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Despite special gifts for missions,

more funding cuts ahead for CBF

By Mark Wingfield

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) —Gifts of \$9 million from an anonymous donor will enable the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to continue to appoint new missionaries next year despite budget shortfalls.

Participants in the CBF's general assembly approved a basic budget of \$17.1 million for the 2003-2004 fiscal year, to be supplemented by \$2.6 million in designated gifts. The bulk of that designated money derives from a \$5 million gift received in April and a \$4 million gift received the previous year, both to be disbursed over a four-year period.

Without the special gifts, the CBF would not be able to appoint any new missionaries in the 2003-2004 fiscal year, said CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal. And the anonymous gifts made possible the appointment of 15 short-term and career missionaries at the CBF general assembly June 27.

"We are not appointing any new missionaries, except for those that are funded by designated gifts," Vestal told the CBF Coordinating Council June 25. He re-emphasized that point at the June 27 general assembly commissioning service for 18 mission workers.

"Honestly, we could not be here tonight without the support of a generous donor," Vestal told the assembly.

Because of the large designated gift for missions, total giving to the CBF increased this year. But undesignated gifts, which fund the majority of CBF's programs and partner relationships, did not meet budget goals, Vestal reported to the Coordinating Council.

The CBF was projected to end the current fiscal year June 30 with a \$650,000 shortfall in undesignated receipts over expenditures, even while keeping expenditures at 85 percent of budget. That budget shortfall will be covered by reserve funds, said finance committee chair Philip Wise, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Lubbock, Texas.

Total income for the year is projected to reach about \$15 million, said Jim Strawn, chief financial officer. That's short of a basic budget of \$18.2 million.

The Coordinating Council enacted spending cuts earlier in the year for both CBF's own ministries and its funding for partner organizations.

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Those partners will face additional cuts from CBF in coming months if the recommendations of a task force are adopted. The task force, assigned to study

suggested CBF reduce its overall funding for outside organizations, such as seminaries and media ministries like ABP, from the current 28 percent of CBF's budget to 20 percent. It would be the latest in a series of cuts that began in 1996.

The CBF's budget woes mirror national trends in other religious bodies, noted outgoing moderator Phill Martin, a layman and member of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas. "This is not a phenomenon [only] CBF is dealing with. This is a phenomenon faith-based organizations are dealing with."

The shortfall, various CBF officials explained, stems from a collision of two primary forces – optimistic budgeting and tough economic times in churches.

Vestal told the Coordinating Council 241 churches gave to the CBF for the first time in the last six months. About 25 of those first-time givers are Hispanic churches and about 115 are from Texas, he added.

That is one of many signs that things are going well in the CBF, despite the budget challenge, Martin told the general assembly. "Things really are great with CBF, but there is one thing that is of concern. ... Our corporate vision and dreams for CBF are greater than our commitment to funding," he reported.

For example, Martin said, 130 people are exploring a call to missionary service with CBF. "We are uncertain about being able to add to our numbers. That is not in keeping with our vision."

He added: "Funding is not an easy question or subject. ... If we are to continue to say things are great at CBF, we must all pay attention to funding of national CBF."

The funding challenge portends changes for other areas of CBF life beyond missions.

CBF staff will receive no salary increases in the new fiscal year. That's the second year of flat compensation for the CBF's coordinators, the corps of top-level division directors.

Although the CBF's partner entities face reduced financial support, a policy change creates the potential for them to get more money sooner in the year. Under previous policy, the CBF distributed allocations to seminaries and other partners at a rate 85-to-90 percent of budget, then made up the difference at the end of the year if income matched budget projections. Under the new policy, partners will receive a monthly allocation keyed to that month's flow of gifts into the CBF.

For example, if total gifts run 5 percent below budget, the partners will receive 95 percent of their budgeted allocations for that month. When income is greater than budgeted, CBF will make up for the earlier reductions. However, the distributions to partners will not exceed 100 percent of budget.

For the 2003-2004 fiscal year, the partner entities are budgeted at the level of actual distributions in the year just ended, meaning a full allocation for 2003-2004 will be 85 percent of what had been budgeted in the 2002-2003 year.

Partner entities, none of which are owned or managed by the CBF, include 13 schools that are budgeted to share \$1.13 million. Other partners are the Baptist Joint Committee, \$212,500; Associated Baptist Press, \$137,700; Baptist Center for Ethics, \$85,000; Baptists Today, \$42,500; and Baptist World Alliance, \$20,000.

