

CBF to evaluate structure, funding in two-year study

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) - Facing a chronic budget shortfall, [Cooperative Baptist Fellowship](#) moderator Hal Bass has appointed a 14-member task force to study the organization's missional and organizational future.

The task force, emerging from consensus during a recent gathering of leaders of state and regional CBF and partner organizations, will take up to two years to develop a model of funding for the umbrella Fellowship movement that fosters "collaboration rather than competition" for resources.

Daniel Vestal delivers a report to the CBF General Assembly. (Photo by J.V. McKinney)

"When we created CBF 20 years ago, we organized an institution with the best thinking we had," CBF Executive Coordinator Daniel Vestal said during a business session of the group's annual General Assembly June 25. "In the coming months we will attend to our institutional well-being, and we will nurture the movement of God's Spirit within our community, because that is who we are."

Participants adopted a 2010-2011 budget of \$14.5 million, down from \$16.1 million last year, in an attempt to get a handle on economic realities. Early in the current fiscal year the [CBF Coordinating Council implemented](#) a contingency spending plan anticipating income at 80 percent of the projection in the adopted budget.

Eight months into the year, receipts were coming in at 73 percent, prompting leaders to ponder even deeper cuts and/or finding ways to increase revenues between now and Oct. 1.

“The fluctuation in the economies have made the last few years financially difficult,” Colleen Burroughs, chair of the Coordinating Council’s finance committee, said June 24.

The budget includes a goal of \$5.5 million raised though the CBF’s [Offering for Global Missions](#) , reduced from \$6.1 million this year but more in line with actual receipts in recent years. Shortfalls in the offering, which provides a majority of the income for the \$8.6 million budgeted for global missions and ministries initiatives, limit the Fellowship’s ability to appoint new fully funded missionaries. At a June 23 service the group commissioned 16 new field personnel who will serve alongside CBF missionaries but raise their own support.

“Many of us don’t realize that the courageous and called 16 field personnel that we commissioned last night as affiliates have to raise their own support, but they are going because God is still moving and working in the world,” Burroughs said. “You and your churches are vital to sustaining the CBF and the ministries that we have committed to do together.”

Julie Pennington-Russell, pastor of First Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., challenged CBF churches and individuals to step up contributions to the CBF’s missions program.

“The CBF Offering for Global Missions is not above and beyond the budget to do special extra kinds of ministries,” she said. “It is the way our field personnel are supported on the field. Specific ministries don’t happen if the offering is not received.. The goal is a real number. It comes straight from the CBF budget for global missions personnel.”

While emphasizing the urgency to keep CBF missionaries on the field,

leaders insisted the overall Fellowship movement is strong.

“We wish we were over a hundred percent of budget and over a hundred percent of Offering for Global Missions, but I want to assure you of something,” pastor moderator Jack Glasgow said in a breakout session to discuss the budget. “The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship movement is doing more right now than we’ve ever done before — global missions, congregational resources — we’re doing more, not less. It’s just that people are giving in different streams and in different ways. They’re giving to robust state organizations like North Carolina. That’s not something that we’re concerned about. We celebrate that. There is money being given directly to partners. There are churches who are partnering with us in specific ways so that money is not flowing through the Offering for Global Missions. It’s not flowing through the budget, but it’s going to the mission field.”

Glasgow said helping churches sort out the Fellowship’s and partner’s various funding streams will be a major focus of the “2012 Task Force” chaired by David Hull, pastor of First Baptist Church in Huntsville, Ala., that will report at next year’s General Assembly in Tampa, Fla., and the 2012 meeting in Fort Worth, Texas.

“We recognize that having a collaborative funding approach, where partners - whether it’s state, regions or identity partners like Baptist Joint Committee, Baptist Center for Ethics, press organizations, whether it’s theological schools - we need to be able to come together and say for the next 20 years what is our strategy going to be for getting the dollars to where they need to be that they can be used best and so we send a message to individual Christians and congregations that is a consistent message of how we can best fund God’s enterprises,” Glasgow said.

Along with funding, the task force will examine ways to streamline organizational structures to help churches and other ministries respond

more effectively to global needs and help churches and individuals to embrace their identity as part of the CBF.

Succeeding Bass, a professor at Ouachita Baptist University in Arkansas, is Christy McMillan Goodwin, associate pastor at Oakland Baptist Church in Rock Hill, S.C. Goodwin, 38, attended the initial gathering that led to formation of the CBF as an 18-year-old student at Furman University. A graduate of Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Va., she will be the first leader of the organization whose entire adult life has been post the Southern Baptist Convention controversy that birthed the movement and in a CBF church.

-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.