

Associated Baptist Press

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Opponents attempting to discredit CBF, coordinator tells leadership group

By Bob Allen

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Opponents of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship are spreading unfair and harmful criticism about the moderate group, its top executive told elected leaders Feb. 25.

"There is in our midst a concerted, well-funded effort to undermine the integrity of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship," Coordinator Daniel Vestal told the group's Coordinating Council, meeting Feb. 25-27 in Atlanta.

Adversaries of the moderate group falsely accuse it of not believing the Bible, Vestal said, and also of promoting a gay-and-lesbian agenda and supporting abortion. He said he is often asked what is the Fellowship's "real" agenda, and he responds by quoting its mission statement that the group exists to "network, empower and mobilize Baptist Christians."

"That is our real agenda," he said.

Vestal said the attacks create a dilemma. "How much do you respond to the accusations, and how much do you engage those making the accusations, and how much do you ignore it?"

"We face some unfair criticism that hurts a lot of good people," Vestal said.

The CBF leader said the 8-year-old Fellowship is continuing to grow, adding more than 100 new contributing churches last year. "The most dramatic growth that is taking place in CBF life is taking place at the state and regional levels," Vestal said.

Sixteen state-and-regional Fellowship groups now have paid coordinators, Vestal said. Fourteen have been hired within the last two years.

Vestal said building infrastructure in states and regions is good for the organization in the long run, but it has contributed to a budget plateau that is putting a squeeze on national and international ministries.

"There is funding going to the state and regional levels that is no longer coming to the national level, at least in undesignated (funds)," he said.

Finance chairman David Currie reported that overall contributions to the national CBF are up 3.3 percent this fiscal year to date, totaling more than \$7.8 million. The global-missions offering is up 10 percent and a category of "other" gifts totaling \$909,000 is up 15 percent, said Currie, of San Angelo, Texas. But undesignated gifts, the main portion of the Fellowship's spending plan, are down 1.6 percent from last year.

The Coordinating Council approved a proposed budget for 1999-2000 anticipating income 5 percent above this year's spending plan.

The \$15,575,712 budget proposal includes \$669,530 in new dollars for priority needs identified in extensive discussions by Fellowship staff. Other identified needs will go unmet in 1999-2000 because of lack of funds, Vestal said. Funding all the priority needs would require an additional \$2 million in undesignated receipts.

"A lot of things were left on the cutting floor," Currie said.

In other business, the Coordinating Council voted to tap reserve funds to grant \$50,000 next year to the independent newspaper Baptists Today. The 16-year-old paper, which nearly went under last year, has restructured its board, hired new staff and been redesigned but still needs help with marketing, council members were told.

"Baptists Today impacts all of CBF," said Cynthia Wise, chairwoman of the Baptist Principles task group to which the Macon, Ga., - based paper relates. "We do not want Baptists Today to fail."

Since hiring a new editor seven months ago, Wise said, the paper has increased its circulation from 7,000 to 8,000, raised \$280,000 in contributions and already surpassed its annual budget for advertising revenue. A new Internet Web site is receiving 6,000 hits a month, said Wise, of Dothan, Ala.

Baptists Today Editor Bob Ballance said the grant would provide about one-fifth of the paper's annual budget.

"The problem right now is we've got just enough money to put [Baptists Today] together and put it in the mail, but we don't have enough money to make it grow," Ballance said. He said the paper has several efforts planned to promote circulation, including distributing 6,000 copies at this summer's biennial meeting of the 1.5 million-member American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

"We feel like if we succeed you succeed," Ballance said. "We also feel if we don't, it might make some commentary on the moderate movement itself."

"I know we're a newspaper, and we're supposed to be objective," Ballance said, "but if you'll help us, you better believe we're going to help you. Nobody in this room has more love for CBF than I do."

The original proposal called for the CBF to commit a total of \$150,000 to Baptists Today over three years. That motion was amended to a one-year grant by the Fellowship's Advisory Council, however, after an hour-long discussion of procedural concerns.

During a plenary session, the \$50,000, one-year grant passed by a clear majority on a voice vote, but several council members voted "No."