How the CBF's budget allocations shape up in the future – particularly if further cuts are required – could be influenced by the report of a budget priorities task force given to the Coordinating Council June 25. The report was not officially adopted but was received as information.

It identified six areas for highest-priority funding – most-neglected and unevangelized people, church starting, developing partnership missions with local churches, supporting theological education, nurturing congregational health and fostering congregational leadership. Except for theological education, all the top priority areas relate to the CBF's own Atlanta-based programs.

It also identified four areas least important and, presumably, the first suggested for budget cuts – collegiate ministries, marriage and family, chaplaincy, and Baptist identity.

In the new budget, Baptist identity includes allocations to the Baptist Joint Committee, ABP, BCE, Baptists Today and the BWA and funding for ethnic and regional networks and interim pastor support.

Currently, partner funding accounts for 28 percent of the budget. The budget priorities task force recommended that in the future, total allocations to partner entities be limited to 20 percent of the CBF budget. Another task team will study how to implement the suggestions of the budget study.

The prospect of reducing the pool of available money to divide among partner ministries drew mixed responses from members of the Coordinating Council, with some suggesting those ministries ought to be less dependent upon the CBF and others suggesting the CBF ought to help keep them strong.

The contribution to the Baptist World Alliance could draw particular scrutiny in the year ahead, as the CBF seeks final approval for its BWA membership application, which could be approved by this summer.

That likelihood already has cost the BWA \$125,000 in funding from the Southern Baptist Convention. Southern Baptist leaders have protested strongly against the CBF application and have hinted they might eliminate funding altogether. This year's drop from \$425,000 to \$300,000 from the SBC is a 34 percent reduction.

Ironically, the CBF several years ago reduced its own funding for the BWA from \$100,000 to the current \$20,000 level – an 80 percent reduction. That change was done in a budget realignment, officials said at the time.

Speaking to the Coordinating Council June 25, Vestal acknowledged the CBF's level of funding for the BWA needs to be revisited. "If our application is accepted, we've got to be good partners," he said. "That means we have to increase our financial support."

In the 2003-2004 fiscal year, the CBF has budgeted its largest single share of undesignated money for global missions, \$9.6 million. That will be supplemented by \$2 million in designated funding and will support 149 short-term and career missionaries, partnership missions with local churches, missions administration and church starting.

Other budget areas include \$2.3 million for administration, \$2.1 million for leadership development, \$1.0 million for communications and marketing, \$984,579 for building community and networking, \$663,063 for faith formation and \$375,000 for the general assembly.

Also as part of budget-cutting measures, the CBF will scale back or close its two regional resource centers, one in Dallas and one in Raleigh, N.C.

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Speak up for homosexuals, Palestinians, women preachers, Tony Campolo urges

By Greg Warner

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) – Tony Campolo pulled no punches in his speech to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship June 26, speaking boldly about gays, women preachers, poverty, the Middle East, and fundamentalism.

Campolo, a Baptist sociologist and popular speaker who preaches more than 400 times a year, called on Christians to defend the civil rights of homosexuals.

"I'm not asking you to be conservative or liberal, I'm asking you to be loving," said Campolo, delivering the keynote address during the opening session of CBF's annual General Assembly. "I'm asking you to show love and compassion to people who have had their teeth kicked in by the church for far too many years."

Campolo urged Christians to base their social opinions and actions on the Bible. "As Baptists, we accept no creed but the Bible, but after we say that, we forget the Bible," he charged.

Those who oppose women preachers cite certain scripture verses but ignore or misrepresent others, he said. "When you start changing the Bible to fit your theology," he said, it is sinful.

Christians who oppose women in ministry are "instrument[s] of the devil," charged Campolo, who teaches sociology at Eastern University, an American Baptist school in St. Davids, Pa. "It's one thing to be wrong, but this isn't wrong – that's sin."

The same Christians who oppose women preachers in American churches have no problem sending women overseas as missionaries to preach in other cultures, Campolo charged. "I can never understand them."

Campolo lamented the treatment of the poor in America, which he said ranks "dead last" among nations in per capita giving to fight poverty. "For the richest nation in the world not to have basic health care for all its people is obscene," he added.

Campolo said Christians should address Middle East issues even-handedly. Israel has a right to exist and have safe borders, he said, "but we have to start speaking on behalf of Palestinians too."

"There is terrorism on both sides," he continued, and there should be justice for both parties. But one half of all foreign aid goes to Israel, he said, and it is "evangelical Zionists" who create the imbalance. Meanwhile, half of all U.S. foreign aid goes to Israel, he said.

