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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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91-73

NOTE TO EDITORS: The first two stories below replace the story moved May 10: "Moderates forming new group; claim it's not new convention." The three other stories are wrapups of the meeting.

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
formed in Atlanta assembly

By Mark Wingfield

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N-NEWS*

ATLANTA (BP)--After 12 years of hard labor, Southern Baptist moderates gave birth to a new religious body called the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship May 11.

However, those who birthed this infant organization and those who observed the birth offered different assessments on what had been born. Some called it a new denomination, others called it the precursor to a denomination, while still others called it a fellowship or renewal movement within the Southern Baptist Convention.

Less than one month before the conservative-controlled Southern Baptist Convention holds its annual meeting in Atlanta, more than 5,000 moderates gathered in the same city to form Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Regardless of perspective, the new fellowship bears many characteristics of a denomination or convention. Participants approved:

- a constitution and bylaws and plans to seek incorporation in the state of Georgia;
- a three-track funding mechanism with a proposed operating budget of \$545,336;
- formation of a missions coordinating council to be led by a permanent director with a 1991-92 budget of \$507,295;
- support for 12 home and foreign missions projects.

One hindrance to calling the group a denomination is there is no provision for electing messengers or delegates to the group's annual assemblies. According to the newly adopted bylaws, any individual, church or group contributing any amount of money to the fellowship is a member. At this meeting, anyone who walked into the meeting hall could vote.

John Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church in Asheville, N.C., was elected moderator of the group. He replaces Daniel Vestal, pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta, who had been chairman of the interim steering committee of The Baptist Fellowship since last August.

With formation of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, The Baptist Fellowship ceased to exist. The latter group had been formed last August at a meeting of moderates in Atlanta after Vestal's defeat by conservative pastor Morris Chapman for the presidency of the SBC.

Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church in Wichita Falls, Texas, is the latest in a 12-year string of SBC presidents elected by a conservative movement in the denomination. Moderates claim conservatives have systematically excluded them from leadership positions in the convention.

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Another organization formed at last year's moderate convocation will also be merged into the new Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Cooperative Baptist Missions Program Inc. was established as an alternative missions funding program for individuals and churches choosing not to give through the SBC Cooperative Program.

Participants approved a motion by BCMP vice chairman Jim Lacy that BCMP be merged with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Lacy is a member of First Baptist Church in Midland, Texas.

Outgoing BCMP chairman Grady Cothen, former president of the Baptist Sunday School Board, said \$1.57 million had been given through BCMP as of April 30.

Those donations came from 211 churches, Cothen said. Of that number, 39 churches used the "Regular Plan," which closely parallels the SBC Cooperative Program; 80 churches used the "Ventures Plan," which excludes some items included in the Cooperative Program and adds other non-SBC recipients. The remaining 92 churches sent money to be distributed according to their own plans.

At this meeting, participants approved a third funding track called "Vision 2000 Plan," which directs all funds to causes either not funded or barely funded by the Cooperative Program. This plan gives money to mission ventures outside the SBC mission boards, to Richmond Theological Seminary and the George W. Truett Seminary of Baylor University, to literature development, an unnamed ethics and public policy program, Associated Baptist Press and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

Home and foreign mission projects funded through the Vision 2000 plan would be administered by the fellowship's missions coordinating council.

Alan Neely, chairman of the missions task force, said the coordinating council will select, screen and train personnel to meet mission needs presented by various Baptist bodies around the world. Neely is professor at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, N.J.

The proposed constitution and bylaws for Cooperative Baptist Fellowship say the purpose of the group is "to enable the people of God to carry out the Great Commission under the lordship of Jesus Christ, in a fellowship where every Christian exercises God's gifts and calling."

A subcommittee of the interim steering committee had written the proposed constitution and bylaws, which were introduced May 9, the first day of the group's three-day meeting. After more than one hour of discussion the next morning, the document was sent back to the subcommittee, which held an open meeting to receive suggested amendments before coming back to the assembly on the final morning of the meeting.

The major single amendment approved from the floor was to change the name of the organization. The interim steering committee had recommended naming the group "United Baptist Fellowship."

Due to concerns the fellowship would be confused with United Baptists in some areas of the United States, the alternate name was chosen.

