

Moderate Baptists in North Carolina plan meeting after resounding defeat
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WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (ABP) – Moderate Baptists in North Carolina are calling for a meeting next month to discuss their future.

The open meeting is scheduled for Jan. 23-24 at First Baptist Church in Greensboro, said David Hughes, pastor of First Baptist Church in Winston-Salem. Hughes ran as a moderate candidate in last month's election for president of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina but received only about 40 percent of the vote. Other moderate candidates lost by similar margins.

Conservatives have dominated convention elections in North Carolina since 1995. The elections this year, billed as a watershed by moderates, were widely seen as a referendum on loyalty to the conservative-dominated Southern Baptist Convention. Some moderates say churches don't need strong ties to the SBC in order to be part of the North Carolina convention.

Baptists who have felt shut out of state conventions – either by conservatives or moderates – have formed alternative conventions in Texas, Virginia and Missouri. Baptists in other states have been reluctant to take that step and instead continue to function either within or alongside the historic state conventions.

In 1990, after moderates lost a decade of elections within the Southern Baptist Convention, they held a meeting in Atlanta which led to the formation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Although that meeting and the one in North Carolina followed significant election defeats, the result may or may not be similar, Hughes said.

One difference is that moderates will not necessarily have to start a new organization. About 210 Baptist churches in North Carolina already are part of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina, which relates to the national CBF.

Hughes said he hopes 200 or more people will attend the meeting in Greensboro next month. "It will be future-looking," he said.

Hughes met with about half a dozen other pastors in Greensboro Dec. 2 to discuss the future. He said he didn't have permission from those attending the meeting to release their names. The group realizes that it doesn't have authority to speak for anyone else, he said. The discussion at the meeting was informal, Hughes said. No votes were taken.

The group talked about a number of issues, Hughes said, and decided that a larger meeting should be held. Tentative plans call for a worship service the evening of Jan. 23 with a series of discussions the next day.

"We certainly expect moderates to come, but we're not going to call it a meeting for moderates," he said.

Hughes said the group realizes some conservatives might attend the meeting. "If they do, that's fine," he said.

"I'm looking forward to it," he said. "I'm excited about it."

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