

Report from the Executive Coordinator
CBFNC General Assembly Business Session
March 21, 2009

A Developmental Parallel

This is a hopeful yet fearful time for our family. Our only child, Lauren, is a senior in high school. When you have an only child, you only get one shot at rites of passage, so you better make the most of them.

Because of Lauren, it's easy for me to remember the age of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. You see, Lauren was born on July 19, 1991. I was a pastor in Virginia at the time. Kim worked at the Foreign Mission Board. In May of that year, with Kim 7 months pregnant, I carpoled with a friend and drove from Richmond to High Point, where we boarded the FBC High Point bus to travel with a group of North Carolinians to travel to Atlanta, to participate in the meeting at which Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was officially constituted. For all practical purposes, Lauren and the Fellowship movement are the same age.

North Carolina CBF is not quite as old. We were officially constituted in 1994. We celebrate our fifteenth anniversary this year. Like a teenage child, when you look at us on a day-to-day basis, you can be frustrated that we don't have our act more together. But when you consider the big picture, it's pretty amazing how far we've come, how much we've grown, and how mature we are becoming. As parents dealing with a child moving from adolescence into adulthood, there are good reasons to be both hopeful and fearful.

In this brief time report, I'd like to share some hopeful signs, five marks of the maturity of our Fellowship, as well as three reasons we ought to have a little healthy fear as we look to the future.

Marks of Maturity

Let's start with the marks of maturity:

- To begin with, CBFNC has proven that we are the right group to serve as the *primary hub* around which Free and Faithful Baptist churches and their ministry partners in North Carolina can network, cooperate and collaborate to serve Christ together. (Some of you may recall a meeting in Charlotte in December 2005 in which some leaders in this state were calling for the formation of a new convention. I don't hear anyone talking that way anymore, because CBFNC is firmly established as the connecting point for our segment of the Baptist community in our state.)
- Second, while proving our value and strength to churches and ministry partners, we have *maintained a focus on missional renewal, missional formation and missional engagement, not on institutional survival.*
- Third, we have accepted the challenge by our constituents to continually offer more and more ministries, but we have *resisted the temptation to fall back into an outmoded organizational model that was appropriate for the last Baptist century, but increasingly irrelevant in the new Baptist century.*
- Fourth, we have remained conservatively committed to traditional Baptist principles, but we have been *progressively assertive in tackling important societal issues* such as wealth and poverty and racial reconciliation, from the perspective of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Fifth, we have respected and supported our core constituency, which, if we are completely honest, consists of aging Baptists (aging congregations made up of aging

memberships) while also *reaching out to the next generation of Baptists* through youth ministries, collegiate ministries, theological education and new church starts.

- In that regard, let me mention how excited I am about a new resource that was developed by Elizabeth Edwards, who serves on the CBFNC Faith Development Ministry Council and is associate pastor of Lakeside Baptist Church in Rocky Mount. It is a four lesson resource entitled “*Free and Faithful: A Curriculum for Sharing the Story of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship with Youth and Young Adults.*” This is a resource I hope all churches in our fellowship will utilize as an avenue of spiritual formation for their young people. In addition, as a follow-up project to using *Free and Faithful*, CBFNC is giving the *opportunity for youth groups to create a video to upload on YouTube* that gives a positive perspective on who Baptists are and why these young people appreciate their Baptist church.

In all these ways and more, North Carolina CBF exhibits exciting marks of maturity.

Challenges for our Future

At the same time, though, I have some fears. Or at least concerns, which I prefer to think of as challenges for our future.

- *To begin with, we have a resource challenge.* Everyone nowadays (families, businesses, churches, governments) has a resource challenge. We are actually better off than most organizations in this respect. But while we have enjoyed double digit financial growth over the last five years, that will be challenging to continue in the future. I am confident that will continue to be asked to do more and more in the coming years; but I am concerned that we will have the resource supply to match the ministry demand. There is a limited amount of growth we can expect from church budgets, so we must explore alternative avenues for resources.
- *Second, we have an organizational challenge.* We must be in a process of continuous adaptation and transformation in order to stay relevant to the constantly changing needs of our churches and our world. Just because a ministry or set of ministries works well one year doesn't mean they will work well the next. We must continuously evaluate – and sometimes change – our staffing system, our council structure, and our ministry offerings, in order to remain a viable and vital fellowship.
- *Third, we have a missional challenge.* If maintaining a missional rather than an institutional focus is one of the marks of our maturity thus far, it must remain a high priority as we move forward. That's why I'm excited about the upcoming “missional collaboration conversations” we will be conducting involving congregations and our ministry partners. This will be a significant learning experience that will help all of us grow and develop as a missional fellowship rather than an institutional bureaucracy.

Conclusion

As I think about Lauren leaving the nest, I have both hopes and fears. But the hopes far outweigh the fears. The same is true as I look at our fellowship. There are fears to be sure, but the hopes are far stronger and they are what motivate me every day to pursue this wonderful ministry. I think I have the best job in the entire Baptist world. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you. I'm excited about our journey together. I can't wait to see what the Lord has in store for us next.