"I am really struggling with this," Donna Forrester, a council member from Greenville, S.C., said before the vote "I don't know if anybody is more of a supporter of Baptists Today or Bob Ballance than I am."

“I have no reservations about the importance of Baptists Today in moderate life or in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in particular,” she said, “but I do have concerns about taking one thing off the cutting-room floor and using precious reserve funds, when undesignated funds are down.”

Currie said while the finance group supported the funding request, the Fellowship must stop dipping into reserves to fund projects. Last year the Coordinating Council used emergency funds to provide startup money for a new Christian lifestyle magazine, FaithWorks, published by Associated Baptist Press, another Fellowship “partner” organization.

The Fellowship has about \$1.3 million in emergency-reserve funds, Currie said, far below the level it would need to operate in a financial crisis.

The 1999-2000 CBF budget will be recommended at the Fellowship’s June 24-26 general assembly in Birmingham, Ala. It projects expenditures of \$9,823,572 for global missions; \$2,065,226 for Baptist principles, which includes Fellowship-supported seminaries and divinity schools; and \$1,602,000 for administration. Other main expenditures are \$949,019 for communications, \$585,648 for church resources, \$367,987 for networking, \$117,199 for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Foundation, and \$65,058 for reserves and CBF initiatives.

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Search for CBF missions leader progressing, committee reports

By Bob Allen and Robert O’Brien

ATLANTA (ABP) -- A committee seeking a new missions leader for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has completed a candidate profile and is ready to begin narrowing its search.

A search committee working to nominate a successor to Global Missions Coordinator Keith Parks, who retires this summer, has met four times, asked Fellowship missionaries for input and received more than 20 recommendations for the new staff member, said Sanford Smith, chairman of the search group.

Smith said the group plans to meet March 8 to begin narrowing its field of candidates. “I’m excited about the possibility, I believe -- I hesitate to say this -- but I hope we can have somebody by June,” Smith said.

The Fellowship’s Global Missions Ministry Group also appointed two missionary couples at a Feb. 25-27 meeting of the CBF Coordinating Council.

Sam and Melody Harrell, both born and reared in East Africa, were appointed as international coordinators to live in Nairobi, Kenya. They will mobilize resources of African Christians for ministries in World A, the one fourth of the globe with little or no access to the gospel. He was born in Nairobi and she was born in Jinja, Uganda, to now-retired Baptist-missionary parents.

He is a graduate of North Carolina State University and Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Va. She is a graduate of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

Before appointment by CBF, Sam Harrell served in Kenya as a teacher in two Christian schools and as a tentmaker missionary. Melody Harrell is a former teacher in Birmingham and a tentmaker missionary and teacher in Nairobi.

Brian and Claire McAtee were appointed as career missionaries to do international-student ministry in Boston after serving two years in CBF's Global Service Corps in a similar role in Athens, Ga.

A native of Greenville, S.C., he is the son of missionary parents and a graduate of the University of South Carolina and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. She is a native of Gladewater, Texas, and a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and Southwestern Seminary.

In other personnel moves, John and Revonda Deal, a career couple assigned to work with internationals in the diplomatic community in Washington, D.C., will transfer to Atlanta. He will become associate coordinator for administration for the global-missions office, and she will work in other CBF-related ministries. They will retain their career-missionary status.

Lonnie and Fran Turner, a career couple who now work with the diplomatic community in Brussels, Belgium, will transfer to Washington to succeed the Deals.

Tom and Beth Ogburn, career international coordinators in Asia, will transfer to the United States to assume direction of CBF's Adopt-A-People program. They succeed Philip and Shantel Vestal, who complete a two-year term in May in that role in CBF's Global Service Corps. The Ogburns will also work to mobilize Christian resources and coordinate prayer in North America to focus on ministries in World A.

In other business conducted at the meeting in Atlanta, the Global Missions Ministry Group appointed a subcommittee to study its relationship with Friends of New Churches in light of a recent internal dispute at the Knoxville, Tenn., -based organization.

Several Friends of New Churches board members resigned recently after a failed attempt to fire the organization's executive director, Will Carter. A spokesman for the board majority said concerns about Carter's leadership were unfounded.

