



Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Bob Allen
Executive editor: Greg Warner

Phone: 800.340.6626
Fax: 904.262.7745
E-mail: bob@abpnews.com

July 6, 2000

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

(00-59)

Memphis, Tennessee

JUL 14 2000

IN THIS ISSUE:

- CBF kicks off meeting with missions celebration
- Panelists say court major election issue, but churches should stay out of politics
- Texans vote to form state CBF chapter
- CBF leaders dispute account of reporter abuse

CBF kicks off meeting with missions celebration

By Phyllis Thompson

ORLANDO (ABP) -- Seminary students tossed oversized, inflatable globes around the Orange County Convention Center, and a 200-voice youth choir sang praise songs accompanied by drums, guitars and a brass band as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship kicked off its annual meeting with a missions emphasis June 29.

Five CBF missionaries sang "He's Got the Whole World" in the languages of the people they serve. A new hymn written in honor of CBF's Global Missions co-coordinators Barbara and Gary Baldrige was introduced.

Highlighting a celebratory opening plenary session entitled "Living Missions: 'Come'" were an interview with the Baldriges by CBF moderator-elect Jim Baucom and a commissioning service for nine new missions workers.

The Baldriges spoke of their vision for CBF missions. "We inherited a firm foundation laid by Keith Parks, one of integrity and credibility," said Barbara Baldrige. "Now we must build on it."

"We want to reach out to all the marginalized peoples of the world," said Gary Baldrige. "We want to reach out to the poorest of the poor, those with AIDS, those who are homeless -- the outcasts that no one else cares for wherever they are."

The Baldriges spoke often of "a world without borders," which has long been a CBF motto for reaching out to people with the gospel. "There shouldn't be barriers of countries, churches, denominations or races," said Gary Baldrige. "We're here to work with Christians of other backgrounds, with government organizations and with many different kinds of partners. This is the very essence of doing missions in the 21st century."

The group commissioned seven new career missionaries, one Global Service Corps missionary and one Envoy. Global Service Corps missionaries serve for two years at their own expense; Envoys perform ministry tasks while working at secular jobs.

These additions bring the CBF total missions personnel count to 140.

Anne Burton, who graduates from George W. Truett Theological Seminary in August, will work with international students in Los Angeles. She is a native of Oklahoma City and a graduate of Baylor University. Burton's appointment follows a commitment to missions throughout her high school and college years.

Lynn and Mike Hutchinson, also appointed to work with internationals, will serve in Paris, France. Lynn is a native of Tennessee and Mike was born in Alabama. Both are graduates of William Carey College in Mississippi; Lynn earned her graduate degree in social work at the University of Southern Mississippi and Mike graduated from New Orleans Theological Seminary. The Hutchinsons served 12 years in Africa with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. They live in Long Beach, Miss.

Craig and Susan Owen, both native Texans and graduates of Texas A & M University, will go to Southeast Asia as missionaries to an unreached people group. Craig, a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, is associate pastor at Southmont Baptist Church in Denton, Texas. Susan is a chemical engineer.

Anita and Jack Snell will serve as associate coordinators for mission teams in Southeast Asia. He was born in Florida; she in Alabama. Both are graduates of Samford University. Anita is a music teacher. Jack, a graduate of Southeastern Seminary, has been a pastor since 1966. The Snells live in Jacksonville, Fla., where he is pastor of Hendricks Avenue Baptist Church. He is a past member of the CBF Coordinating Council and former chair of the Global Missions Ministry Group. The couple has worked as volunteers on several CBF-sponsored mission trips.

Michelle Darrah, a Baltimore native, will serve in Southeast Asia as a Global Service Corps missionary. A graduate of California Baptist College and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, she has worked for the past three years as administrative assistant to Coordinator Daniel Vestal at the CBF offices in Atlanta. She will teach English and work as administrative assistant to international coordinators in Southeast Asia, Erika and Kent Parks.

Lisa Orr has been approved as an Envoy to Nairobi, Kenya. She will teach at the Rosslyn Academy and will also work with Fellowship missionaries Melody and Sam Harrell in their Kids for Kids program and the Arms of Jesus Orphanage. Orr, a member of Snyder Memorial Baptist Church in Fayetteville, N.C., became acquainted with the Harrells during a mission trip to Nairobi in 1999.

-30-

Panelists say court major election issue, but churches should stay out of politics

By Kenny Byrd

ORLANDO, Fla. (ABP) -- People of faith should understand a lot is riding on the selection of the next U.S. president, but churches should avoid engaging in partisan electioneering, advised a panel of experts discussing religion and politics during the annual Cooperative Baptist Fellowship gathering.

