

CBF launches Fellowship Southwest network

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DECATUR, Ga.—The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is launching Fellowship Southwest—a network spanning Texas, Oklahoma and the West.

The CBF governing board adopted a motion Feb. 10 from its networking committee to affirm Fellowship Southwest.

“Fellowship Southwest is a wonderful opportunity to come alongside our incredible churches in Texas, Oklahoma and the West to cultivate Christian community and accomplish mission and ministry in harmony with one another,” CBF Executive Coordinator Suzii Paynter said.

“This network will strengthen our core commitment as Cooperative Baptists to unity in cooperation, bringing to the table churches and individuals with a variety of worship practices and beliefs who are serious about shared mission, ministry and advancing the witness of Christ.

“The convergence of Christians culturally and ecumenically who wish to partner together makes this moment ripe to set a new, big and equal table in our Fellowship. This new regional network presents great opportunity for Christian community, shared mission and impactful ministry.”

Will supplement CBF of Texas and other organizations

The new regional network will supplement the work of three autonomous CBF state/regional organizations—CBF of Texas, CBF of Oklahoma and CBF West—to promote Baptist identity, Christian cooperation and to accomplish effective mission and ministry among related partners.

Fellowship Southwest will encompass an area that is home to more than 500 CBF churches, four partner theological schools and a wide array of other partners and individuals, including CBF field personnel, chaplains, pastoral counselors, student groups and church starters.

The Fellowship Southwest network will offer an enhanced capacity for collaboration, communication and identity in the Southwest; Hispanic church and mission development in the United States and Mexico; ethnic and ecumenical partnerships; scholarships and support for young leaders; collaborative mission and ministry work; church starting and congregational revitalization; clergy health and effective ministry; advocacy and public witness; recruitment and retention of churches; referral and placement services; and cooperation with state and regional denominational bodies.



Rick McClatchy The new network will strengthen existing missions and church-starting partnerships among Fellowship churches in Texas, Oklahoma and the West region in addition to enhancing ongoing partnerships with Convención Bautista Hispana de Texas, Hispanic Pentecostals and churches in Mexico, CBF of Texas Coordinator Rick McClatchy said.

“Fellowship Southwest is a recognition of all that is already happening in the larger picture of the Southwest,” McClatchy said. “It is an effort to bring more intentional coordination, communication and a broader

strategic vision to our mission efforts in the region.”

CBF West Coordinator Glen Foster, who provides leadership to a 13-state region and is pastor of Pantano Baptist Church in Tucson, Ariz., said the new network will “produce life-changing results” in Arizona, New Mexico and California.

“The Southwest has the highest percentage of non-English speakers,” Foster said. “Partnering to provide assistance with immigration, education and advocacy will build bridges of much-needed hope, and working together in missions will grow the kingdom of God on both sides of the U.S. border.”

CBF of Oklahoma Coordinator Steve Graham echoed McClatchy and Foster and emphasized the network will offer new points of connection between churches and will generate energy around shared mission in the Southwest.

“Fellowship Southwest will connect churches, lay leaders and ministers who are a vital part of CBF,” Graham said. “Bringing us together will harness energy and passion for the good of the cause. In our state of Oklahoma, a growing number of people are discovering that we offer ourselves as partners in conversation, ministry and mission; partners for well-being and wholeness. Connecting with our border states will increase the momentum.”

Organizational structure

The network’s organizational structure will consist of a steering committee, an advisory committee and a full-time coordinator employed by CBF. The steering committee will include representatives from CBF of Texas, CBF of Oklahoma and CBF West as the network’s originating executive members. An additional four to six members also will serve on the committee with the Fellowship Southwest coordinator as an ex-officio member of the steering

body.

The advisory committee of Fellowship Southwest will be organized as a coalition of representative ministry and mission partners, serving three-year terms with the possible re-appointment for an additional three-year term. Representatives of the advisory committee will advance the priorities of the network in mission and ministry. The committee will serve as a hub from which various aspects of shared ministry are accomplished through subcommittees, task forces and other structures relevant to harmonious work and relationship.

Network leaders will convene in May for a planning retreat to discuss mission and ministry priorities, organizational structure and future full-time leadership.