The CBF subcommittee will bring a recommendation in June concerning funding of Friends of New Churches, according to a written report, along with recommendations concerning accountability in "partnership relationships."

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SBC retains 'transitional' budget for at least two more years

By Mark Wingfield

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- A Southern Baptist Convention spending plan that has been labeled "transitional" for two years will be unchanged next year, the SBC Executive Committee decided Feb. 23.

The same percentage splits that have divided Cooperative Program gifts among various SBC agencies and institutions in the two-year transitional period since a major denominational restructuring will be retained at least for the next two years.

One stated rationale for restructuring the SBC was to send more money to "front-line missions" such as church planting and international missions. The major beneficiaries of funding increases to date, however, have been seminaries, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission and the Executive Committee itself.

The International Mission Board, hailed as the flagship missions enterprise of Southern Baptists, is projected to receive more money in next year's unified budget, as total receipts from churches and state

conventions increase. The IMB's slice of the Cooperative Program pie, however, is 50 percent, the same percentage it had prior to restructuring.

Executive Committee leaders do note, however, that the IMB can expect to receive more new dollars in next year's SBC budget, because by the end of the year it will be getting a true 50 percent of all Cooperative Program receipts. In the past, half of gifts received in excess of the budget were set aside for convention-wide capital needs. The capital-needs budget is scheduled to be phased out sometime during the 1999-2000 fiscal year.

The SBC's other direct-missions entity, the North American Mission Board, was created in the denominational restructuring plan by merging three old agencies, the Home Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission and Radio and Television Commission. In the transitional SBC budgets since restructuring -- and now in the planned budgets for the next two years -- NAMB has received 22.79 percent of all Cooperative Program gifts, less than the combined 24.15 percent given to NAMB's predecessor agencies.

Meanwhile, the total portion of SBC funds given to the seminaries has grown from 20.4 percent before restructuring to 21.64 percent now. Some seminaries have benefited from this increase more than others, due to the formula by which the seminary line item is divided based on a rolling average of enrollments. The biggest winner has been Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. The biggest loser has been Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, headed by Richard Land, now receives 1.49 percent of the SBC budget, up from 0.99 percent before restructuring.

Executive Committee members drafted their proposal for the 1999-2000 budget in a day-long subcommittee meeting in Nashville Feb. 22, then presented it to the full committee the next day. The \$159.58 million budget must be approved by messengers to the SBC annual meeting in June.

Projected allocations, according to the proposed budget, are: International Mission Board (50 percent), \$79.79 million; North American Mission Board (22.79 percent), \$36.37 million; the six seminaries (21.64 percent), \$34.53 million; Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (1.49 percent), \$2.38 million; Annuity Board (0.76 percent), \$1.2 million; and the SBC Operating Budget administered by the Executive Committee (3.32 percent), \$5.3 million.

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Retired seminary president remembered as 'giant'

By Mark Wingfield

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Former Southern Baptist leader Robert Naylor was eulogized at a Feb. 24 memorial service as a passionate preacher, adept administrator and faithful friend.

Naylor, president emeritus of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, died Feb. 21 at age 90. Although a cause of death was not cited, he had been diagnosed in November with Lou Gehrig's disease.

"A giant has walked among us, and we shall miss him," said a tearful Ken Hemphill, Southwestern's current president and one of four speakers at Naylor's funeral, held at Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth.

Naylor was pastor at Travis Avenue from 1952 through 1958, before assuming the seminary presidency in September 1958.

He led the seminary for 20 years, presiding over an era of explosive growth that established Southwestern as the world's largest theological seminary. During Naylor's tenure, enrollment grew from 2,400 to 4,100, faculty increased from 53 to 125 and the school's annual budget grew from \$1.3 million to \$6.3 million.

Naylor presided over a massive expansion of the seminary's fund-raising efforts, as well as construction of several new buildings and renovation of virtually every existing building on campus.

Hemphill hailed Naylor as a man of integrity, who personified the charge he gave to incoming students at each semester's opening chapel service. Even after his retirement, Naylor returned to address new students, asking them to stand as he pronounced this blessing and warning: "I officially declare you Southwesterners. And you'd be better off dead than bringing dishonor to that name."

Naylor "personified what it means to be a Southwesterner," Hemphill said.

