaplains. Most agencies which employ chaplains require they be endorsed by a denomination or other official religious body.

At its first meeting since the general assembly, the Coordinating Council appointed a "council on endorsement" to establish and administer policies and procedures for the endorsement and nurture of chaplains, counselors and other ministers in specialized settings.

Previously, moderate Baptists have been able to receive endorsement through the Southern Baptist Convention. As the moderate Fellowship and conservative-led SBC have drifted apart, however, moderates have increasingly said they would prefer to be endorsed by the Fellowship.

Donna Forrester, a council member and pastoral counselor in Greenville, S.C., said the Fellowship's office has been "inundated" with calls from chaplain candidates since the general assembly action in June. Staff member Gary Baldrige said 85 persons had contacted the Atlanta-based CBF about endorsement.

In other business, the council's networking ministry team approved part-time director positions for Asian and Hispanic Fellowship networks. Yoo J. Yoon, pastor of Glory Korean Baptist Church in Dallas, will direct the Asian network. Dan Rivera, retired president of Hispanic Baptist Theological Seminary in San Antonio, Texas, was named director of the Hispanic network.

Fellowship Coordinator Daniel Vestal welcomed Yoon and Rivera, calling their appointment an important step in the group's goal of inclusivity. While the Fellowship has achieved equality among males, females, clergy and laity, Vestal said: "The one piece in this Fellowship's dream that is yet to be realized is multicultural, multiethnic. There's not a one of us in this room that doesn't believe in that and want it and pray for it. These two standing here tonight is a big step."

In other business, the Coordinating Council:

-- Approved a one-year employment extension for Keith Parks, global missions coordinator. Policies require that employment be reviewed annually for staff members age 70 and older. Parks, the Fellowship's first missions coordinator, took the job in 1993. He turns 70 Oct. 23.

-- Heard a challenge from Vestal to increase gifts for famine relief in North Korea. The Fellowship established a famine-relief fund for North Korea at its general assembly this summer, but no money was earmarked for its promotion. As a result, only \$6,335 had been received by mid-October. At the council meeting, the Fellowship's global missions ministry group approved a promotion plan for the offering, which will be disbursed through the Baptist World Alliance.

The global missions ministry group also voted to phase out salaries for its two-year Global Service Corps. After the two-year phaseout, individuals participating in the program will raise their own support. Officials said the change will free up about \$900,000 to be used to hire new career missionaries and create a new network of people who support GSC personnel but otherwise might not contribute to the Fellowship. Currently, 33 of the Fellowship's 143 missionaries are GSC appointees.

-- Began its budget-development process for 1998-99. The finance committee will use a "zero-based" process in developing the budget proposal, said Ed Vick, the committee's chairperson. He asked ministry groups to budget essential items based on revenue received last fiscal year and request "priority two" and "priority three" projects anticipating income increases of 5 percent and 10 percent respectively.

-- Approved a \$50,000 advance for "emergency relief" to Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. The Virginia seminary made the "hardship request" because a mid-year cut in the Fellowship's budget last year did not allow Richmond administrators enough time to raise alternate support, Vick said.

-- Heard a first report from a "reference and referral" task force appointed to help Fellowship-friendly churches locate pastors and staff ministers. The Fellowship will not technically "place" ministers, because in Baptist polity, local churches are free to select their own leaders, said Vestal. The service will "help ministers and churches in discovering one another," said Rick McClatchy, coordinator of Oklahoma's state Fellowship and a member of the task force.

-- Approved a recommendation to make Atlanta the Fellowship's permanent home. A facility study committee recommended waiting until 1999 to look at long-term space needs. The Fellowship currently rents offices from Mercer University, with a lease expiring in December 2002.

-- Elected Dixie Petrey, a minister from Tennessee, to the council, to fulfill an unexpired term of Molly Marshall, a seminary professor from Kansas, who resigned. The Fellowship's Virginia chapter also appointed a new representative to the council to fill a vacancy caused by a death. Eddie Freeman, pastor of Broadus Memorial Baptist Church in Charlottesville, died unexpectedly in September. Clint Hopkins, pastor of Churchland Baptist Church in Chesapeake, was named to complete Freeman's term, which expires in 1999.