Meeting June 30, members of the Religious Liberty Council elected new officers and posed questions to the panelists. The RLC is the membership arm of the Baptist Joint Committee, a Washington-based supporter of church-state separation.

The RLC first formed as a way to allow individuals to continue financial support to the BJC after the Southern Baptist Convention defunded the agency. The RLC now has nearly 1,000 members.

Hal Bass, professor of political science at Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Ark., said the current relationship between religion and politics in the United States is unparalleled with any time in history.

Bass said there have been examples of fundamentalist movements seeking power and achieving it, and also of civilizations that lost their faith-based moorings and declined. However, "Trying to draw conclusions and trying to act on the basis of those conclusions for the here and now is not a very profitable enterprise," Bass said.

Carole Shields, co-chair of the board of People For the American Way Foundation, said church-state separation, civil rights and workers' rights, are at risk in the upcoming presidential election. "One [Supreme Court] justice can change some very important decisions, including church-state separation," Shields said.

She pointed to a PFAW publication called "Courting Disaster: How a Scalia-Thomas Supreme Court Would Endanger Our Rights and Freedoms." She said opinions written by Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas show that if their voices were the majority, civil rights and worker's rights would be rolled back. She said their views would hurt laws protecting the environment, religious liberty and others.

"Clearly a school-voucher proposal, for example, is likely not to go our way if (Scalia and Thomas') votes were to dominate or be in the majority," Shields said. She also pointed out that presidential candidate George W. Bush has said he would appoint justices with beliefs similar to Scalia and Thomas. A Bush spokesman has told Associated Baptist Press that Bush would appoint justices who will "strictly interpret the Constitution and will not make law from the bench."

Steven Engel, rabbi at the Congregation of Liberal Judaism in Orlando, said politicians ought to balance the "shoulds and should nots" of government actions. "On the one hand a government should protect people to practice their own religious freedom. ... But no government should impose its own form of religion on its people."

Engel addressed a question about the posting of the Ten Commandments in public schools and places. "In my tradition ... we have a commandment that's a little different than the Ten Commandments in many Christian Bibles." He added, "Now when we put the Ten Commandments on the wall, whose commandments are you going to use? What interpretation, what translation are you going to use? ... Is it, 'Do not murder,' or 'Do not kill?' What's the difference between those two?"

Melissa Rogers, general counsel of the BJC, said that both Vice President Al Gore or Texas Gov. George Bush have endorsed an unconstitutional proposal to fund religious social service ministries with tax funds -- known as "charitable choice."

Rogers said: "Whoever wins, we're stuck with charitable choice. Regulation will come along with government funding and that will effect the autonomy of churches."

Rogers also outlined permissible and impermissible conduct by churches during an election season.

"Churches may not engage in substantial efforts to influence legislation (known as a lobbying limitation)," she said. "On the other hand, churches are flatly banned from participating or intervening in any political campaigns. ... Violating these limits can jeopardize a church's tax-exempt status."

Pointing to true examples of inappropriate church electioneering, Rogers listed some "don'ts" for churches:

- Don't hold a fund raiser for a political candidate at a Buddhist temple or a Baptist church.
- Don't buy a newspaper ad saying that a vote for a specific candidate is a sin.
- Don't accept an invitation from a candidate to designate a particular Sunday as "candidate Y for governor day."
- Don't slip inserts into the church bulletin listing candidates who are recommended for public office.
- Don't invite candidates to the church and have the minister tell the church, "This man should be the next president of the United States."

Rogers said churches may conduct voter-registration efforts as long as they are nonpartisan. Churches can also invite candidates to speak at a church forum on the issues, as long as all the candidates for that office are invited. And, she said ministers can work on campaigns in their personal capacity but should never do so as a spokesman for the church.

RLC members gathered at the luncheon elected Bill Wilson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Waynesboro, Va., and Suzii Paynter, an education specialist in Austin, Texas, to serve as co-chairs of the organization. Bryan Brock, minister of education at First Baptist Gaithersburg in Maryland, was elected secretary of the RLC.

The RLC also heard a letter of acceptance from Grady Cothen, who received the Baptist Joint Committee's J. M. Dawson Religious Liberty Award.

Cothen, a former Southern Baptist Convention leader who was unable to attend due to poor health, said the country is "only a breath away from the blood-soaked ground of John Leland and James Madison." He said Baptists "little suspected that by the year 2000 we would be fighting other so-called Baptists for the soul of the nation. Today we stand in peril of losing the separation of church and state, protected only by the fragile promises of questionable politicians."