Campolo also lambasted the popularity of the "Left Behind" book series, which he said is based on a "false theology" that is "unbiblical to the core." He said dispensationalism, the end-times theory on which the series and much modern eschatology are based, is "a weird little form of fundamentalism." Although the teaching of a rapture is central to the system, there is no mention of a rapture before the 19th century, he said.

He noted that Calvinism, the theological system that is "now enshrined" at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, "would put 'Left Behind' out of business" if advocates accepted Calvin's eschatology too.

"I do believe in the Second Coming," Campolo emphasized. But Jesus himself didn't know when he would return, Campolo noted. "You're going to have to ask a Baptist evangelist for that."

Campolo emphasized the need for Christians to get involved in the lives of others. "The way the world is reached for Christ is not any different now that it was 2,000 years ago. Clergy are OK. But it's laity that do it."

"We must preach Jesus," he said. "We must call people to surrender their lives to Jesus. ... Whatever you do, make sure Jesus is central."

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State funding of faith-based groups is lure of 'Babylon,' Campolo says

By Robert Marus

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) – Human governments are the Babylons referred to in the book of Revelation. And America's Babylon is the temptation for religious charities to accept government money, Baptist sociologist Tony Campolo said in a May 27 speech.

Campolo, a former professor at the American Baptist-related Eastern University in suburban Philadelphia, was speaking at the annual luncheon of the Religious Liberty Council of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. The luncheon took place during the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's General Assembly in Charlotte, N.C.

"Whenever the church finds itself in a particular political-economic system, then of course that system must be referred to as Babylon," Campolo said in reference to the allegory of the "whore of Babylon" in Revelation 17.

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"The system is out to seduce the church, and that is exactly what is going on right now with 'faith-based initiatives,'" Campolo continued. "It has become the most dangerous seduction that I've ever seen come down the pike."

Campolo referred to President Bush's bid to place thoroughly religious groups – such as churches and mosques – on an equal footing with secular groups in receiving government grants for performing social services. Many religious leaders have endorsed the idea as a more effective way of providing social services that work, while many others have viewed it as a violation of the Constitution's ban on government support for religious groups.

Campolo said churches and religious charities that think it's a good idea to take government money are looking to the wrong place for their funding. "The people of God have the resources to do what needs to be done, and we don't need to be looking to the government," he said.

Campolo said the risk is greater to the church's freedom than it was to the state's integrity. "We will lose our prophetic edge" if churches take government money, he said. "Separation of church and state is crucial if the church is going to influence the government."

But churches can't offer a meaningful critique of government if they are in debt to it. "Whoever pays the fiddler calls the tune," Campolo said.

Campolo, a sociologist by training and a popular Christian speaker on social-justice issues, also used the opportunity to opine on several areas of public policy.

Discussing new restrictions on Americans' freedom, Campolo questioned why more Christians in the United States aren't speaking up for Muslims. "Following September 11, the religious freedom of Muslims is being seriously threatened" in the United States, he said.

Campolo condemned new laws and Justice Department policies that make it possible for government police – such as FBI agents – to spy on religious services and groups without probable cause. "They're sending spies into mosques and we're not saying a word," he said. Campolo pointed out that, during the Soviet era, American evangelicals would often express outrage over reports of KGB agents spying on churches and keeping intelligence files on Christian leaders, sometimes imprisoning them.

"If it was outrageous to send spies into churches, then it is also outrageous to send spies into mosques."

Campolo said excusing such surveillance of mosques because of national security concerns is missing the point. "You say, 'It's dangerous.' Freedom is always dangerous."

He also called on the U.S. government to pay particular concern to the peril that the prospect of a Shiite Muslim theocracy in newly liberated Iraq would mean for that country's religious minorities – including hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Christians.

Campolo particularly took to task American Christian leaders who have made incendiary public statements about Islam in recent years – including statements by former Southern Baptist Convention president Jerry Vines, who called Mohammed a "demon-possessed pedophile."

"I can tolerate difference of opinion, except when they're stupid," Campolo said of such comments. "Do these people understand how this plays out for our Christian missionaries in Muslim countries?"

He said he in no way meant to excuse the acts of Muslim extremists. But pointing to such acts doesn't absolve the American agitators of responsibility, he said. "You agitate people, and then you're upset when those people do violent and ungodly things."

Campolo said that a better approach to Muslim-Christian relations would be for American Christians to persuade leaders in Islamic countries of the value of religious freedom. "We've got to resist that seduction of Babylon," he said, "but we've also got to ensure that the New Jerusalem has the right to exist in every Babylon around the world."

