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CBF leaders refer strategic plan back to council for more study June 28, 2001 - Volume: 01-51

By Bob Allen

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Cooperative Baptist Fellowship leaders have sent a strategic plan slated for vote at this week's General Assembly back to the drawing board.

Citing resistance from state and regional groups affiliated with the CBF, a national Coordinating Council voted on the eve of the June 28-30 gathering in Atlanta not to go forward with a second-phase strategic plan billed as a new course for the moderate group's second decade.

The plan, which follows a first phase approved last year that included a new mission statement and reorganized staff, proposes to alter the makeup of the organization's governing board, the Coordinating Council, and change the way the national body relates to state and regional chapters.

Since its release in February, the plan has drawn widespread criticism, prompting the Coordinating Council June 27 to refer it back for more study and dialogue with a goal of recommending a possibly altered plan at a future national gathering.

"There's just been a virtual storm as people have read about this particular plan from their own perspectives and without all the information sometimes," CBF moderator Donna Forrester said.

Among concerns cited in formal communication from state CBF groups in North Carolina and Virginia and informally in other states are:

-- Adding a membership requirement that churches must "embrace" the CBF mission statement and organizational values to be counted as a CBF member. Some complain that requiring any action beyond financial support violates the autonomy of the local church. Others say it smacks of creedalism and would divide churches by forcing the issue in congregations where CBF and Southern Baptist Convention supporters peacefully co-exist.

-- Altering makeup of the Coordinating Council. The plan proposes reducing the size of the council to make it more efficient, but it also ends the practice of allowing state and regional CBF chapters to elect their own representatives to the national council. New members would in the future be recruited by a nominating committee appointed by and reporting to a renamed Governing Board. Critics say the move removes decision-making from the grassroots and moves the council's complexion toward a self-perpetuating board.

-- A general feeling that leaders of state chapters weren't included in early phases of developing the plan, when their feedback could have helped avoid some of the problems. Pushed by a desire to unveil the strategic plan in conjunction with the CBF's 10th anniversary General Assembly and to move beyond a strategic-planning limbo that has already spanned two years, some members felt the council was attempting to ramrod it through.

"In terms of how this is playing at the grassroots level, this is not being well received, and I think it will hinder what we are doing in phase one if we don't clarify this," said Michael Tutterow, a council member from Wilmington, N.C.

Forrester, a minister from Greenville, S.C., said the council had probably failed to communicate effectively how the first and second planning phases fit together.

Moderator-elect Jim Baucom pledged to invite recognized experts to discuss polity concerns and to seek input from the broader constituency during the next year.

Pam Eubanks of Knoxville, Tenn., recalled that leaders initially believed unveiling a strategic plan for the future on the group's 10th anniversary would serve as "a birthday present for CBF."

"It would have been great for us to offer this as a birthday present," she said, " ... but we've all gotten birthday presents we were disappointed with.

"Give us all time to chew on it, to think about it and maybe come up with a wonderful present for our 11th or 12th birthday."

In another vote, however, the Coordinating Council refused to reverse an earlier position banning CBF funding of institutions that "condone, advocate or affirm homosexual practice."

After discussion, the council voted 38-13 against a motion by Dixie Petrey of Knoxville, Tenn., to rescind the policy approved last October.

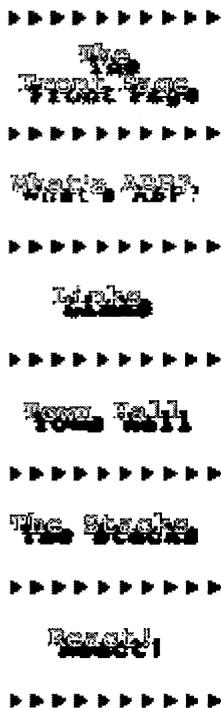
The council did, however, change terminology in the statement from "organizational value" to "personnel and administrative funding policy" in an effort to clarify that it is an internal document for the Coordinating Council and does not speak for the CBF movement as a whole.

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CBF official resigns to accept pastorate June 28, 2001 - Volume: 01-51

By Bob Allen

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Cooperative Baptist Fellowship leader Gary Parker has resigned to become pastor of First Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga.

The suburban Atlanta congregation voted unanimously June 24 to call Parker, the Fellowship's coordinator of Baptist life and leadership, as senior pastor.

"I'm really returning to a first calling," Parker said of his return to the pastorate. "I kept thinking I would get over it, that first calling, but I never did."

Parker described his five years as the CBF's liaison with 11 theological seminaries and "partner" organizations including Associated Baptist Press, Baptists Today, the Baptist Joint Committee and the Baptist World Alliance, as "a challenging and interesting work."

A former pastor, Parker came to the Fellowship from the pastorate of First Baptist Church in Jefferson City, Mo. CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal described him as "a very important voice" on the Fellowship's leadership team and "one of the most articulate spokesmen on Baptist life anywhere.

Parker's resignation became effective July 1. He will start his ministry at the church the first week of August.

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Fellowship council hires first development officer June 28, 2001 - Volume: 01-51

By Bob Allen

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has hired its first executive staff member for fund raising. The moderate Baptist group's Coordinating Council unanimously elected Baylor University development officer Thomas Newsom to the newly created post of development coordinator June 27.

Newsom comes to the Fellowship after working 20 years at Baylor in Waco, Texas, most recently as senior development officer for special projects. He recently has directed a \$17 million building campaign for George W. Truett Theological Seminary that has raised \$14.5 million since September 1998.

Before coming to Baylor he worked in Arizona at Phoenix Baptist Hospital, Grand Canyon University and Arizona Baptist Children's Services. He also formerly worked at Texas Baptist Children's Home in Round Rock and at Congress Avenue Baptist Church in Austin.

In his new job, Newsom will coordinate all fund-raising activities of the Atlanta-based CBF. He will solicit major gifts from individuals, write and review grant proposals and direct an endowment campaign. He will also seek to increase the number of individuals and churches that support the Fellowship and upgrade amounts of those now giving.

"Good development officers are very scarce," Ed Vick, chairman of a search committee that recommended Newsom told the Coordinating Council. "Tom is outstanding, and we are extremely fortunate in having him as our candidate."

Search-committee member Judy Battles described him as a "successful fund-raising professional" who is "dedicated and committed to do the task we need him to do for CBF."

Another committee member, Joy Heaton, said the group wanted someone who not only could raise money but "has a passion about the mission and ministries" of the Fellowship.

Newsom hiring became effective July 1. He will work from the CBF's regional office in Dallas. He will earn \$95,000 a year plus benefits.

"I believe in the CBF and its mission and what you are trying to accomplish here," Newsom told council members.

Newsom is married to Jane Thigpen Newsom. They have two adult children.



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