Here are other highlights of the approved constitution and bylaws:

-- Membership in the fellowship is defined by financial contribution, although no minimum contribution is stated. A portion of the bylaws designating individuals, churches and institutions giving \$1,000 or more as "founding members" and those giving \$100 or more as "sustaining members" was deleted.

-- The group will be governed by a moderator, moderator-elect and recorder who will serve with a 79-member coordinating council. The moderator may serve only one term, and members of the coordinating council will serve three-year terms.

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-- An administrative committee will conduct business between the quarterly meetings of the coordinating council. Originally slated to be called an executive committee, this group's name was changed after a motion from the floor based on the rationale this body should not have the same name as the SBC Executive Committee.

-- All meetings of the fellowship, its coordinating council, administrative committee and all subcommittees except the nominating committee are required to be open meetings. This provision was adopted as a bylaw amendment from the floor.

-- The coordinating council has authority to amend the bylaws upon a two-thirds vote if necessary to meet legal requirements for incorporation or to obtain tax-exempt status. An amendment provided the limitation. The proposed bylaws had given the coordinating council power to amend bylaws under any circumstances.

-- Bylaws call for five ministry groups: world missions, literature, ethics and public policy, theological education, and equipping the laity.

-- Additionally, the coordinating council is virtually a self-perpetuating board. A nominating committee composed strictly of current members of the coordinating council will receive nominations from state groups to present to the general assembly for election.

Defining the relationship between state groups and the national body was a repeated point of discussion. Some strongly favored state groups electing their own representatives to the coordinating council, while others favored giving the nominating committee the option of rejecting state nominations if necessary. The latter view prevailed at this meeting.

The constitution calls for members of the coordinating council to be elected according to a formula established by states and regions.

Texas has the most representatives with a total of six. Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia each have five. Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Missouri, South Carolina and Tennessee each have four. Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Oklahoma each have three.

Four regional clusters -- Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest and West -- have three representatives each.

Also, the proposed constitution includes a "sunset clause," calling for the constitution to expire at the close of the general assembly in 1993 unless reaffirmed by a majority vote of those in attendance.

The group's next meeting is scheduled for April 30-May 2, 1992, at the Tarrant County Convention Center in Fort Worth, Texas.

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Formation of new group
'not petty rivalry'

By Mark Wingfield

N-10

Baptist Press
5/13/91

ATLANTA (BP)--Formation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship does not stem from "petty rivalry," according to a statement presented by the interim steering committee of The Baptist Fellowship, precursor to the new group.

More than 5,000 Southern Baptist moderates formed Cooperative Baptist Fellowship during a May 9-11 meeting in Atlanta.

"If the old moderate wing of the SBC were represented in making policy and were treated as welcomed representatives of competing ideas in the Baptist mission task, then we would co-exist, as we did for years, alongside fundamentalism," the statement said. "But this is not the way things are."

Walter Shurden, professor of church history at Mercer University in Macon, Ga., read the statement on behalf of the steering committee.

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In a later interview, Shurden said this statement, originally intended to be a preamble to the fellowship's constitution, was written in a fashion similar to the public statement given in 1845 to explain the purpose of the constitution and bylaws of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Shurden said he and Cecil Sherman, pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, were the primary writers of the statement.

Forming the fellowship "does not require that we sever ties with the old Southern Baptist Convention," the statement said. "It does give us another mission delivery system, one more like our understanding of what it means to be Baptist and what it means to do gospel."

Forming this new group is merely a confession there is a division within the SBC, the statement said. "To spend our time trying to reclaim a human institution is to make more of that institution than we ought to make.

"When we make more of the SBC than we ought, we risk falling into idolatry. Twelve years is too long to engage in political activity. We are called to higher purposes."

The statement identified six areas where moderates differ with the conservatives who have gained control of the Southern Baptist Convention in the past 12 years:

1. Bible. "The Bible neither claims nor reveals inerrancy as a Christian teaching. Bible claims must be based on the Bible, not on human interpretations of the Bible."

Inerrancy -- generally defined as the belief that the Bible is literally true in everything it says -- was the rallying cry for conservatives as they gained control of presidential appointive powers in the SBC.

