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**CBF, Buckner Baptist Benevolences sign historic ministry partnership
By Russ Dilday and Lance Wallace
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PROGRESO, Texas (ABP) – Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Buckner Baptist Benevolences signed a partnership agreement March 20 that will enlarge the scope of both organizations' social ministries and missions efforts.

The agreement, known as KidsHeart, calls for Buckner to provide avenues of missions service for CBF volunteers both domestically and internationally, as well as social ministry training for CBF congregations. Buckner is a 124-year-old Texas ministry with services to children, families and senior adults.

CBF, a national fellowship of Baptist Christians and churches, will provide resources and volunteers for Buckner-led missions efforts to children in several countries and work done through Buckner along the Texas-Mexico border. For the initial two years of the partnership, CBF also has committed \$120,000 for Buckner ministries, funding work in three regions along the Rio Grande and aiding children living in a Kenyan orphanage.

"Nothing ever happens in a vacuum in a relationship," said Buckner president Ken Hall to the group of about 75 people who gathered at the Progreso Community Center for the signing ceremony. "Much has already been done in the past with the people of Progreso, the pastors of local churches, the association, the Baptist General Convention of Texas and CBF. We are building on that foundation. God has a way of bringing it all together to help hurting lives."

KidsHeart is a working ministry partnership that will provide help for the most neglected children and families in the United States and around the globe. The partnership will work to restore family unity, provide humanitarian aid to overseas orphanages, offer services to those living in poverty and assist churches in fulfilling their mandate to serve others.

"Partnership can't ever be reduced to paper," Hall said. "It happens in the heart. KidsHeart will make a huge difference in people's lives."

KidsHeart will also give CBF missions leaders an outlet for CBF churches and individuals who want to participate in hands-on missions work. During the week of July 21, 30 to 50 churches will come to Progreso to spend the week doing vacation Bible school, sports camps and home repair and maintenance.

"When God's people work together for God's kingdom, there is no greater partnership," said CBF coordinator Daniel Vestal. "There's really nothing quite so beautiful as when God's people work together."

Vestal stressed that "partnering" is a word with which Baptists will become familiar, not just as an idea but in practice. "For CBF, this is a historic day," Vestal said. "We see this as a great opportunity for the future. Today, the two of us sign the documents as Christian brothers, fellow Baptists and as leaders of organizations to help each other help people in a spirit of mutual trust and mutual respect."

The largest portion of the financial commitment, \$90,000, will be used for ministries in the colonias – poor, rural communities along the Mexican border – in three locations to help fund the salaries for two years of Buckner community center directors in El Paso, Progreso and a yet-to-be-named colonia near Laredo. CBF previously had provided more than \$30,000 in funding for the Progreso community center ministry.

The remaining \$30,000 is being used to support ministries through Buckner Orphan Care International in its work with children around the world.

The funds, say partnership planners, will fulfill missions directives for both organizations. "We've been pleased with the initial partnership we've been able to have with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship," Hall said. "It gives us a new impetus, a new enthusiasm to bring more people into the mix of helping hurting people."

Tom Ogburn, CBF associate coordinator for partnership missions, helped pen the agreement. He said the funds sent

to the colonias are "the essence of answering the needs of CBF's Rural Poverty Initiative, ministering to some of the most neglected, impoverished people living in the United States."

Felipe Garza, vice president for Buckner Children and Family Services, called the gift "incredible. These funds will enable our ministries in El Paso and Progreso to continue, while opening up a new opportunity for service near Laredo at a time when the economy is recessed, missions funding is tight and not many ministries can expand."

Likewise, BOCI vice president Mike Douris, vice president of Buckner Orphan Care International, said he is grateful for the funding of the Kenyan ministry, but said he was "not surprised by CBF's generosity or commitment. That's one thing we know from working with their missionaries in Kenya – they are true partners in ministry."

"This is a great day for Texas, for CBF and for Buckner," said Jorge Zapata, border ministries coordinator for Buckner and master of ceremonies at the signing event. "We're here to celebrate God's work."



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