Cothen said the effort to unite church and state "is being led by those who call themselves Baptists." He said, "Once again, the spiritual and civic welfare of the many rests on the stubborn commitment of the few."

-30-

Texans vote to form state CBF chapter

By Marv Knox

ORLANDO, Fla. (ABP) -- Texans have formed a state organization to affiliate with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Texas participants at the Fellowship's June 29-July 1 General Assembly in Orlando, Fla., voted unanimously to create the state organization and to launch a search for an executive director immediately.

The Atlanta-based Fellowship is a network of moderate Baptists who work together to support missionaries, provide church resources, support such endeavors as ministerial training, ethics advocacy and production of Christian literature, and create Christian community around common convictions and interests. The group is composed of current and former Southern Baptists who object to the conservative leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Although Texas is the last state or region to create a Fellowship organization, it is not a newcomer to the 9-year-old national Fellowship. Texas is home to the largest number of Fellowship-affiliated churches (415) and provides the largest amount of money (almost \$3.5 million) of any state or region.

The move to create the state Fellowship organization, complete with a full-time coordinator, will help interested Texans support the national group while also continuing to back the Baptist General Convention of Texas, said Phill Martin of Richardson, Texas, who made the motion to form the state organization on behalf of the Texas Fellowship steering committee.

"It's important for us as CBF-like-minded persons in Texas to have someone to coordinate support for CBF," said Martin, director of education for the National Association of Church Business Administration. "This coordinator will partner with and support the BGCT."

"We will try to enlarge the CBF in Texas and meanwhile not reduce support for the BGCT."

The steering committee has not yet determined a budget for the state organization or the location of its offices. "We don't have those answers," Martin said. "This has been a faith journey."

A Texas Fellowship organization will have different purposes than Texas Baptists Committed, the statewide organization with which most Fellowship supporters in Texas already are affiliated, noted David Currie, executive director of Texas Baptists Committed.

Texas Baptists Committed is a political organization designed to protect the Baptist General Convention of Texas from the kind of "takeover" that occurred in the Southern Baptist Convention during the past 20 years, Currie said. "Baptists Committed has kept trying to save the state from fundamentalism."

State organizations affiliated with the Fellowship, on the other hand, are focused on promoting the missions, ministries and networking operations of the national Fellowship, he added.

"It's time we have someone to think every day about CBF. Texas doesn't need to do everything by itself," Currie said. "The stronger CBF becomes, the stronger Baptists Committed and the BGCT is, then greater is the chance our vision can be fulfilled."

Formation of a state Fellowship organization offers several "plusses," noted Charles McLaughlin, editor of the Fellowship newsletter in Texas and associate director of Texas Baptists Committed.

"First, it can generate support for CBF and the BGCT among churches," he predicted. "It also forms an identity in Texas for the CBF. And it allows us to move forward in support of missions activities, fellowship and educational opportunities."

Funding is likely to come from churches that now provide support for the national Fellowship organization, McLaughlin said. These churches probably will be asked to designate part of their national CBF contribution to be returned to Texas for the state organization. In addition, funding sources will increase as a greater number of Texas churches affiliate with both state and national Fellowship organizations, he noted.

In other business, the Texas group elected officers -- Kyle Henderson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Athens, convener; Jeanie Miley, author, lecturer and pastor's wife from River Oaks Baptist Church in Houston, convener-elect; and Kerry Horn, pastor of First Baptist Church in Covington, secretary.

-30-

CBF leaders dispute account of reporter abuse

By Bob Allen

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Participants and witnesses are disputing a Baptist Press reporter's allegations that he was intimidated and physically accosted while covering a recent meeting of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Baptist Press, the Southern Baptist Convention's official news service, published a story July 5 charging abusive treatment of Russell Moore, a free-lance writer employed by Baptist Press to cover the CBF's General Assembly June 29-July 1 in Orlando, Fla.

In the story, Moore alleged that an individual who identified himself as "a former (SBC) Foreign Mission Board missionary" physically and verbally accosted him because he was upset with BP's coverage of the meeting.

The same story also said CBF leader David Currie "publicly rebuked" Moore, a student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, inciting boos, hisses and disparaging remarks aimed at the reporter throughout the three-day meeting.

"I am disappointed that a CBF leader felt the need to create an intimidating atmosphere for any individual, whether a journalist or not," Will Hall, the newly elected SBC Executive Committee vice president in charge of Baptist Press, said in the story. "Moreover, I'm saddened about the apparent abuse that resulted for our reporter."

