



Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Bob Allen
Executive editor: Greg Warner

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

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL

May 23, 2001

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

MAY 29 2001

(01-41)

Nashville, Tennessee

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Strategic-plan proposal causing friction in CBF
- CBF leader undergoes surgery for brain tumor
- SBC's Land being considered for religious-freedom panel

Strategic-plan proposal causing friction in CBF

By Bob Allen

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (ABP) -- A proposed strategic plan is causing friction between the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and some of its affiliates.

Two state chapters of the moderate organization have formally asked national leaders to reconsider recommendations altering membership qualifications and the method for electing its governing board.

National CBF leaders tout the second phase of a strategic plan, scheduled for vote at the Fellowship's 10th anniversary General Assembly, June 28-30 in Atlanta, as a step toward moving the organization beyond its origins in Southern Baptist controversy into a new kind of Baptist organization for a post-denominational age.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina's Coordinating Council, however, voted unanimously May 21 to request that the vote on recommendations by a national strategic-planning committee be delayed a year. The motion calls for referring the proposals back to the national CBF Coordinating Council for "further review" with the "input of as many CBF members as possible."

The Coordinating Council of the CBF of Virginia earlier asked the national organization to reconsider a new proposal for electing leaders that it said "leans toward" self-perpetuation. Bylaw changes scheduled for vote at this year's CBF national gathering call for a smaller and renamed Coordinating Council that is less connected to state and regional chapters.

National CBF leaders report criticism from other states as well but say they also have gotten feedback from members praising the plan.

The Atlanta-based Fellowship supports about 120 missionaries and offers programs for churches looking for alternatives to the 16-million-member Southern Baptist Convention. Formed in 1991, the 1,800-church CBF opposes conservatives who took over the nation's largest Protestant denomination by political means during the 1980s.

The North Carolina council vote followed a study prompted by concerns about a part of the proposal defining member churches as those that, in addition to supporting CBF financially, choose to "embrace" the organization's mission statement and core values.

Critics oppose the change both on principle and for practical reasons. Some say requiring churches to affirm any position statement amounts to imposing a creed.

Chief among moderate criticism is that the SBC's current leaders seek to enforce narrow doctrines on the nation's 41,000 Southern Baptist congregations. Baptists have traditionally opposed any effort to impose doctrine through ecclesiastical means, leaving it up to local churches to interpret the Bible for themselves.

Other critics of the CBF strategic plan say tinkering with membership requirements will bring division by forcing the issue in local churches where CBF and SBC supporters now peacefully coexist.

"I believe there are many churches that are dually aligned, and perhaps without formal action, because they have a few individuals who affirm CBF fully," said David Crocker, a North Carolina Coordinating Council member from Fayetteville. He said requiring member churches to take action to affiliate with CBF could divide some congregations by precipitating an up-or-down vote on the question.

Virginia CBF leaders, meanwhile, questioned a proposed change in how leaders are nominated. Currently, the CBF Coordinating Council is broadly representative. Aside from a few at-large posts, the bulk of the Coordinating Council is nominated by the various state, regional and racial/ethnic networks within the Fellowship and elected by the General Assembly.

The new strategic plan, approved Feb. 24 by the Coordinating Council, calls for cutting the size of the council from its current 78 members to 40, to make it more efficient, and renaming it the Governing Board. While Governing Board nominees would still be subject to approval by the entire assembly in annual session, the responsibility for nominating them would be transferred to an eight-to-13-member nominating committee chosen by the Governing Board.

Virginia CBF's Coordinating Council called that change "a system that heavily leans toward a self-perpetuating Governing Board."

"While we want to express some measure of trust in the Governing Board," the group wrote national CBF leaders April 27, "we have learned through history, and more recently from our experience in the Southern Baptist Convention, that too much trust in a small group is dangerous."

Instead of calling for a delay in the vote, as North Carolina, Virginia's council proposed a compromise that eliminates numerical representation by state and region but continues to involve the networks in the selection process. Leaders said the alternative bylaws recognize "legitimate concerns" of the national CBF about efficiency and autonomy while keeping "the grass-roots voice in the nomination process."

Underlying the differences are complaints by state CBF leaders that they weren't involved in early stages of developing the strategic plan and now are in a position where they risk disrupting the process by confronting it publicly at the General Assembly.

"We're not rejecting the proposal, we're just asking that it be clarified," said North Carolina CBF moderator Mark Edwards, an attorney from Nashville, N.C.

National leaders, however, say the Fellowship has been in "limbo" for two years due to strategic planning and that a delay in the vote would be disastrous.

David Wilkinson, coordinator of communications and marketing for the Fellowship, told North Carolina CBF leaders that the 11-member strategic-planning committee may "have made some assumptions that caught you off guard."

Last year's General Assembly overwhelmingly adopted a first-phase strategic plan that included a reorganization of staff and adoption of a new mission statement, core values and objectives. Wilkinson said the committee thought a logical step for the second phase of planning was to ask "what kind of governance" is needed for the restructured CBF.