In his report to the council, Vestal said he would ask committees planning upcoming general assemblies to adopt themes for the next three years on spirituality, community building and global missions, emphases outlined in Vestal's address at this year's general assembly.

Vestal described the request as "kind of a three-year plan that gives us direction and helps us rally our resources and our thinking in a direction that I think will be helpful."

Next year's general assembly is scheduled June 25-27 in Houston. The theme will be "Celebrate the Spirit," drawn from Joel 2:28 in the Old Testament.

In a devotional, Fellowship moderator Martha Smith urged council members to resist the tendency of allowing the organization to institutionalize to the point where it becomes an end in itself.

"We do not yet know all God is up to in CBF," said Smith, of Gastonia, N.C. "Our task is to remain open to the wind of God's Spirit.

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-- Robert O'Brien contributed to this story.

## **Lawmakers postpone markup because of Jewish holidays**

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Heeding the concerns of several Jewish groups, the House Constitution subcommittee has postponed an Oct. 23 date to consider the proposed Religious Freedom Amendment to the Constitution.

The markup would have conflicted with two Jewish holidays. Shemini Atzeret marks the close of an eight-day Sukkot festival, also called the Feast of Tabernacles. Simchat Torah, or Rejoicing of the Law, celebrates the completion of the yearly cycle of the reading of the Torah in Jewish worship services.

The Religious Freedom Amendment offered by Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., would sanction some forms of government-endorsed religious speech and school-sponsored prayer. It would also open the door for pervasively religious groups to be eligible for public funds, such as education vouchers, on the same footing as other private and religiously affiliated groups.

In a letter to Rep. Charles Canady, R-Fla., chairman of the subcommittee, the Jewish groups urged Canady to postpone the hearing until the following week. It was signed by the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, Anti-Defamation League, National Council of Jewish Women, Union of American Hebrew Congregations and others.

The hearing has been tentatively rescheduled for Oct. 28, according to a letter circulated by one of the Jewish groups.

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-- By Kenny Byrd

## **Reggie McNeal: "We have churches more worldly than the culture"**

By Mark Wingfield

BOWLING GREEN, Ky. (ABP) -- Making churches culturally relevant in order to reach people does not require watering down the gospel, according to church-growth consultant Reggie McNeal.

McNeal, a consultant with the South Carolina Baptist Convention, was keynote speaker for a session on numerical growth during an Oct. 10-11 "church-health summit" sponsored by the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

"People say to be culturally relevant somehow waters down the gospel," McNeal noted. "That is erroneous and against the Spirit of Jesus."

The irony, he said, is "we have many churches that are more worldly than the culture."

In reality, churches that shun making themselves culturally relevant are "self-centered," he explained. "I don't know anything more greedy than Christians who are sitting in a church saying, 'Feed me! Feed me! Feed me!' when there are thousands of hungry people outside."

Churches that want to reach people with the gospel will understand the modern culture and seek to relate to people in that culture, McNeal said. He cited several examples of issues churches must understand, beginning with convenience.

"Convenience is a driving force" in modern society, he said. "Churches that want to connect better pay attention to that."

McNeal recalled a member of a church which he previously served as pastor telling him, "I'm not so sure it ought to be convenient to come to church."

McNeal's response: "Where does it say in the word of God to make it difficult for people to come to God?"

He warned church leaders that people who visit their churches make quick decisions about whether they will return or not. Such decisions are made about 10 minutes after hitting the parking lot, he said, meaning what happens long before the sermon is of great importance in making a good impression.

He cited issues such as parking, directional signs and appearance of the facilities as initial indicators.

Meeting modern expectations for convenience also should drive churches to offer more than one worship time and worship style, McNeal said. "This is a 24-hour, seven-day society."

Due to work demands and other scheduling conflicts, "some people never will come to your church on Sunday morning," he reported. "Or maybe we need to let them get out a little early to go get our food warmed up. ... Who's reaching them?"

McNeal admonished churches to plan their programs and activities with unchurched people in mind. "Here we are with the stewardship of the eternal gospel, and we've got to start planning with someone besides us in mind. ... I dream of the day churches stop planning with calendars and budgets and start with people."

