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**NAMB cuts back social ministries,
while adding evangelism positions**

By Jennifer Davis Rash

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board has cut five jobs from its social-ministries division in a move officials said is designed to free up budget dollars for evangelism.

John Yarbrough, vice president of evangelization at the national agency based in Alpharetta, Ga., said the changes reflect a "commitment to keep our structure and resources in line with our strategies."

While eliminating three national missionaries and two non-program positions in social ministries, the change creates five new positions in NAMB's evangelism team.

Two new national missionary positions will focus on evangelism over the Internet and through welfare-to-work opportunities. A current staff position in women's evangelism is being elevated to national-missionary status. Two other staff additions are planned in prayer evangelism.

Martin King, director of convention relations for NAMB, quoted agency President Bob Reccord as saying: "We are not static and we are not done changing. We will continue to be more effective and more efficient."

The changes caught workers, including ministry-team heads, by surprise. An Aug. 23 letter announced the positions were being eliminated effective Aug. 31. Since the Aug. 23 letter one exception was negotiated with NAMB leadership. Originally, national literacy missionary Kendale Moore's position was to be eliminated. But national literacy missionary Gayle Leininger announced her retirement effective Dec. 15, 2001, allowing Moore to stay on board.

Three of the other affected employees were offered a transfer to another position and one was dismissed and given a severance package, Yarbrough said.

The positions eliminated include:

- One national literacy missionary.
- One national interfaith missionary.
- Immigration ministries specialist.
- A position in special ministries.
- A position in multi-cultural evangelism.

Another office that handles domestic-hunger and migrant ministries also felt the impact, gaining additional assignments of immigration and refugee ministries.

Leaders at one Baptist state convention said the job cuts would have a negative impact in their state.

"I am very disappointed in the reduction of the emphasis in both literacy and immigration resettlement," said Richard Alford, associate in the associational/cooperative missions office at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "Both of these are significant needs in the state and across the nation."

Alford, who also heads up literacy work among Alabama Baptists, said: "This reduces NAMB's ability to serve the churches, the associations and the state conventions. This will severely affect us."

With immigration on the rise nationwide and illiteracy not declining, Alford said "there is a great need" to reach out and minister. "But at the same time, we are saying nationally that we are reducing our forces," he added.

"This reduces the national agency's ability to serve its people," he said. "These are critical issues."

NAMB missionary Leininger agreed the changes are a "setback" for literacy missions. "Kendale Moore will obviously not be able to field service as many as if we had two," she explained. "His budget and time will only go so far. He will have to choose priorities."

Boyd Campbell, an immigration lawyer and Baptist lay leader in Montgomery, Ala., said he is concerned about the effect on ministries to Spanish-language churches in the United States. Previously, NAMB officials have taken a lead in bringing in pastors from out of the country to lead Hispanic churches, he said. Now, he predicted, one person will be doing the work of two and will no longer be able to intervene before the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the Justice Department.

Others questioned how the information about the changes was disseminated.

Alford said missions leaders from state conventions had a meeting with NAMB officials in July "and this information was not mentioned."

State convention personnel and NAMB trustees learned of the changes through a formal letter from Yarbrough outlining the new organizational structure mailed after the Aug. 23 letter to the affected employees.

King said Yarbrough ultimately made the decision based on input from the various ministry teams that fall under his leadership.

"This is a change in strategy," King said. "It didn't have anything to do with budget, but everything to do with strategy ... the most effective way to do missions," he said. "We have to be effective first and what flows out of that is efficiency."

"It does signal a change in priorities," King confirmed. "Does it mean that with less attention they will have a lower priority? Probably true," he said. "But it does not mean that they are not important."

"We are not abandoning anything," King said. (Those ministries) just don't have the resources they once did."

Barry Holcomb, a NAMB trustee from Ashford, Ala., said he supports the move. "What NAMB is doing is to develop more efficient ways to reach people for the Lord," he said. "NAMB has not dropped the ministries but has merged positions."

Still, Holcomb said, as a trustee, he plans to be sensitive to concerns that are raised about the changes. "I will investigate these further and will talk about policy and procedures that went into these decisions," he said.

"If we find that needs aren't being met, then I will intervene," Holcomb said. "But I also want to be supportive of the board."