"I think perhaps we underestimated the investment people have in the question of governance," Wilkinson said. "Some folks felt like we truncated the process."

Wilkinson said the language regarding membership resulted from requests by churches to clarify "what it means" to be a CBF church. He said the membership article wouldn't exclude any church that currently regards itself a Fellowship church but is intended to communicate that belonging to CBF is "not merely sending a check."

The North Carolina Coordinating Council is first asking national leaders to rescind their earlier vote recommending the second-phase restructuring to the General Assembly and redraw the plan for consideration in 2002.

Neither Wilkinson nor another representative of the strategic-planning committee present at the North Carolina meeting wanted to presume whether a majority of council members would vote to revisit their earlier decision. Both predicted, however, that the matter would likely be discussed at a council meeting just prior to the General Assembly.

Beth Fogg, a national Coordinating Council member from Richmond, Va., hinted that there might be room for compromise. She said some council members believe that problems identified in the strategic plan can be fixed with minor adjustments without requiring a year's delay in implementation.

Wilkinson said the council would need to weigh concerns raised by critics of the proposal with the interests of thousands of Fellowship members, some traveling long distances, expecting an opportunity to discuss and vote on the strategic plan at the General Assembly.

Should the Coordinating Council decline to withdraw the proposal, North Carolina leaders said they are prepared to bring their motion to delay before the full General Assembly.

Wilkinson said the Fellowship's Atlanta staff "does not fear vigorous discussion at the General Assembly." Any proposal presented, however, will need broad support. Since the recommendations involve amendments to the CBF constitution and bylaws, they must pass by a two-thirds majority.

-30-

CBF leader undergoes surgery for brain tumor

GREENVILLE, S.C. (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's top elected leader is recovering from surgery to remove a brain tumor discovered only days before.

Donna Forrester, moderator of the Atlanta-based CBF, underwent surgery May 21 at Greenville Memorial Hospital in South Carolina.

According to information posted on a family Web site May 22, the operation went well. Doctors were awaiting a pathology report.

In an e-mail sent to and forwarded by friends, Forrester said she learned late Thursday afternoon, May 17, that tests revealed a large tumor in her right temporal and parietal lobes. Her neurosurgeon diagnosed the mass as a grade 3-4 glioblastoma multiforma, a fast-growing malignant tumor requiring radical surgery followed by chemotherapy and radiation treatment.

Forrester, 51, had planned to preside at the CBF's 10th anniversary General Assembly, scheduled June 28-30 in Atlanta. Before surgery, she still hoped to attend part of the meeting, even though she is scheduled to be in the middle of treatment.

Forrester was elected the Fellowship's moderator-elect in 1999. As moderator, she has helped lead the second phase of a strategic-planning process for the 1,800-church CBF. Her term as moderator expires at the

close of this year's General Assembly, but she will remain an officer for another year, assuming the leadership role of immediate-past moderator.

She has worked as minister of pastoral care and counseling at First Baptist Church of Greenville, S.C., since 1989. Before that she worked five years as chaplain at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

Forrester is married to Jerry Kerns, president of a residential construction company in Greenville. Her father, Vello Forrester, who served 40 years as pastor of three South Carolina churches before retiring, lives with the couple. Her mother, Nancy, died in 1994, six months before Forrester's marriage to Kerns.

She has a nursing degree from the University of South Carolina, a master-of-divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a doctorate in ministry from Southeastern Seminary. Knollwood Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., ordained her as a minister in 1976.

Forrester's family is posting updates on her condition on the Internet at www.caringbridge.com/sc/donnaforrester. As of May 23, she wasn't yet receiving phone calls.

-30-

-- By ABP staff

SBC's Land being considered for religious-freedom panel

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission and architect of the SBC Disney boycott, is being discussed as a likely pick for a federal commission that monitors religious persecution.

Created by a 1998 law designed to make religious freedom central to U.S. foreign policy, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom monitors governments around the world and recommends action against those that deny religious freedom.

Sources close to the selection process tell Associated Baptist Press that Land, who has been vocal about the persecution of Christians around the globe, could be appointed by President George W. Bush.

The Bush administration appears to be waiting to see what four appointments Democratic leaders will make. If Democrats pick a Catholic to the commission, sources say Bush may feel less pressure to do so and will have two slots, rather than one, for evangelical Christian leaders.

Terms of the nine voting commission members expired May 14. Two of the sitting members have been re-appointed to another term. House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., re-appointed Nina Shea, a Catholic who is director of Freedom House's Center for Religious Freedom. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., re-appointed Michael Young, dean of the George Washington University Law School, who is a Mormon.

That means Land, a conservative, would be one of three appointees allotted to Bush. The president is expected to name former commission chair Elliott Abrams, president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, to one of the positions.