According to the BP story, Moore was confronted inside the convention center by an individual July 1. "He started screaming and yelling at me in the middle of the convention center," Moore said. "He called me a (expletive deleted) liar and said I had no integrity."

Moore said he asked the man to step aside and allow him to pass. "Then, he pushed me against a wall, berated me, jabbing me in the chest with his finger as he spoke. I asked him to discontinue the conversation again, but he continued to pursue me, yelling a curse."

Moore said he feared for his safety, and left the convention hall immediately.

The individual, whom Baptist Press identified in a complaint to a CBF official but not in the news story, declined to discuss the episode on the record.

But the CBF official, Communications Coordinator David Wilkinson, said he had a lengthy conversation in which the unidentified person gave an account substantially different from the Baptist Press reporter's.

According to Wilkinson:

The former "missionary," who served two years in the FMB's Journeyman program for young adults, said he was sitting behind an individual who was taking copious notes during a general session. Later he asked Moore, who was not wearing a press nametag, if he was a reporter and whom he represented.

The individual admitted to saying Moore's coverage of the CBF meeting lacked integrity and was unethical, and that he stepped in front of Moore when he made a move to leave. However, he flatly denied that he pushed Moore, put his finger on his chest or swore at him.

Wilkinson said he told the Baptist Press director of the contradictory account and offered to organize a conference call to sort out the matter. Hall balked at including Moore, and Wilkinson withdrew the offer.

The next day Baptist Press ran a story by staff writer Todd Starnes expressing Hall's "deep concerns after a Baptist Press reporter was accosted" during the CBF meeting. The story relied solely on Moore's account of the facts of the allegations, without a response from either the CBF or individuals named.

Currie, executive director of Texas Baptists Committed, also disputed details of Moore's descriptions of a small-group session he led about how state political groups like his relate to the Atlanta-based Fellowship.

The Baptist Press story said Moore "was pointed out as a reporter" and that he was "booed and hissed" when Currie attacked the news service.

Currie said he asked if a Baptist Press reporter was in the room and that Moore introduced himself. Some in the room audibly "groaned" when the reporter was identified, Currie said. "I said" 'Be nice. He has a right to be here.'"

Witnesses supported Currie's account.

Currie said he often asks if reporters are present when addressing a group. "I like to know who I'm talking to," Currie said. "In making a speech, I want to know who my audience is."

Currie denied that he "rebuked" Moore, because he had never heard of him. He admitted, however, that he did criticize stories by other BP writers in recent months as "hatchet jobs" and of using "Hitler's big lie" propaganda to discredit the CBF and related movements.

Currie said he told persons considering starting a 'mainstream' Baptist organization they would have to deal with unfair treatment from Baptist Press, including the repeating of false statements until they become widely believed.

As an example, Currie referred to BP coverage of a statement made during debate on the SBC's "Baptist Faith and Message" article on Scripture. In an effort to restore language establishing Christ as the criterion by which the Bible should be interpreted, Texan Anthony Sisemore remarked, "The Bible is just a book."

"What he was trying to say," Currie said, "was not that the Bible was any book like 'Tom Sawyer' or 'War and Peace.' The Bible is a book, but we have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ."

SBC leaders "knew that," Currie said, but continued to repeat Sisemore's quote as representing the moderate Baptist view. "No moderate leader I know believes the Bible is just a book," Currie said.

As recently as June 26, BP ran a story about the possibility the Baptist General Convention of Texas might sever ties with the SBC. The story quoted an SBC leader as describing the choice that would face churches as those who believe the Bible is just a book and those who don't.

"When you say that Texas Baptist leaders believe the Bible is just a book, you know you aren't telling the truth," Currie said.

Later, Currie said he saw Moore's first stories of the meeting, which implied the CBF supports homosexuality through relationships with special-interest "partner" groups. He then challenged a CBF plenary session to use remarks by CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal to counter press reports that make the organization look like the "lunatic fringe."

"If you read the press stories out of Baptist Press, all you would think the CBF is about is promoting homosexuality and ripping the SBC," Currie said in an interview. "The only person I heard ripping the SBC was myself. My job is pointing out that the SBC is no longer a Baptist organization."

Moore could not be reached for comment late July 6.

Hall said he stands by BP's coverage of the CBF meeting and declined to comment further.

Currie, who just completed service as the chairman of the Fellowship's finance committee, also said, "CBF does not give one penny to support the promotion of homosexuality."

-30-

END