"Perhaps no single president in the history of this school will have had such an impact on the seminary," Hemphill said, referring not only to Naylor's 20 years as president, but his 17 years as a seminary trustee and 21 years as president emeritus.

John Earl Seelig, one of Naylor's closest friends and the seminary's retired vice president for public affairs, praised Naylor as "a man of faith who loved God's word."

"He was my mentor ... , my friend," Seelig said. "But he was more than my friend. ... Some people come into your life and leave footprints on your heart, and you are never, ever the same again."

James Coggin, who followed Naylor as pastor at Travis Avenue, called Naylor "the greatest preacher I ever heard." Naylor was a "great administrator, great organizer, great promoter ... but above all those, he was a great, great preacher," Coggin said.

Michael Dean, Travis Avenue's current pastor, noted the symbolism of Naylor's funeral being held in the church's vast, ornate sanctuary, a worship center designed and built under Naylor's direction as pastor. "This sanctuary, constructed 40 years ago, was birthed in the heart and spirit of Robert Naylor," Dean said.

The former seminary president was "an enormous figure in the kingdom of God for this generation," he added.

An estimated 1,700 friends, family members, colleagues, former students and Baptist leaders attended the funeral. The Seminary Chorus sang two selections, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" and "Hallelujah Chorus."

Seelig noted that both Naylor and his wife, Goldia, enrolled at Southwestern at such a young age that they had to receive special permission from then-president L.R. Scarborough. Naylor had graduated from East Central State University in Ada, Okla., at 19 and immediately came to Southwestern. But the minimum age for seminary enrollment at the time was 20.

Naylor earned a master-of-theology degree from Southwestern in 1932 and later was awarded honorary doctorates from Ouachita Baptist University and Texas Christian University. In addition to his pastorate at Travis Avenue, he served as pastor of churches in Ada, Okla.; Nashville, Ark.; Malvern, Ark.; Arkadelphia, Ark.; Enid, Okla.; and Columbia, S.C.

He is survived by his wife; a daughter, Rebekah Naylor, a medical missionary in India; two sons, Robert E. Naylor Jr. of West Chester, Pa., and Richard D. Naylor of Austin; a brother, William Naylor of Duncan, Okla.; a sister, Francene Mounts of Guthrie, Okla.; three grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Texas Baptists establish committee to defend 'slanderous attacks'

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- A special committee will be appointed to defend leaders of the Baptist General Convention of Texas against "slanderous attacks" by critics of the BGCT.

A motion to create the committee was presented to the BGCT Executive Board Feb. 23 by Dan Curry, pastor of South Oaks Baptist Church in Arlington.

Curry made the motion in an emotional speech during the time for miscellaneous business in the Executive Board's winter meeting. His motion passed overwhelmingly.

"I'm tired of the misleading and slanderous attacks on our leaders," Curry said. "I believe it's time to take a stand and defend our brothers and our state convention and say enough is enough."

Although not identifying these critics, Curry cited what he called unfounded allegations about the beliefs of BGCT leaders on issues such as homosexuality and abortion.

BGCT leaders have expressed concern in the past that their beliefs and convention actions have been misrepresented by people associated with Southern Baptists of Texas, a newly formed conservative state convention created to align more closely with the Southern Baptist Convention.

A video containing allegations against BGCT leaders recently has been circulating across the state, presumably distributed by parties interested in pushing Texas Baptist churches into closer alignment with the SBC's conservative leadership. Last fall, a document purporting to contrast the views of BGCT leaders and SBC leaders was circulated in some churches without explanation of its origin. Southern Baptists of Texas leaders publicly disavowed any role in distributing such a document.

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Charismatic worship becoming the norm in growing numbers of SBC churches

By Ken Walker

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (ABP) -- Despite recent attempts to stifle charismatic influences in the Southern Baptist Convention, practices including casting out demons, anointing with oil and speaking in tongues occur at Chattanooga's Central Baptist Church -- and at other Southern Baptist churches across the nation as well.

That might not sit well with Florida Baptists, who expelled three churches for neo-Pentecostalism in 1996; in Missouri, where a charismatic SBC church was recently voted out of its local association; or in Georgia, where an amendment to exclude churches involved in charismatic practices narrowly failed last November.