The 1998 International Religious Freedom Act allows the president to appoint three members to the panel and the congressional leaders from the president's party two more. Congressional leaders from the

president's opposing party name the other four voting members. A 10th, nonvoting, member of the panel will be a yet-unnamed Bush appointee to head the State Department's office on religious freedom.

Land isn't the only person being talked about for the president's picks. Sources say he is on a short list and is mentioned as a top candidate but still could be bumped.

Word is expected soon. A White House press aide told ABP that the administration "was hard at work" to fill all the slots as soon as possible.

Land wasn't immediately available for comment.

The commission job is part time, and if named Land would not have to leave his SBC job. Commission members are not paid, but they are reimbursed for travel and other expenses and are considered government employees.

Land has been a backer of the 1998 religious-freedom law from its inception. While he originally advocated a stronger bill that carried mandatory sanctions for violators of religious freedom, he later threw his support to a compromise -- giving the administration more discretion about whether to impose sanctions -- that eventually became law.

Before that, Land led the SBC to pass a 1997 resolution calling on the U.S. government to "elevate religious-liberty concerns to the highest priority in foreign policy." The statement also urged Americans "to refrain from international trade, even at the risk of financial loss, with or in nations that practice religious persecution."

He has written that more Christians were persecuted for their faith in the 20th century than in all previous centuries combined. He has urged Southern Baptists and other Christians to demand that the government crack down on nations that suppress Christianity and credited pressure from Christians for passage of the International Religious Freedom Act.

But in its first two years, the commission's concern has been broader than just Christianity. Lawmakers who were in the beginning wary of a religious-freedom measure feared the Religious Right would emphasize persecution of Christians at the expense of other faiths. The commission has taken pains to avoid criticism that it is concerned only with Christians.

The panel's press spokesman told ABP that the commission has talked as much or more about the persecution of other faiths. He listed dozens of faith groups from Falun Gong in China to Muslims in India. "I don't think a fair-minded person could read our reports in their entirety and seriously make that claim," said Lawrence Goodrich, director of communications for the U.S. panel.

Goodrich emphasized that the commission is nonpartisan. The commission advises both the administration and Congress, Goodrich said, and therefore must relate to members of both parties.

"If it's going to be effective, it has to be seen as nonpartisan by both sides," Goodrich said. "We have Republicans and Democrats on the Hill of equal numbers -- it has to be seen as a trustworthy source of recommendations."

Land describes himself as being nonpartisan, but he made it clear in the last presidential election that he believed then-Republican nominee George W. Bush was the candidate who most closely follows Christian values and beliefs.

"I would never tell you how to vote," he was quoted as saying in a speech in North Carolina last October. "I wouldn't even try. But I will tell you that God may want to talk to you about how you should vote."

The New York Times once quoted Land, discussing the relationship between the Religious Right and the GOP, as saying: "The go-along, get-along strategy is dead. No more engagement. We want a wedding ring. We want a ceremony. We want a consummation of the marriage."

Land later said he was misquoted and that he meant if the GOP wants the support of conservative Christians, "then they need to come and endorse our values and our beliefs and our understanding of the truth."

Land has also been known to use tough rhetoric to describe his political opponents. He was a frequent critic of President Bill Clinton, and he once referred to Clinton's Attorney General, Janet Reno, as "the deaf, dumb, blind woman."

Land has supported the religious-liberty commission's call for sanctions against Sudan for persecution of Christians and criticized the Clinton administration for lacking "the moral spine" to get tougher with the "outlaw, war-criminal regime in Khartoum."

He also has backed the commission's call to attack the pocketbooks of companies that do business in countries engaged in persecution.

Land has been criticized for alluding to Christian persecution in America by those who say such rhetoric diminishes atrocities committed in other countries. Land once countered in a panel discussion that "persecution is too strong a word at present" to use in reference to the U.S., but he warned that "harassment, suppression and discrimination unprotected and uncorrected will become persecution."

Land's longstanding fight to combat persecution abroad may win him a seat on a commission that is still searching to find its role in shaping U.S. foreign policy.

He once said on the topic: "If the people of the United States do not insist that their government make this a priority issue with the governments who are allowing this or who are actively participating in it, there will be no relief for millions and millions of Christians who are suffering persecution and martyrdom around the world."

Land has been president and treasurer of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the Southern Baptist Convention's agency for social, moral and religious-liberty concerns, since 1988.

In that position, he serves as host of the commission's "For Faith and Family" talk-radio program that is broadcast at stations across the country and over the Internet.

Before that he was a professor and administrator at Criswell College and an associate pastor at First Baptist Church in Dallas.

He took an 18-month leave of absence from Criswell College in 1987 and 1988 to work as an administrative assistant to then-Texas Gov. William Clements. In that role, he served as senior adviser to the Republican governor on church-state issues and matters relating to "traditional family values," including abortion, drugs and pornography.

A native of Houston, Land received a bachelor's degree from Princeton University in 1969, a master's from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1972 and a doctorate from Oxford University in 1980.

-30-

-- Bob Allen contributed to this story.

END