2. Education. "Fundamentalists educate by indoctrination ... We seek to enlarge and build upon such truth as we have."

3. Mission. "Fundamentalists make the mission assignment narrower than Jesus did. They allow their emphasis on direct evangelism to undercut other biblical ministries of mercy and justice. This narrowed definition of what a missionary ought to be and do is a contention between us."

4. Pastor. "They argue the pastor should be the ruler of a congregation ... Our understanding of the role of the pastor is to be a servant/shepherd."

5. Women. The statement said conservatives generally believe women should be submissive to men in church leadership roles, but moderates believe women are "equally capable of dealing with sacred issues."

6. Church. Describing Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as "ecumenical" and "inclusive," the statement said: "We are eager to have fellowship with our brothers and sisters in the faith and to recognize their work for our Savior. We do not try to make them conform to us; we try to include them in our design for mission."

"The points of difference are critical," the statement said. "They are the stuff around which a fellowship such as the Southern Baptist Convention is made.

"At no place have we been able to negotiate about these differences. Were our fundamentalist brethren to negotiate, they would compromise. And that would be a sin by their understandings. So we can either come to their position or we can form a new fellowship."

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(Linda Lawson contributed to this story)

Hewett, others elected to lead
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

N-CO

ATLANTA (BP)--John Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church in Asheville, N.C., was elected the first moderator of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship when the group was formed May 9-11.

More than 5,000 Southern Baptist moderates met in Atlanta to form the new organization, which grew out of an informal group called The Baptist Fellowship started last August.

Patricia Ayers of San Antonio, Texas, was named moderator-elect. Bill Owen of Ardmore, Okla., was named recorder.

These three officers will work with a 79-member coordinating council. The council was elected according to a formula giving certain numbers of representatives to states and regional clusters.

State and regional groups nominated their own representatives, which were then approved by the larger assembly.

When nominations were presented to the assembly, two unsuccessful attempts were made to remove Kirby Godsey, president of Mercer University in Macon, Ga., as a Georgia representative. Godsey has stirred controversy among Georgia moderates and conservatives for the way he has administered the university.

Those elected to three-year terms are: Pamela Williams, Louisiana; Lavonn Brown, Oklahoma; Linda Ericson, Northeast; Ken Meyers, Mid-Atlantic; Rick Tuten, Midwest; Vicky Patterson, West; Jean Bond, Mississippi; Layne Smith, Arkansas; Suzii Paynter, Mississippi; Cecil Sherman, Texas; Joe Hairston, Mid-Atlantic;

Sara Shelton, Alabama; Robert Rainwater, Virginia; Joy Steincross, Missouri; Henry Huff, North Carolina; Babs Morrison, Texas; Jim Gentry, Kentucky; Barbara Mills, Florida; Roger Lovette, Tennessee; Nancy Ammerman, Georgia; Martha Smith, North Carolina; Kirby Godsey, Georgia; Charles Wade, Texas; William Turnage, Missouri; John Coryell, Alabama; Winnie Williams, South Carolina.

Those elected to two-year terms are: Fred Jones, Louisiana; Helen Montgomery, Oklahoma; David Lam, Northeast; Cindy Johnson, Mid-Atlantic; Donald Sharp, Midwest; Ron Sisk, West; Joe Tuten, Mississippi; Mary Ann Williams, Arkansas; Oeita Bottorff, Texas; Alfred Ayscue, North Carolina; Jim Slatton, Virginia; Tim Noel, Alabama; Pam Gordon, Virginia; Paul Duke, Missouri;

Marian Grant, North Carolina; Jerry Dailey, Texas; Jimmy Allen, Texas; Carolyn Hale, Kentucky; Jack Snell, Florida; William Savell, Tennessee; Clarisa Strickland, Georgia; Linda Bridges, Virginia; Nanette Avery, Tennessee; Larry Kemp, Kentucky; Pat Anderson, Florida; Marcia Stow, South Carolina; Fletcher Derrick, South Carolina

Those elected to one-year terms are: Reba Cobb, Kentucky; Jon Stubblefield, Louisiana; Mike Boyd, Oklahoma; David Waugh, Northeast; Jeanette Holt, Mid-Atlantic; Dot Sample, Midwest; Rudy Zachry, West; John McClanahan, Arkansas; Steve Tondera, Alabama; Ray Spence, Virginia; John Hughes, Missouri; Peggy Haymes, North Carolina; Jim Lacy, Texas;

Peggy Pemble, Florida; Bill Sherman, Tennessee; Ches Smith, Georgia; John Cothran, South Carolina; Mike Boyd, Oklahoma; Dan Rivera, Texas; Peter Rhea Jones, Georgia; Seth Macon, N.C.; Frank Mancuso, Virginia; Carolyn Cole Bucy, Texas; Richard Groves, North Carolina; Edna Frances Dawkins, Virginia; Tom Sims, Mississippi.

