

Baxley unanimously elected to lead CBF

January 16, 2019

DECATUR, Ga.—The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Governing Board voted unanimously Jan. 15 to elect Paul Baxley as the organization's fourth executive coordinator.

Baxley, who has served since 2010 as senior minister of First Baptist Church, Athens, Ga., was selected based upon the unanimous recommendation of the 11-member executive coordinator search committee formed last July.

A native of Winston-Salem, N.C., Baxley has held pastorates and ministry positions in Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia and is a former member of the CBF Governing Board. He is the first CBF executive coordinator without ministry experience in Texas.

He succeeds Suzii Paynter, who became the third executive coordinator of CBF in March 2013 and announced in July 2018 plans to transition her leadership of the Fellowship. Other previous executive coordinators were Daniel Vestal, who served 1996-2012, and Cecil Sherman, who served 1992-96.

Experienced in life of CBF

During his two-terms on the CBF Governing Board, Baxley chaired the personnel committee as well as the global mission structure and staffing committee, an ad hoc body that worked for 18 months to develop a comprehensive plan for CBF Global Missions.

Baxley also provided leadership as member of the ad-hoc committee of the Illumination Project, an 18-month effort to seek ways to model unity through cooperation on matters of human sexuality in CBF.

Additionally, he served on the CBF Coordinating Council, the Fellowship's earlier governance body, and chaired the Engaging Missionally Collaborative Team.

He has been a leader to two CBF state organizations as chair of the New Day Task Force of CBF of North Carolina and as a coordinating council member of CBF of Georgia, where he chaired the missions committee and was moderator.

Baxley is a graduate of Wake Forest University, Duke Divinity School and Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

'Deep faith and authenticity'

Jeff Roberts, chair of the executive coordinator search committee and senior pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C., reflected on the search process.

"As part of this process, I have been able to spend time with very talented individuals who are devoted to following Jesus and committed to our CBF fellowship," Roberts said. "Our committee quickly discovered that our love for CBF far outweighed any of our differences. We also were reminded of how many talented individuals there are in CBF life. We were impressed with our candidates and this gave us great confidence not only in this process but for the future of our Fellowship.

"I am grateful for this experience and am looking forward to what God is doing in our lives together. I celebrate that our committee is unanimous in our recommendation of Dr. Paul Baxley as our next executive coordinator."

Search committee member Jackie Baugh Moore, vice president of the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation, cited Baxley's hope, creativity, energy, spiritual resilience and strong faith.

"Paul's wisdom, theological maturity and knowledge coupled with his desire to listen and love people will help him guide CBF through this next chapter in our narrative," she said. "His leadership style reflects deep faith and authenticity. Paul is dedicated to equipping and strengthening theological education, mission work, the church, partner organizations and all of us involved in the life of CBF."

CBF Moderator Gary Dollar congratulated the search committee and Governing Board on their selection of Baxley.

"Paul is a deeply committed Christian and a lifelong Baptist. He loves the church and the way it is expressed through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship," Dollar said. "I am convinced that Paul will lead all of us in CBF to new levels of service in the name of Christ."

'Not afraid'

In accepting the call to serve as CBF executive coordinator, Baxley expressed his optimism for the future of CBF and emphasized the central role of congregations in this future.



Paul Baxley

“I accept the call of the Governing Board and this calling from God, with the opportunities and challenges that I know they both hold,” Baxley said. “I’m aware of all the research about the state of congregations and denominations in the Western world. I’m aware that every day won’t be easy and that every question won’t be soft. But I’m not afraid.

“Instead, I’m confident because I have this conviction, the God who raised Jesus from the dead and who has carried his people through 2,000 years of challenge and adversity, much of it our own making, is still in the business of drawing the world to divine love through us.

“Congregations are at the center of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and CBF exists to bless and serve churches. I’m eager to see what kind of powerful collaborations can emerge between CBF pastors, lay leaders, leaders of our partner ministries and our state and regional coordinators. Imagine the power that could come from the best kind of convening and collaboration, where we see that CBF’s future is not held by whoever is the executive coordinator, but our life, work and witness together. My experience as a pastor in CBF congregations has taught me that when we open ourselves to serve and lead together, God does incredible work.”

Outgoing CBF Executive Coordinator Suzii Paynter welcomed the selection of Baxley as her successor.



Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Executive Coordinator Suzii Paynter announced last July her plans to retire. (CBF Photo)

“Paul Baxley has already been an exemplary leader for CBF. I welcome him into the executive coordinator’s role with enthusiasm and certain hope for the future,” Paynter said. “God has shown faithfulness to CBF by preparing the way in every era and through each transition and so it is with Paul.

“As a pastor, he has the respect and admiration of generations across CBF life. His wisdom and energy are gifts that he generously contributes in every endeavor. Personally, he is a true friend and warmly regarded colleague. One keystone of his leadership is building consensus and participation by charting a purposeful course worthy of engagement. He has asked big questions and sought high callings. His love for the church, his Lord and the people of the world have equipped him with God’s gifts and God’s blessing to be the best-ever executive coordinator of CBF.”

Former CBF Executive Coordinator Daniel Vestal praised Baxley as “a person of impeccable integrity and deep Christian conviction.”

Baxley was ordained to gospel ministry in 1993 at his home church of First Baptist Church on Fifth in Winston-Salem, N.C. Baxley and his wife,

Jennifer, a licensed physical therapist, have four children—Olivia, 17; Maria, 11; and twins Caroline and Matthew, 8.