CBF raises profile of poverty initiative

with \$175,000 offering, workshops

By Sue Poss

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) - Partners in Hope, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's rural poverty initiative got a financial boost of \$175,210 at the 2003 General Assembly in Charlotte, N.C., June 26.

Partners in Hope was the featured ministry offering for the assembly. The amount of the offering, significantly more than the goal of \$100,000, means the program will be fully funded this year, said Tom Prevost, coordinator of the initiative.

Partners in Hope is a 20-year commitment to partner with 20 of the nation's poorest counties to work alongside local residents to improve the quality of life. There is currently active work in Perry County, Ala.; the Rio Grande River Valley of Texas; the Mississippi River Delta in Arkansas and Mississippi; and Appalachian mountain areas in Kentucky. Initiatives are being developed for Louisiana and South Dakota.

"This initiative fits CBF's commitment to reach the most neglected," said Prevost. "And we're doing that through local assets-based community transformation. We're going to these communities and asking them what they need then finding ways to meet those needs."

Partners in Hope was launched at the 2001 General Assembly and has quickly gained momentum, thanks to the research, grant resources, volunteer support, strategy consultation and partnership grants provided by state, regional and national Fellowship organizations. "Significant partnerships have emerged with state and regional CBFs as well as with other organizations," Prevost said.

One of the newest partnerships is with Buckner Children and Family Services in Dallas that will provide expanded ministries to at-risk children and families in the Rio Grande Valley.

Mart Gray, coordinator of CBF of Alabama, has been one most involved in the work in Perry County in his state in the effort called Sowing Seeds of Hope. "We have started by building healthy relationships with the local residents," he said. "It is a significant step for us just to be there and be the presence of Christ."

In addition to the financial boost from the ministry offering, the assembly also increased the public profile of Partners in Hope among Fellowship members. Two workshops attracted more than 100 people each.

"It is easy to see what is wrong in a community, but the problem with that is that it is overwhelming," said Doris Littrell, a former professor in community development who is now working with Partners in Hope. "By focusing on the assets they already have, this gives local residents an internal power they didn't know they had."

Partners in Hope is also having an impact beyond the 20 official counties with which it is associated. "One of the things we're beginning to see happen," Prevost said, "is that Christians are becoming more aware of the poverty right around them. We see churches that learn about the needs in these poorest counties also becoming aware of poverty closer to home, perhaps in their own neighborhoods."

That awareness, Prevost said, is at the heart of Partners in Hope. "This is a program primarily about awareness," he said. "There are people and groups already at work among the poor and we simply need to engage with them and be obedient to the words of Jesus to witness to the least of these."

Simple compassion makes big difference with HIV/AIDS patients, speakers say

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By Sue Poss

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) – When Christians get involved with HIV or AIDS patients, it makes a difference – and it's not that complicated.

"It's a simple issue of compassion," said Wayne Smith, director of Samaritan Ministry of Central Baptist Church of Bearden in Knoxville, Tenn. Smith led a workshop at the General Assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to help churches discover ways in which they can minister to people with HIV/AIDS.

"I think the first thing a church or an individual can do is become educated," Smith said. "Identify an organization in the community that is already working with these patients. Then volunteer to answer the phone or run errands or do whatever you can. You'll make a difference. You don't have to go in there with your Bible in hand. Just go in with compassion and people will notice."

Anne Jernberg, a member of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas and a recent graduate of Austin College, a Presbyterian school in Sherman, Texas, has been a volunteer with AIDS ministry since she was a freshman. "We have a good-sized AIDS ministry at Austin and I have friends who suffer with HIV and AIDS," she said.

"The Presbyterians have been doing a lot with AIDS ministry but I haven't seen Baptists being that involved," Jernberg said. "And I think it is crucial that we find a way to love these people."

Jernberg is headed to Harvard Divinity School in the fall and plans to continue her work with HIV/AIDS patients there.

For churches interested in learning more about AIDS ministries, Smith said the first step could be something as simple as including a bulletin insert about the disease.

"Congregations can begin by learning about HIV so that we can stop the ignorance and fear," Smith said. "There are organizations in every town that offer educational programs."

Smith said he thinks it is also important for church members to hear their pastors talk about HIV.

"We need to say the words from the pulpit," he said. "Pastors set a valuable tone when they open the door to talk about HIV and AIDS.

"Jesus was clear in his life about how he dealt with the sick and disabled – not with condemnation but with compassion," Smith said. "The Christian response to HIV needs to be a clear, clean uncluttered message of love."