Freedom becomes rally cry
for moderate Southern Baptists

By Sarah Zimmerman

N-CO

ATLANTA (BP)--As biblical inerrancy has been the bench mark for conservative Southern Baptists, freedom became the rallying cry for moderate Southern Baptists meeting in Atlanta May 9-11.

Yet the more than 5,000 people attending the meeting stopped short of using their freedom to form a new denomination.

While accepting the Bible's inspiration and authority, the moderate Southern Baptists stressed individual freedom to interpret Scripture.

"For me, to be a Baptist is to claim the privilege and freedom of being my own theologian and my own interpreter of Scripture as the Holy Spirit leads me," said Scott Walker, pastor of First Baptist Church of Charleston, S.C.

Participants heard 10 sermons and testimonies during the three-day meeting, and they gave standing ovations to messages by Nancy Ammerman and Ken Chafin.

"One of the greatest ironies of these years in Southern Baptist life is that it took a fundamentalist takeover of the denomination's institutions to show us just how completely we had already, voluntarily, given up much of our freedom," said Ammerman, associate professor of sociology of religion at Emory University in Atlanta.

"In the name of loyalty and efficiency and the greater good of spreading the gospel, we had given up our freedom.

"We voluntarily agreed to give all our money to one centralized bureaucracy. We had pledged never to get a pastor from anything but an official denominational seminary. We loyally accepted whatever doctrine was printed in Sunday school quarterlies in Nashville.

"We promised to build our churches, plan our programs, train our leaders, robe our choirs, tag our visitors and pray our prayers according to calendars and plans that came to us from Nashville. The Pope should be so lucky," Ammerman said.

"We were big and strong and influential and efficient, but we were not free."

Reclaiming freedom does not mean leaving the Southern Baptist Convention, Ammerman stressed. Instead, it means cooperating with organizations which help the church fulfill its mission.

"We need a new dream which permits us to celebrate our Baptist heritage but at the same time puts us on new roads," Chafin, pastor of Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., told the group.

The new dream, Chafin said, will focus on freedom. "It's the word which Baptists have loved and from which they have gotten free pulpits, free professors, a freed laity, free congregations, freedom to deal with issues and freedom to cooperate," Chafin said.

Chafin suggested he and members of his audience were guilty of worshipping the denomination.

"It is because of my great love for the denomination that I spent more than a decade trying in vain to keep her focused on her reason for being -- to give churches a way of joining hands for the purpose of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with the whole world," Chafin said.

"My grief is that there is neither the time nor the tools nor the opportunity for putting back together what is being destroyed," Chafin said.

John Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Ashville, N.C. was elected moderator of the fellowship.

"During the past 12 years there have been times I wondered if I could stay a Baptist," Hewett said at the conclusion of the meeting. "If being a Baptist means being what you are, I am proud and happy to stay one."

"I am no longer incapacitated by grief. My period of denominational mourning is drawing to a close. Our long denominational exile is over. We are going home."

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Hewett: 'We've got a train to catch and a house to build'

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
5/13/91

ATLANTA (BP)--"This gospel train IS bound for glory, and it IS leaving the station," the newly elected moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship told participants in the closing moments of the group's convocation May 11.

John Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C., said after his election to a one-year term: "We've got a train to catch and a house to build. This is the time to trust God and trust each other. Pack your bags. Bring your tools and your dreams, your prayers and your money. We'll work out the blueprints together, led by the Spirit, guided by the Word."

Later, in a news conference, Hewett described the fellowship as "one more choice from a plethora of choices for those tired of fighting fundamentalists. No, I don't think we're starting a new denomination."

"I would challenge you to avoid an easy, predictable answer," he continued. "It is too easy to suggest that A + B + C = a new denomination. There is consistent support (within the fellowship) for those who say we don't want to leave the SBC."