Ironically, those involved in this growing movement believe conventional charismatic labels don't accurately describe what they believe is God's way of bringing renewal to the nation's largest non-Catholic faith group. This movement will be celebrated at Central Baptist's "Fresh Oil and New Wine" conference March 7-11. The church expects 2,000 to attend, including some 500 SBC pastors.

Senior pastor Ron Phillips, who testifies to a life-changing experience with the Holy Spirit in 1989, said he knows of several dozen churches that are experiencing a revival as a result of last year's inaugural meeting.

"'Charismatic' has become a label, and it's too narrow a word for what God is doing," said Phillips, whose denominational credentials include past service as president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention and chairman of the SBC Home (now North American) Mission Board.

"There's been a lot of fascination with spiritual gifts and manifestations, but this movement is bigger than that," Phillips said. "I don't think it can be stopped, no matter how much people protest."

Dwain Miller agrees. The pastor of Second Baptist Church in El Dorado, Ark., will be one of the speakers at this year's conference. He joins such high-profile names as TV talk-show host James Robison, evangelist-author Jack Taylor and charismatic Houston pastor Wallace Henley.

Miller traces the beginning of his spiritual renewal to three visits to Pensacola, Fla., where a revival broke out several years ago at Brownsville Assembly of God. Those trips helped strip away his prejudice and pride, he said, and helped him conclude that the great revival prophesied in the Old Testament book of Joel is for today.

Miller said he sensed the same spirit at last year's Fresh Oil and New Wine conference in Chattanooga.

"The Holy Spirit peeled away layers of sin and disobedience in my heart and in the lives of our staff members," Miller said of the event. "He gave us a renewed vision."

Associate pastor Jerry Gay claims he was healed of a ruptured disk at the conference. At first skeptical of what he was observing, Gay resisted an invitation to stand for prayer after Taylor preached on healing. But the next morning during a seminar Gay suddenly exclaimed that he could feel his arm and neck.

"He was convinced then," Miller said. "It totally transformed his life."

Similar unusual manifestations continued last fall when Phillips visited El Dorado for a week of special services. Miller said 300 people were delivered from afflictions including addiction to crack cocaine, alcoholism, depression and fractured marriages.

Before the Chattanooga pastor spoke the first night, one woman crumpled to the floor and lay there for 15 minutes. Her life was changed, the pastor said, and to this day she walks around with a glow on her face.

"Nobody could deny it was God," he said. "That thrust our meetings into a sense of expectancy. We've experienced more growth and baptisms than we've seen in a long, long time."

The signs at Second Baptist haven't included tongues, however, a traditional litmus test for charismatic churches. Though Miller said he isn't opposed to glossalalia, he tries to follow the apostle Paul's admonition to seek the giver instead of the gift.

Tongues have also been missing from services at First Baptist Church of Shelbyville, Tenn. But Pastor Drew Hayes said his church began experiencing a turnaround in 1997, after he preached a 10-part series on the Holy Spirit. The church has added more than 200 people since then, 134 during the 1997-98 church year alone.

Hayes said God also directed him to begin praying for healings and miracles and to make First Baptist a house of prayer. The church has also added a Sunday service featuring a praise band, raised hands and the kind of lively music that upsets traditionalists.

"I think the (Fresh Oil) conference was further confirmation of what the Lord was already doing in our church and my life," he said. "It reawakened us to a move of the Holy Spirit in a way not often acknowledged by mainstream Southern Baptist churches."

Hayes believes Baptists and charismatics have a lot to learn from each other.

Of the newcomers at First Baptist with church backgrounds, many are former Pentecostals. They lacked the kind of solid biblical training emphasized by Southern Baptists, the pastor said.

However, Hayes said Pentecostals engage in practices that are “indisputably” biblical. Such traditions as anointing with oil and praying for and believing in divine healing ought to be the norm in SBC churches, he said.

“I can’t imagine why any Southern Baptist church would not want to cultivate an atmosphere where that can happen,” said Hayes, who recently has seen two members healed of cancer and others freed of depression or drug and alcohol addictions. “I never want to go back to traditional Southern Baptist worship.”