Central Seminary kicks off 100th anniversary celebration

By Brenda Sanders

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (ABP) -- As the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship gears up for its 10th anniversary next year, a theological school it helps support is celebrating a century.

Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Kan., one of 11 U.S. schools sponsored by the Atlanta-based Fellowship, kicked off a yearlong centennial celebration Aug. 29.

Rather than starting its own schools, publishing house and other quasi-denominational organizations, the Fellowship has focused on missions and administration of a centralized fund that it parcels out to a number of independent entities.

Most CBF "partners" have been born in the last 10 years in response to doctrinal difference in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Central Seminary, however, was chartered in 1901 as an independent institution supported by Baptist churches in Missouri and Kansas. For decades, both Southern and Northern Baptists served on its faculty and board of trustees. In the 1950s, however, amid a dispute between the two Baptist groups over SBC missions work in the North, the SBC rejected a shared-ownership proposal, and Central responded by affiliating with American Baptists. Then, in 1957, Southern Baptists voted to start a seminary of their own, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, just across the state line in Kansas City, Mo.

Central's dual-denominational identity came full circle in 1995, when trustees voted "full support" for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Guest speakers during the daylong centennial kick-off included both CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal and Trinetta McCray, president of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. They participated in a dialogue about what the two organizations have in common and how they are unique. Both CBF and ABC/USA are represented on the seminary's current board of directors, faculty and student body.

An opening convocation service, as well as a centennial banquet, featured guest speaker William Lawson, pastor of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church in Houston. A Central graduate in the 1950s, he has been active in civic affairs, civil rights and character-building programs for African Americans.

Addressing students, faculty, alumni and other friends of the seminary, Lawson said, "The Lord has brought you thus far and the Lord is going to carry you on.

"Much change has taken place since 1901," he noted. "Baptists have changed and Central Seminary has changed. But we are anchored by faith to one who does not change -- Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever."

Lawson said the seminary should view its 100th year of service as a great accomplishment and also as a challenge to continue to offer "open education for all people."

He reminded the audience that from the outset, Central Seminary was chartered as a school of ministerial training for all Baptists, as well as for others of similar confessional heritages.

Perhaps even more unique for educational institutions founded in the early 1900s, was the fact that from the beginning, women were welcomed into the curricular programs "on terms of perfect equality."

Also speaking during the banquet program, McCray noted: "We need places that we can point to that are a sign that there is still a God. Central Seminary stands after 100 years as a sign of faithfulness and endurance."

Seminary President Tom Clifton and his wife, Audrey, received accolades during the program and faculty members were recognized. A video presentation reflected on the seminary's record of inclusiveness and impact on society through thousands of alumni, including:

-- Knud Wumpelmann of Denmark, a graduate of the 1950s who is former president of the Baptist World Alliance;

-- E. A. Freeman, another 1950s graduate, who was a leader in the National Baptist Convention, active in the civil rights movement, and helped establish some of the first homeless shelters in the Greater Kansas City area;

-- C.L. Bachus, a 1970s graduate who is pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in metropolitan Kansas City -- a congregation that has helped build more than 40 new homes in a subdivision for low-income families;

-- Lee Rader, a 1980s graduate who won a national award last year for her work as a chaplain at a women's correctional center in Chillicothe, Mo.;

-- Bruce and Jene Bridgewater, 1990s graduates who direct the work of an urban social service agency in Kansas City, Kan., called the Bethel Neighborhood Center.

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-- Bob Allen contributed to this report

CBF official predicts group will formally split from SBC

By Brenda Sanders

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (ABP) -- While Cooperative Baptist Fellowship leader Daniel Vestal has resisted calling the movement a "denomination," the time has probably come for the moderate group to formally split from the Southern Baptist Convention, he said Aug. 29.

From its beginning, people have asked if CBF is a denomination, Vestal said at a "Baptist dialogue" panel discussion during a daylong centennial celebration at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Kan.

"I have resisted that title," Vestal said. "I have said we are 'denomination-like' in that we provide services that an organized structure, which we have traditionally called a convention or a denomination, have provided."

Now, however, Vestal said he senses "a great yearning" among Fellowship supporters "for us to define ourselves and to separate more clearly from the Southern Baptist Convention."

"I'm not afraid of using the 'D-word,' but I guess I'm more comfortable in saying we are a fellowship that functions like a denomination," Vestal said. "I guess I have bought into the reality that we are living in a post-denominational world."

