

CBF meets with American Baptists for centennial celebration

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By Patricia Heys

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WASHINGTON (ABP)—More than 2,500 Baptists gathered June 28-29 for the annual Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in Washington. For the first time, it featured a joint gathering with the American Baptist Churches USA.

The service in Washington's convention center marked the end of CBF's annual general assembly and the beginning of ABC's 100th anniversary celebration. Program organizers noted the joint ABC/CBF session had been five years in planning.

"This is an awesome God moment," Roy Medley, ABC's general secretary told the crowd of almost 4,000 participants, divided almost evenly between representatives of both groups.

The Baptists celebrated religious freedom and participated in workshops about congregational life, HIV/AIDS, immigration, women in ministry global poverty and hunger. They also took the first step toward joining the United

Nations' campaign against global poverty and disease, called the Millennium Development Goals.

In a break from business-as-usual during the national meeting, participants voted overwhelmingly to instruct their governing body to consider ways CBF can join other Christian groups to reach the United Nations Millennium Development goals.

CBF's Coordinating Council will spend the next year investigating "the feasibility and means by which CBF might be involved" with other religious and non-governmental groups rallying behind the U.N.'s long-term and comprehensive campaign to eradicate hunger, poverty, AIDS, and crushing Third World debt.

The group also gave more than \$22,000 to the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Offering for Religious Liberty and Human Rights. The Baptist World Alliance receives one-third of the proceeds. The other two-thirds are administered through partnering organizations with existing initiatives relating to human rights and religious liberty issues.

CBF's portion this year will be shared with the European Baptist Federation, which works with governments and leaders to promote religious human rights. The federation consists of 51 member unions in Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. The funds from the Fellowship's offering will allow the federation members to travel to countries where religious freedom is threatened.

Emmanuel McCall, who ended his term as CBF moderator, introduced Harriet Harral of Fort Worth as the next moderator. He also spoke to the assembly about covenant relationships.

"How does CBF fulfill covenant with God?" McCall said. "We continue doing more of what we are doing. We are evangelizing by loving people into a relationship with God. We are evangelizing by dealing with the needs that

people have, which if not addressed obscure our message. We are evangelizing by challenging unjust situations, the disparities and inequities of life.”

The cooperative event served as a predecessor to another gathering of Baptists—the New Baptist Covenant Celebration to be in 2008 in Atlanta. It will feature Baptists from more than 36 organizations.

“There’s a great deal of energy about the convergence of Baptists who are coming together to find fellowship, community and address great issues of our day, particularly around the issue of poverty,” Daniel Vestal, CBF’s executive coordinator, said. “I’ve never experienced anything like this in my lifetime.”

In his report to the Coordinating Council, Vestal cited the need for relationship covenants between national CBF and the state and regional CBF organizations, strategic prioritizing, improving interactive communications tools and creating a collaborative culture between staff, the council and CBF partners.

Revenue concerns prompted Vestal to name among the challenges “developing a culture of shared fundraising.”

“I think staff has done a good job trying to contain cost, minimize administration, reduce overlap, doing what we have to do and nothing more, but to you as a council in all candor, we have done all we can do,” Vestal said. “If we’re going to reduce costs any more, we have to ask ‘What are we really going to do?’”

In a Coordinating Council business session, a \$16,481,000 budget was presented along with the nominating committee’s recommendations. Nominations included North Carolina pastor Jack Glasgow as moderator elect, Arkansas college professor Hal Bass as recorder, and individuals to serve on the national Coordinating Council, council on endorsement, and

trustees for the CBF Foundation and Church Benefits Board. Also, an amendment to the bylaws was proposed that would recognize a CBF regional organization in the Midwest. All items were approved during the general session.

At the concluding general session, CBF and ABCUSA co-commissioned two couples to global missions service: Marcia and Duane Binkley, who will serve in the U.S. among Karen refugees, and Nancy and Steve James, who have been serving in Haiti as CBF affiliates.

“I am delighted that we are cooperating with American Baptists in joint appointments of the Binkleys and the Jameses to their respective places of ministry,” Rob Nash, CBF’s global missions coordinator, said. “These joint ventures send the signal that mission engagement in the 21st century is about collaboration for the good of God’s kingdom in the world.”

The previous evening, CBF commissioned 16 other missionaries to serve among the world’s most neglected people. Baptist World Alliance President David Coffey affirmed and challenged the new field personnel to continue to “face the world of spiritual lostness” by knowing the world and knowing the Bible.

“If you are going to be the presence of Christ in a broken world, it will not happen without risk-taking,” Coffey said. “These people you’ve seen commissioned here tonight are risk-takers.”

The 2008 CBF general assembly will be June 19-20 in Memphis, Tenn.

Hannah Elliott contributed to this article.

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