Nor does Phillips, even though he acknowledges the unusual atmosphere at Central Baptist has stirred up controversy among SBC pastors.

Among the unconventional things he has done lately was inviting well-known charismatic pastor Rod Parsley to speak at Central Baptist. For the 1998 Christmas drama he used a video clip of charismatic evangelist Steve Hill in the church’s Christmas drama. The Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) publishing house, not Southern Baptists’, distributes Phillips’ most recent book.

“I’ve lost my place in line,” he said, acknowledging the unpopularity of his stand. “But what more could people want than the fullness of the Spirit? There is a freedom that comes in knowing the Spirit and having an intimate relationship with him.”

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Views of Chattanooga pastor become focus of controversy

By Ken Walker

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (ABP) -- As the leader in what many consider a revived charismatic movement in the Southern Baptist Convention, Ron Phillips has become a controversial figure. Among points of contention is his description of an unusual encounter with the Holy Spirit.

In his latest book, “Vanquishing The Enemy,” the pastor of Central Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tenn., writes of hearing the Lord speak to him in an audible voice in 1989 while he was attending a Southern Baptist conference in New Mexico. The Lord led him to read Psalms 91-95, which came alive and turned his room into a sanctuary where the presence of Christ swept over him, he said.

Four years later, he received the “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” which he now teaches is a spiritual gift that is valid for today.

While such reports disturb many Southern Baptists, Phillips retains admirers among traditionalists and charismatics alike.

Before the 1998 “Fresh Oil and New Wine” conference at Phillips’ church, Phil Hoskins had never seen people falling on the floor during worship. It happened when a group of pastors went forward for a special prayer.

While the pastor of Higher Ground Baptist Church in Kingsport, Tenn., didn’t understand being “slain in the Spirit,” he told his music pastor he wouldn’t criticize it.

“I said, ‘I don’t understand what’s going on, but I’m not attacking it,’” he recalled. “‘I don’t want to be guilty of blaspheming the Holy Spirit.’”

Nor should others spend their time criticizing Phillips or Central Baptist Church, he said. While speaking at conferences sponsored by SBC evangelist Bailey Smith, Hoskins said he has encountered criticism for his association with the Chattanooga pastor. But, he replied, “They need to direct their attention to Southern Baptists who don’t believe the Bible.”

Hoskins has a personal reason for supporting Phillips. It involves the birth of a stillborn child three years ago, after his wife had already suffered through four miscarriages. She didn’t smile for a long time, Hoskins said, while he fought depression and wondered if he would be able to remain in the ministry.

Months after the tragedy, he said, he felt led to invite the Chattanooga pastor to speak at his church. The scheduled four nights of services stretched into two weeks and registered 80 professions of faith.

One night at dinner Phillips asked his host what was wrong, saying he sensed a spirit of heaviness on him. Hoskins burst into tears. Phillips gathered deacons around Hoskins and his wife and prayed against the demons troubling them.

“It was like someone lifted a tractor trailer from me,” Hoskins said. “I fell on my knees and cried. God’s doing some unusual things at Central Baptist, but I won’t say anything against their ministry.”

Southern California pastor Richard Moore said he is thrilled with the impact the southern Tennessee church has had on his life.

After attending last spring’s conference, Moore took his family to visit Central during summer vacation. When they returned home, his once-shy son began writing songs and singing at various churches with his older sister.

The pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Holtville, Calif., reported that other remarkable experiences followed.

Last fall, his mother-in-law -- suffering from congestive heart failure -- collapsed during church. He summoned several deacons and they anointed her with oil and prayed for her healing. Later at the hospital, doctors said her heart was fine, and her lungs looked clearer than they had in the past.

In December, Moore became the first pastor to pray at the swearing-in ceremonies of a county government official, and his growing church recently expanded its sanctuary.

“I’m seeing God changing hearts and I think Ron’s conference is changing minds,” said Moore. “There is probably such an animosity against spiritual renewal. But it’s been a wonderful transformation.

“It was a tremendous time for me,” Moore said of last year’s meeting. “More than anything, there was a powerful anointing. To have Southern Baptists on our faces for hours and hours without worrying about lunch was powerful.”