He also spoke of the need for churches to cross generational lines.

Many boomers who came back to church to provide moral instruction for their children now are leaving the church because entrenched leadership has not created a place for the boomers to assume leadership roles, McNeal said. They're leaving "because they've not had the same impact on the church they've had everywhere else. They've not been allowed into leadership."

Reaching "Generation X," the youngest adult generation alive today, is another problem, he said. "We are not reaching this generation."

One reason, he suggested, is they don't see the church living out what it claims to teach and preach. "They're saying the church is too racist and too homogeneous."

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## **Maturational growth can be hardest to accomplish**

By David Winfrey

BOWLING GREEN, Ky. (ABP) -- Maturational growth is the most important growth for a congregation, but it also is the most difficult to define and accomplish, Pastor Leith Anderson told those attending a church growth conference sponsored by the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

"Maturity and health can be extremely difficult to grasp," said Anderson, an author and pastor of Wooddale Church in Minneapolis.

"To mature is to grow up," he said. "It is to behave and live in a way that is appropriate to the age of that person."

But not all members are at the same level of maturity or ready to grow at the same rate or times, said Anderson, author of "Dying for Change," and "A Church for the 21st Century."

Anderson outlined six principles for churches seeking maturational growth:

-- Maturing churches make disciples of Jesus Christ. Anderson distinguished between those with a knowledge of Christian teachings and those who are willing to follow them. "A disciple is not one who intellectually knows but behaviorally obeys the commandments of Jesus Christ."

-- People grow when the season comes. Churches are in danger of acting like Pharisees if they expect others to be spiritually mature immediately in all matters, Anderson said.

"The reality is most maturation comes in spurts," he said, adding that those spurts often are connected to crises or changes in life stages. "We need to be there and ready when that occurs."

-- Relationships are important. According to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 80 percent of adults coming to faith in Jesus Christ do so as a result of the influence of a friend, Anderson said.

If churches are to mature, it will occur more as a result of relationships than programming, he said. "That is not to say that programs are not important. It is to say that relationships are extremely important."

-- To grow maturationally, find mentoring churches. Anderson suggested a church that is looking to grow in health should find another church that had similar characteristics, surroundings and challenges and now has matured.

Take church leaders to that church for a weekend visit and observe what happened as that congregation matured, he said. "The transformation takes place on the van ride on the way home."

Members won't be able to say it couldn't work back at their church because they already will have seen that it did work for a similar congregation. "You begin to catch the vision of what can be and how it can occur," he said.

-- Grow the leaders to grow the church. "The leaders may not be the ones who hold the offices," he noted. "The leaders are those who influence others."

When leaders make growth, prayer or evangelism a priority, then the church will grow, pray and evangelize, he said.

-- Build from islands of health and strength. Churches would do better to maximize the things they do well rather than try to fix all their problems, he said.

Anderson drew a parallel from an admonition from a farmer about his weed-filled lawn: "If you grow grass and you do a good enough job of growing grass, you don't have to worry about the weeds."

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## **Church size often dictates pastor's responsibilities**

By Mark Wingfield

BOWLING GREEN, Ky. (ABP) -- If the pastor of your church had a limited amount of additional time available, would you prefer the pastor do more visiting with shut-ins or put more time into sermon preparation?

How you answer that question may be an indicator of what type of church you attend, according to Alan Witham, pastor of Hyland Baptist Church in Henderson, Ky.

Witham led a session on "What Kind of Church is Ours?" during a "church-health summit" Oct. 10-11 in Bowling Green, Ky. Material for the session was based on an Alban Institute book, "Discovering Your Congregation's Future," and research by Arlin Rothage.

This model classifies churches as falling into four types: family churches, pastoral churches, program churches and corporation churches.

Although not strictly categorized by numbers, churches tend to fall into these categories based on average worship attendance, Witham said. For example, family churches usually average 50 or fewer people in attendance; pastoral churches 50 to 150; program churches 150 to 350; and corporation churches 350 or more.

Understanding these models could help both pastors and laity see the expectations present within the congregation and how those may become sources of conflict, Witham said. Often, conflict arises when a growing church is moving from one model to another and members don't understand why the demands on the pastor's time are changing, he said.