As evidence of his own church's continuing identity with Southern Baptists, Hewett cited the recent purchase of \$7,000 worth of new hymnals published by the Sunday School Board.

"That sounds like a Southern Baptist church to me," said Hewett. "But it is also a Southern Baptist church that has decided not to fund tyranny."

Hewett said he will be leading Vacation Bible School at his church during the June 4-6 Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Atlanta.

"We decided we'd rather have 400 or 500 people reading the Bible rather than going to Atlanta and feel that bad," said Hewett. He did not rule out that some from his church might yet decide to attend the SBC as elected messengers.

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CLC joins NRLC in
Supreme Court brief

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
5/13/91

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission has joined the National Right to Life Committee in a friend-of-the-court brief asking the United States Supreme Court to rule the Civil Rights Act of 1871 cannot be used by abortionists to sue pro-life groups such as Operation Rescue for blocking access to abortion clinics.

The 120-year-old law, known as the Ku Klux Klan Act, was intended to protect the constitutional rights of black persons, not the rights of abortionists or women seeking abortions, the brief says.

It also says there is no protection against private interference with a right to abortion under the KKK Act or the Ninth Amendment, a contention made by legal counsel for the Alexandria, Va., Women's Clinic. "The right to abortion, under Roe v. Wade, ... is a Fourteenth Amendment right against government interference with the abortion decision, not a right against all interference," the brief says.

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"It is a perversion of statutory construction to treat pro-life protesters like KKK members who had committed violent crimes," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the CLC. "KKK members treated blacks like nonpersons, and this law prohibited that practice. It turns the statute on its head to allow it to be used by groups who treat unborn babies as nonpersons."

The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1871 to protect blacks, who recently had received constitutional citizenship, from harassment by KKK members. Under the act, victims were granted the right to sue private offenders in federal court.

Bray v. Alexandria Women's Clinic is reportedly among about 25 cases in the United States in which courts have issued injunctions under the KKK Act to prohibit Operation Rescue and other pro-life groups from blockading abortion clinics. In the case, Jayne Bray and other Operation Rescue members were enjoined from blocking access to Alexandria Women's Clinic and other abortion clinics in northern Virginia.

The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the pro-lifers would be impeding a constitutional right to travel across state lines because many of the women seeking abortions were from other states.

The brief was filed by NRLC's counsel April 11. The case is expected to be heard in the fall.

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HMB plans celebration
during SBC in Atlanta

A- HMB

Baptist Press
5/13/91

ATLANTA (BP)--A "Home Missions Celebration" will welcome Southern Baptists to the headquarters building of the denomination's Home Mission Board in Atlanta during the Southern Baptist Convention.

About 3,000 visitors are expected to attend the celebration, carrying out the theme "At Home with Missions," on Wednesday, June 5, from 2 to 5 p.m.

HMB President Larry Lewis urged Southern Baptists attending the convention in Atlanta to visit the Home Mission Board for the celebration Wednesday afternoon.

"This will be an opportunity to see first-hand your Home Mission Board at work, and to meet many of our missionaries, chaplains and staff," Lewis said.

It will also be the last opportunity for the HMB to host convention messengers at its current building. HMB trustees have sold the property at 1350 Spring Street, with plans to move offices to a yet-to-be-determined location in metropolitan Atlanta in 1995, the next year the SBC meets in Atlanta.

The celebration will include four aspects: a reception where visitors can meet HMB missionaries, chaplains and staff; a mission fair where visitors can see HMB materials and programs; an entertainment area featuring musical groups, clowns and comedy acts; and a sit-down program in the HMB chapel where visitors can hear HMB missionaries tell about their work.

Three large tents will be placed on the HMB parking lot facing Spring Street where the mission fair, reception and entertainment will take place. Entertainment will be presented in four 30-minute segments beginning at 2 p.m.

Focusing on the HMB slogan "Christ for Our Nation," the program in the HMB chapel will feature an overview of HMB priorities by Lewis, video and slide presentations, and testimonies from three missionaries. The 30-minute program will be repeated at 45-minute intervals starting at 2:15 p.m.

Chartered buses will run from the Georgia World Congress Center to the HMB. Also, Atlanta's rapid-rail system provides service between the two points.

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