Alongside the exuberant praise and worship music, laying on of hands and anointing with oil, the pastor said a participant prophesied that God had set an open door before him. His ministry opportunities would be multiplied, the speaker promised.

That come true in late August, Moore said. He went to preach at a Mexican church, expecting a crowd of 15 or 20. More than 300 crammed into the building. Two months later, he was given an opportunity to share his testimony with 1,000 high school students in the same city.

Other Southern Baptists, such as International Mission Board President Jerry Rankin, speak fondly of Phillips.

“I think Ron is more balanced than is being perceived by some of the things he’s doing,” said Rankin, whose own experience with tongues came under scrutiny during his election. “There’s quite a lot of other churches like that. They’ve been blessed but they’re not promoting it.”

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Southern Baptist history ‘hijacked’ by anti-charismatic view, pastor says

By Ken Walker

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (ABP) -- While one resource book says 20 percent of all Baptists identify themselves as charismatic, Southern Baptists have largely been perceived as anti-charismatic.

But Ron Phillips insists that’s only because the denomination’s history was “hijacked” by “cessationists” -- those who believe speaking in tongues and other spiritual gifts ceased long ago. Popularized by Scottish pastor J.N. Darby in the 1800s, this theological view gained wider support through C.I. Scofield’s popular 1909 study Bible.

There is a growing network of SBC pastors who believe spiritual gifts described in the New Testament are still valid for today, Phillips said. But anti-charismatic votes like the one taken at the Georgia Baptist Convention last November are proof of the tremendous opposition they face, he added.

Yet, the pastor Central Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tenn., contends such hostility does not square with Baptists’ historical roots.

“I’m convinced Baptists are part of a radical reformation,” Phillips said. “Like (Swiss church reformer) Ulrich Zwingli said, ‘Baptists have been troubling the church for 1,300 years.’” And, Phillips added, “There has never been a revival without manifestations.”

Southern Baptists have participated in charismatic-style expressions in the past, Phillips said, such as frontier revivals which according to written descriptions featured ecstatic worship and slaying in the Spirit.

Even the legendary Billy Graham, the most famous Southern Baptist of this century, has endorsed tongues as a spiritual gift -- along with other so-called “charismatic” practices including divine healing and the laying on of hands.

“As we approach the end of the age I believe we will see a dramatic recurrence of signs and wonders which will demonstrate the power of God to a skeptical world,” Graham wrote in his 1978 book “The Holy Spirit.”

Graham cautioned against too much emphasis on spiritual gifts, however, recalling a friend who was divinely healed and became so obsessed with signs and wonders he took his eyes off Jesus. Tongues in particular must be used carefully, Graham said, because they are the least important spiritual gift, are not a sign of salvation and can be easily abused.

Still, the potential for misuse alone is not reason enough to abolish charismatics from Southern Baptist life, advocates like Phillips argue.

Richard Moore, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Holtville, Calif., used to follow the fundamentalist, anti-charismatic teachings drilled into him by his former pastor. But when that pastor’s views changed, he encouraged Moore to consider a new theological perspective as well.

Like Phillips, the California pastor's readings of history helped change his mind. Learning about frontier-era evangelists, who saw outpourings of the Holy Spirit in their meetings, coupled with modern phenomena like charismatic-led revivals in Toronto and Pensacola, Fla., provided evidence he couldn't deny.

"My heart began to open up, because I had read history," Moore said. After he began to view such manifestations as valid, he said: "I wanted more. I didn't want to be a dead Christian."

Despite his boast that everything happening in the well-publicized Pensacola revival also takes place at his church, Phillips doesn't cling to charismatic dogma. For example, he requires that all of his church's deacons be Spirit-filled. But after praying for them, he trusts the Lord to fill them, saying a bold witness is as much a sign of the Holy Spirit as speaking in tongues.

Still, he said, Southern Baptists must decide whether there's a place at the table for people who are called charismatics.

"This isn't a political entity," he said. "We don't have any fight in us for brothers. We're discipling people while teaching them about gifts. When people begin to move in the Spirit, Satan unleashes terrible forces, mostly from traditionalists and religionists."

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