For example, in a family church, the pastor is expected to be a chaplain to the members, while leadership roles are assumed by patriarchs and matriarchs in the congregation, Witham said.

But in a pastoral church, the primary expectation of the pastor is to serve as a manager of the leadership team, he added. In this model, the pastor must be at the center of most church activities and must attend all functions.

In a program church, the pastor is expected to be a planner who works with other key leaders to ensure high-quality programs, Witham said.

In a corporation church, the congregation's personal connection with the pastor often is sacrificed due to the size of the church, he said. The pastor's emphasis shifts to planning for "quality worship."

Witham noted that every church has strengths, and no model is better than another. What's important, he said, is to understand the dynamics that make a church fit one particular model and not another.

Otherwise, problems could result, he predicted. "If a church that has been a program church is moving to become a pastoral church but keeps trying to function as a program church, the leaders are going to experience burnout."

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## **Texas pastor calls for cease-fire in music wars**

By Dan Martin

RIDGECREST, N.C. (ABP) -- The tension between traditional services and contemporary praise and worship style is one of the most explosive issues in churches today, Texas pastor John Bisagno says.

"I think the church faces two dilemmas -- two potential tragedies -- today," Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church of Houston, told a recent conference at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center in North Carolina.

"The first is that we forget the great music of the hymns of the church and the other is that we try to resist the tidal wave of the new praise music that is here to stay."

Bisagno said the charismatic movement has "stolen millions of Southern Baptists" not with its theology but by appealing to people's hearts while many Baptist churches "bottle up" their emotions in worship.

"We have said 'no' to emotion and 'no' to expression and finally that bottled-up expression and emotion have burst forth and there is a tidal wave of excitement in the new music that is everywhere," Bisagno said.

Bisagno, a longtime pastor and former music director, said solid teaching and exuberant worship are not mutually exclusive.

"I think we can go to a church where we have both sound doctrine and a good time. I am glad that we have discovered guitars and drums and 'getting with it,'" Bisagno said.

Bisagno cited critics on both sides of the issue, from critics who call contemporary services "disco church," to those who say traditional services are boring and not worshipful.

But Bisagno said style is not as important as the content of worship.

Bisagno noted that King David "one day danced before the Lord." When his wife ridiculed him, the Bible says he stopped and told her: "You have no right to judge me because my worship is not unto you. It is from my heart and it is unto my God."

He quoted the noted writer Elmer Towns who said that "worship is an act which takes us from where we are to where we want to be and where God wants us to be; the communication is imperative, but the mode of transportation is not."

"Some people worship God in cathedrals with rich traditional tones of the organ and the classical music of Europe. They travel in a Mercedes," Bisgano said, borrowing Towns' analogy. "Others worship God in simple wooden churches with a steeple pointing heavenward. They sing the gospel songs of Charles Wesley and Fanny Crosby. They travel in a Ford or a Chevy."

Bisgano continued that some worship with contemporary sounds of praise music with a gentle beat. They travel in a convertible sports coupe.

"But some worship God with the whine of a guitar and amplifiers to the max. These are the ones who travel on a motorcycle without a muffler.

"But they all arrive at the same destination if they all worship God from the heart."

The Houston pastor said "a pastor can do no greater service to his congregation than teaching them how to worship."

"I have wondered why, in the worship of the Bible, the Lord saw fit to preserve the words in the Psalms but not the music," he said. "Maybe it was because he knew that every generation would write its own music."

"And, you know, folks, things do change. If they didn't we would be singing Gregorian chants ... ."

Bisgano said "we are 180 degrees off base when we try to make music the issue of what is worship and what is not worship."

The only test of worship in the Bible is Jesus' saying that people should worship God in spirit and in truth, Bisgano said. "If music were important, he would have mentioned it. Case closed."

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## **Church's Agape Meal cooks up 'soul' food**

By Marv Knox

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- The first time Alvin Hanson came to Broadway Baptist Church's Agape Meal for homeless people, he followed a map a friend drew for him.

The second time, he followed his heart.

"A guy drew me a map and told me I should come here," Hanson recalled. "I came skeptical, but I saw love here. It changed my life."

