

# **Baxley challenges CBF to daring faith and greater giving**

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BIRMINGHAM—Paul Baxley, executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, celebrated the “capacity of local congregations to serve God in their communities” while also challenging churches to increase gifts to global CBF missions causes.

“In my travels, I have found much to celebrate. I have found so many reasons to have renewed energy and conviction,” Baxley told the CBF general assembly, reflecting on his first three months as executive coordinator.

In his new role, he has traveled through 14 states, visiting 48 churches as well as attending eight CBF state/regional gatherings, he noted.

“I must say my hope and my confidence and my conviction about the capacity of local congregations to serve God in their communities has never been higher than it is now,” Baxley said.

This energy can be centered on celebration, Baxley explained. He cited the work done across CBF’s state and regional organizations, the ministries carried out by CBF field personnel around the world, the commitments to racial and cultural diversity within the Fellowship, Cooperative Baptists’ commitment to come alongside people experiencing persistent rural poverty through Together for Hope, and the many ways CBF is helping congregations thrive.

# Concern about declining revenue

At the same time, Baxley also noted concern centered on a decline in revenue. He challenged assembly attendees to recommit to support CBF through undesignated gifts and ambitious promotion and support for the Offering for Global Missions, which funds the long-term presence of field personnel.

The general assembly adopted a \$16.3 million missions and ministries budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins October 1.

Baxley also highlighted several commitments he made to CBF.

“I will tell you the truth as I see it,” he said. “We will work together toward greater and greater transparency. In the days ahead, we’re going to seek new ways to engage with all of your congregations. It is extremely important that we hear from you—your hopes, your dreams, your deepest concerns, what you need most from our Fellowship community. Because above all else, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship exists for congregations and to help congregations thrive.”

Baxley committed also to continue CBF efforts in reaching further, to grow in places across the country and around the world, and with people of other races and backgrounds. He also recommitted to the dreams of those who started the Fellowship nearly 30 years ago, asking for some commitments from Cooperative Baptists in return.

“I want to ask you to commit to praying for our work collectively as a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship,” he said. “And most of all, I want to ask you not to take our life together for granted.

# **Reminder of ‘courageous faith’ of CBF founders**

“Sometimes we get together in our CBF gatherings and we talk about our founding. ... I hear (the founding of CBF) talked about as a decision that came out of the experience of pain—of struggle. I see it as a remarkable act of courageous faith. ... This community did not come to life because of an accident—not because there were no other options. It was a community worthy of risky, daring, ambitious support.”

Baxley asked all those who were in the room in 1991 at the Fellowship’s founding to stand.

“I have something to say to you. ... Thank you on behalf of myself, my family, and a generation of younger Baptists because you heard the Lord saying, ‘See I am doing a new thing.’ Any act of God that began like that cannot be taken for granted,” he said.

“My question today is: Do we have the same kind of daring faith? The same kind of generous heart? The same kind of resurrection confidence? Listen. Can you hear the spirit of God? ‘I am still doing a new thing.’ Now it springs forth. Don’t you see it? Let’s not take that for granted. Let’s join in.”

## **Reports on CBF initiatives**

Bo Prosser, who leads CBF’s Ministerial Excellence Initiative, described efforts to help pastoral and congregational leaders identify and respond to financial stressors causing anxiety in their personal and professional lives. The initiative issues grants that provide direct financial support and direct retirement support as well as coaching, financial literacy training and financial advisement.

The Ministerial Excellence Initiative has assisted 60 pastors totaling \$600,000 in debt relief, he reported.

CBF's Ruth Perkins Lee and Harry Rowland reported on a new initiative made possible with a \$1 million grant from the Lilly Endowment to expand the Fellowship's work of empowering ministers to have healthy ministries which, in turn, support healthy churches.

CBF's Thriving in Ministry initiative will develop new patterns and practices for clergy to build and sustain collegial relationships, Perkins Lee said. The initiative will place a special focus on six groupings of pastors that have been identified as in need of a better ecosystem of well-being—female pastors, pastors in rural settings, Latino pastors, church starters, pastors in transition and pastors in the second half of ministry.

"There are many transitions and unique contexts of service that characterize a sustained career in ministry," Perkins Lee said. "This initiative creates space for relationships to develop and flourish."

Stephen Reeves, associate coordinator of partnerships and advocacy, updated the general assembly on the work of CBF advocacy. Cooperative Baptists have continued providing leadership in the national faith community calling for reform of predatory payday and auto-title lending, he noted. Also, in partnership with Fellowship Southwest, advocates in CBF life spoke out against the child separation policy during summer 2018.

"Our advocacy action team for immigrants and refugees worked to craft a statement of values and principles that should guide immigration reform," Reeves said. "We remain hopeful and prayerful that a moment for positive reform will come and CBF advocates will be ready to provide vocal, public support firmly rooted in our mission commitment of ministering to migrants across the globe."

Carrie Bearden, chair of the CBF Ministries Council, reported on the work

of the council's action groups in the areas of young Baptists, networks, identity and resources.

**Six projects received grants totaling \$25,000 from the CBF Ministries Council:**

- The Building Bridges and Empowering Immigrants program of Iglesia Baptista Victoria en Cristo of Fort Worth, which serves low-income legal permanent residents, refugees, asylum-seekers and undocumented immigrants in the Dallas-Fort Worth area by providing legal case management and services.
- The English-as-a-Second-Language program at Woodland Baptist Church in San Antonio.
- A scholarship for medical coder classes at Edgewood Church in Atlanta, designed to give unemployed and low-income individuals a marketable job skill in the medical insurance industry.
- The Mobile Produce Stand of Palmetto Works in Conway, S.C., providing fresh produce, job training and economic support to local farmers.
- The Peace by Piece quilting ministry of Augusta Heights Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C., which provides homemade quilts for children who have suffered sexual abuse and survivors of domestic violence.