

CBF 101: An Introduction to Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

By Larry Hovis, Executive Coordinator

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina

In college courses, “101” usually refers to basic, foundational, or introductory subject matter. In these days of great change in Baptist life, many members of Baptist churches are seeking to learn more about Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF). The purpose of this document is to help with this educational process.

Background

Beginning in 1979, a concerted effort was undertaken to bring about a drastic change in the leadership and direction of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). This effort was accomplished through a well-organized political process that involved electing a convention president who would make appointments that eventually resulted in placing persons on boards of trustees of agencies and institutions who would carry out the desired changes. Control of boards of trustees was accomplished in about twelve years, along with replacing the administrations, and eventually, most employees of the agencies and institutions. Great attention was given to altering the character and culture of the seminaries and mission boards. Those who supported these changes labeled this process, “The Conservative Resurgence.” Those who opposed these changes referred to the process as, “The Fundamentalist Takeover.” Regardless of one’s approval or disapproval of the changes, all agreed that by 1991, the SBC had undergone a major transformation.

That year, a group gathered in Atlanta representing active Southern Baptists who were displeased with the new direction of the SBC. This group formed a new body which was incorporated under Georgia law as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The focus of CBF in those early days was to provide a place of fellowship for people who felt disenfranchised from the SBC and a funding channel for missionaries and new theological schools that were beginning to be birthed.

Today, CBF has grown far beyond its humble beginnings. Though many of the churches and individuals who partner together through CBF still have a connection to the SBC, CBF is recognized as a separate body, as evidenced by its recent admission as a member of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), an organization of over two hundred international Baptist bodies. (The SBC has subsequently withdrawn from the BWA.)

Baptist Principles: A Firm Foundation

CBF adherents have always placed a high premium on what are commonly referred to as “historic Baptist principles.” In fact, disagreement over the interpretation of these principles, and how they are applied in local churches and in denominational life, has been at the heart of the controversy in the SBC. CBF’s understanding of basic Christian and Baptist principles are reflected in its official documents and strategic plan.

- Our Identity – “We are a fellowship of Baptist Christians and churches who share a passion for the Great Commission of Jesus Christ and a commitment to Baptist principles of faith and practice.”
- Our Vision – “Being the presence of Christ in the world.”
- Our Mission – “Serving Christians and churches as they discover and fulfill their God-given mission.”
- Our Core Values
 - Baptist Principles
 - Soul Freedom – We believe in the priesthood of all believers and the equality of every church member.
 - Bible Freedom – We believe in the authority of Scripture under the Lordship of Christ without the imposition of creedal statements.
 - Church Freedom – We believe in the autonomy of every local church and affirm every church’s right to determine its faith, practice and leadership without outside interference.
 - Religious Freedom – We believe in full religious liberty and the separation of church and state.
 - Biblically-based Global missions – This includes belief in the Triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit); the sinfulness of all humankind; Christ as Savior and Redeemer for all peoples; the ministry of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin and empower believers; the responsibility of every believer and church to share the Gospel; the need to cooperate with others in mission to the world.
 - Resource Model
 - Justice and Reconciliation
 - Lifelong Learning and Ministry
 - Trustworthiness
 - Effectiveness

CBF Ministries

Current CBF ministries fall into four areas or “strategic initiatives”:

- Faith Formation – Assisting congregations with evangelism, outreach and spiritual growth.
- Building Community – Encouraging congregational health, Baptist identity, reconciliation and justice, marriage and family ministries, ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and endorsing chaplains and pastoral counselors.
- Leadership Development – In congregations, through theological education (in partnership with seminaries and divinity schools) and in collegiate ministry.
- Global Missions and Ministries – Through partnership missions with local churches, reaching the most neglected peoples of the world and planting new churches (over one-half of our resources are spent on Global Missions and Ministries).

A Paradigm Shift: From Convention to Partnership

Most lifelong Southern Baptist adults were nurtured in a “convention culture” in which congregations, district associations, state conventions and the national convention were closely connected through money (which flowed from congregations to associations and state conventions to the national convention) and programs (which flowed from the national convention to state conventions and associations to congregations). Theoretically, we exercised autonomy at every level, but in practice, we functioned as an organizational pyramid with congregations forming the base and the national convention sitting at the apex.

Alternatively, CBF promotes a “partnership paradigm” in which congregations are at the center of Baptist life. Congregations are encouraged to determine their unique, God-given mission and then choose partners to assist them in accomplishing that mission. CBF does not demand exclusive loyalty but humbly asks for the opportunity to be one (hopefully a significant one) of a congregation’s many missional partners.

The CBF Movement: National and State Fellowships

In addition to CBF, which has its offices in Atlanta, there are eighteen autonomous state and regional CBF-related bodies. These bodies work very closely with CBF but are not franchises or field offices. CBF Executive Coordinator Daniel Vestal calls this unique relationship between national and state CBF bodies “a seamless movement.”

CBF of North Carolina (CBFNC) is funded and organized separately from CBF. We seek to be the face of CBF in North Carolina by promoting CBF ministries in our state. We also have our own ministries which include multiple mission projects; support for theological education; retreats for youth, children and adults; and a reference and referral service to help churches seeking staff and ministers seeking ministry placement find each other. We extend the partnership paradigm in North Carolina by offering a *Mission Resource Plan* which allows churches to support historic North Carolina Baptist ministries through CBFNC. We have our own paid staff, elected leadership, annual general assembly, and many events throughout the year. Our mission is “Bringing Baptists of North Carolina together for Christ-centered ministry.”

Getting Connected

CBF, at both the state and national levels, is not a member organization, but a fellowship of churches and individuals who voluntarily cooperate to do together what we could never accomplish alone, for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Please attend one of our assemblies, participate in one of our ministries, or call on one of our staff members or volunteer leaders for information or assistance. If you embrace our mission, vision and values, and desire to share in our ministries, you are welcome in our fellowship. Of course, your financial gifts are most welcome, too. May God bless and guide us as we seek to be the presence of Christ in the world, together.

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina

8025 North Point Blvd., Suite 205

Winston-Salem, NC 27106

(336) 759-3456 or (888) 822-1944

www.cbfnc.org

Larry Hovis, Executive Coordinator (LHovis@cbfnc.org)