With the help of Christian friends at the downtown congregation in Fort Worth, Texas, Hanson turned his life around. He's joined the church and sings in the choir. He helps the less fortunate. He's the proud daddy of a new baby.

And he's one of hundreds of homeless people touched by Broadway's Thursday night Agape Meal ministry.

Most of them haven't joined the church like Hanson, but about 100 are regular attenders at the family-style meal served by church members, Pastor Steve Shoemaker reported. And many more have found Christian love, compassion, help and food in the church's fellowship hall on Thursday nights.

Community ministry is not new at Broadway, which meets in a stately building in the middle of one of the city's roughest neighborhoods.

"We have had ministries in the community since the '60s," Shoemaker said. "We prepare daily sack lunches for the homeless, provide clothing for children and sponsor international ministries. Through the years, we've done much more."

But nothing has touched the church and its neighborhood quite like Agape Meal, he added.

Broadway started Agape Meal about two and a half years ago, Shoemaker said, noting several factors coalesced to make the ministry possible.

Church members felt compelled to action by the crying needs of people just beyond the walls of their building, he said. Then they were inspired by a similar ministry conducted by Church of the Savior in a tough Washington neighborhood. And a committed couple provided funds to get the ministry started.

"We try to make it a really nice meal," Shoemaker said of the Thursday evening event. "We use tablecloths and cut flowers and serve good food -- better than we serve our own members on Wednesday nights."

The meal draws an average of 200 "guests" from the community and 40-60 church members who prepare and serve the meal and sit at tables with the guests.

After dinner, all who want to stay spend about 45 minutes in worship, which involves both church members and guests in planning, leadership and participation.

Prayer time is a highlight, as people voice prayers for their deepest needs. Some speak about their battles with alcohol and drugs; others mention their desire to be reconciled with family, to hold down a job, to get well.

And after the worship service, Shoemaker serves the Lord's Supper individually in the chapel. "Communion is really moving," he noted.

"A lot of the people come here feeling they'll never have communion again. If they've lost their home, their faith community, maybe their family, they think they'll never be in a place where they can participate again."

Broadway members agree Agape Meal is a highlight of their week, a moment of community they anticipate eagerly.

"This is a remarkable marriage between theology and ... ministry," explained Carrie Zimmerman.

"It's led to a remarkable transformation in the lives of our volunteers," she said.

"They've seen a section of the world they wouldn't see any where else. Once our neighborhood guests enter our doors, everybody's on the same level. It's a picture of the wholeness of Christ's ministry."

"If Jesus were in Fort Worth today, he'd be here," said David Mallette, another church member.

"It's the most amazing experience," added Beth Dahlberg. "We're doing more than giving these folks food to fill their stomachs, which they can get lots of places. ... We're making friends."

Guests at Agape Meal said they also benefit from the relationships and weekly sessions together.

"The meal -- the food -- doesn't mean as much to me as the fellowship and the people around me," acknowledged Wayne Terry, a small homeless man who fights a daily battle with alcoholism and cirrhosis of the liver. "There are people here who really care.

"Everybody here pretty much knows me. They know my name. I'm a street person. I live on the streets. But bless their hearts, they care enough to give me encouragement to keep coming back."

Alvin Hanson felt that encouragement in a tangible way one night not long after he began attending the Agape Meal.

Hanson loves to sing, and Broadway members asked him -- a guest at the meal -- to sing during the worship service. That's not what he expected from a church with a world-class organ and a vaunted music program.

"They trusted my spirit to sing what's on my heart," Hanson recalled with gratitude. A new person now, he sings on Sundays with that organ and tries to stir music in homeless hearts on Thursday nights.

One participant who relates uniquely to both groups stressed the Agape Meal is a way all the participants share in the gospel.

"This is what the Lord told us to do -- take care of people who can't take care of themselves," said Mike Woody, a former prison inmate who now runs the church's Narrow Gate ministry to convicted felons.

"Agape Meal has brought two worlds together," Woody insisted. "I've seen both sides move from skepticism to love. ... But this is a happy place now. If it weren't for the happiness of the Broadway people, these homeless people wouldn't be happy."