"Yet, in the life of CBF, there is this great yearning out there for a more clearly defined organizational structure that differentiates us from SBC -- even from (American Baptist Churches, U.S.A.) or other Baptist organizations," he said. "And I think CBF is going to have to deal with that this year. I don't think it's something that we can avoid."

Seminary student Bud Adams asked Vestal and fellow panelist, American Baptist Churches president Trinette McCray, to explain a relationship between CBF and ABC that he described as "two people who are dancing together but not holding hands."

McCray, a campus minister and director of multi-cultural relations for Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, responded first. "I think that the world has enough confusion in and of itself and that the church

need not add to that confusion, which would make it even more difficult for us to reach that world with the gospel," she said. "I think that the 'dance' that we may be engaged in with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship might be that grace-hand of God that is keeping us from adding to that world of confusion."

"Where we can find that both of our purposes for mission and ministry are advanced by working together, we are finding ways that we are able to do that," she continued. "Because we have some differences, it doesn't have to keep us from working together on those things we hold in common."

Vestal agreed: "I've discovered that between moderate Southern Baptists -- which has been the lion's share of the CBF's constituency -- and American Baptists there's an awful lot of affinity. There's a tremendous amount of identity, such as commitment to theological education, to racial inclusivity, to gender balance, to the local church."

"Those of us in leadership feel a tremendous amount of affection for ABC and we want very much to find ways to explore relationships, partnering and cooperation," Vestal said.

One tangible way that CBF and ABC are working together, he pointed out, is through the CBF's recent endorsement of retirement-benefit plans for ministers and employees of churches with the American Baptist Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board. In addition, through partnering for some church starts; joint conferences at the American Baptist Assembly in Green Lake, Wis.; and mutual support for Central Seminary, he said: "There are some very practical, structural, tangible ways that partnering has started. My hope is that we deepen that and find ways to explore that."

When asked what each organization could learn from the other, McCray responded, "We might learn courage from CBF -- what it means to see the need, to seize the moment, to find perhaps that time that God decided, either through controversy or otherwise, to cut into our affairs and have the courage to strike out onto a new path."

American Baptists are "rooted in our years, in our longevity," she said. "Sometimes, that can become a hindrance to the new directions and progress that God wants to make for God's world."

"From CBF we can see that when you walk out into deep waters, it's good to walk out," she emphasized, "when you just have a vision and hope that there is something in that next place that you see the hand of God directing you to."

Vestal noted: "What energizes me personally and causes me some degree of envy with the ABC is the diversity they have -- it's black, brown white; it's male, female; it's laity, clergy -- in a much more distinct way."

"At CBF gatherings, it's pretty much all white folks," he said. "I do think we are breaking through in clergy-laity and male-female in terms of leadership, but we have so much to learn in CBF about reflecting the richness of the Body of Christ."

David May, associate professor of New Testament at Central Seminary, asked: "What is a concern, problem or weakness unique to ABC and CBF, and what is one that you think you have in common?"

Vestal responded: "For CBF, I think we try to do too many things. Our expectations exceed our resources and ability to perform. When moderate Southern Baptists get together, we will address every human problem in the world, all the theological issues, all the human concerns -- then we leave convinced that we're going to meet them all tomorrow, and we can't do that."

He continued: "We don't think strategically. We don't budget strategically. We don't plan strategically. We think we can do everything."

"And I don't think we can. We have to be realistic about what we can and can't do. That's hard to do, because if you choose to do one thing, it means you can't do something else."

Considering a shared challenge of the two Baptist groups, Vestal said, "To be honest, as I look at ABC, I guess I don't see ABC churches and folks being really aggressively evangelistic. They don't win a lot of people to Jesus."

"However, having said that, I don't see most moderate Southern Baptist churches being aggressively evangelistic," he continued. "We're not really passionate about the gospel changing people's lives. We're ... more oriented to political correctness and relevancy.

"To be candid, I see that as a problem that both ABC and moderate Southern Baptists share."

McCray said she would rather answer the question, "What hurts my heart the most?" about American Baptists. "That would be the fragmentation that is occurring within our denomination. There are areas where we are deciding to 'move the house,' but in doing so, we are moving it off the foundations."

Both Vestal and McCray said they are open to exploring further options for intentional partnering together and with other Baptist groups, as well.

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