



# CBFNC @ 20: The Road Ahead

*A vision for Christ-Centered Ministry  
in the 21st Century*

*As the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina (CBFNC) celebrates twenty years of life, we hear an invitation from the Holy Spirit to dream of a future in which we will*

- be eager for the overarching purposes of God's Kingdom to shape us and for the ways of Jesus increasingly to become our ways;
- take bold and creative risks for the sake of greater faithfulness and effectiveness;
- explore renewed and new ways of gathering—as congregations, as a Fellowship, as networks, as partners, and as missional communities—in order to encourage one another's formation into Christlikeness;
- be faithful to the convictions and values which gave us birth;
- give thanks for the mission and ministry we have pursued together, as well as for rich relationships we have formed and enjoyed with each other; and,
- live joyfully and serve willingly, confident that both we and the future are in God's strong and tender hands.



COOPERATIVE BAPTIST  
*fellowship*  
OF NORTH CAROLINA

## Listening to CBFNC's Leaders and Constituents

The 20th Anniversary Vision Team began its work in the Spring of 2012, and the Team's initial task was to gather a sense of how the people and churches who comprise CBFNC experience us, of what they affirm and value about our identity and ministries, and of what they hope, dream, and need for the future.

We also gave attention to insights and lessons from our history, and we gratefully acknowledged our relationships with other partners in the broader moderate Baptist movement. Our main focus, however, was on hearing from the people and congregations who are part of the CBFNC family.

The team hosted two listening sessions at the 2013 General Assembly in Lumberton and, prior to the General Assembly, with clusters of CBFNC leaders and constituents, including the CBFNC staff, deans of partner seminaries/divinity schools, the Coordinating Council, Ministry Councils, and Divinity School students. In addition, several Team members had conversations with members of their own congregations and other networks of relationship. These sessions and conversations generated ideas about a range of new strategies and ministries, as well as suggestions about ways to enhance existing ministries. The Team has, in writing this report, carefully considered those ideas and suggestions.

In addition to those ideas and suggestions, we heard four overarching (and encouraging) themes:

1. There is a high degree of appreciation for, and significant trust in, CBFNC and its leaders. Our people affirm our fellowship, our values, and our current ministries.
2. There is, simultaneously, a lack of future focus. Acknowledging that there is a lack of focus is not a negative thing; instead, it is a simple awareness that the future holds challenges and opportunities for which we have not yet developed a clear sense of direction and response.
3. There is a common belief that CBFNC's long-term health is connected with the health of our partner congregations.
4. There is a need and desire for both CBFNC and our partner congregations to clarify and articulate their essential identities, as well as for those congregations and CBFNC to clarify and articulate their relationship with each other.

## Honoring Our Past, Embracing Our Future

Twenty years ago, the churches and individuals who birthed both the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (National) and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina were declaring their commitment to cherished Baptist freedoms which were under threat in a long and painful conflict within the Southern Baptist Convention, the denominational “home” of the founders of both CBF (National) and CBFNC. There was also a strong commitment to preserving and extending Baptist principles and partnering with each other to carry-out kingdom purposes apart from the rancor of denominational conflict.

CBF (National) was birthed in 1991, with North Carolina providing many of its early leaders and supportive congregations. There was, at the same time, a strong sense of the Spirit’s urging to see CBF expressed in a tangible and viable way in our state. The early CBF system of electing leaders to serve the national Coordinating Council depended on states to recommend the persons who would serve. The 1994 birth of CBFNC grew out of a desire to connect congregations and individuals who wanted to be CBF Baptists in North Carolina and to connect with the larger national movement.

An enduring gift of that now-faded controversy which partly motivated the creation of CBF (National) and CBFNC is a greatly-clarified and gratefully-embraced understanding of Baptist principles. In CBFNC’s Statement of Values, we describe those principles as “the centrality and authority of Scripture, the priesthood of all believers, the autonomy of the local church and freedom of religion.” Those principles have enduring significance for us and can encourage younger generations of Baptist Christians to see CBFNC as a vital resource for, and expression of, their discipleship.

## A “Way of Seeing” and a “Vision”

The cultural conditions in which followers of Jesus Christ seek to live-out our commitment to him are fluid, dynamic, and ever-changing. The pace of change is so rapid that it is increasingly difficult to make “strategic” or “long-range” plans that will be useful beyond a time-frame of about 18-24 months. Some of the challenges CBFNC will face and some of the opportunities we will have in the future are unknown and unknowable by us. For that reason, it is impossible to plan meaningfully and in great-detail beyond a couple of years. Even our more immediate plans require flexibility and nimbleness as we implement them, so that we can respond to unexpected needs and unanticipated possibilities.

In our ever-changing contexts, challenges and opportunities will appear which we did not expect, as well as surprises of grace and calling we did not foresee. We both need and want to be able to respond in timely and resourceful ways. What we offer, then, is a “vision” for the future to the extent that we can see it now, but we also offer a guide to our ongoing discernment of the possibilities for mission and ministry which will come to us in the future. This report is both a “vision” and “a way of seeing.”

## CBFNC Values, Identity and Mission

In addition to our commitment to Baptist principles, we honor these values:

**Community** – We embrace the Christian community we share beyond our local congregations and come together frequently for worship, education, fellowship and service.

**Missional Focus** – We exist to participate in the mission of God in the world rather than to perpetuate organizational structures. We believe God has a call for each Christian, each congregation and each ministry agency. We help in the discerning, equipping and implementing of that call.

**Collaborative Partnerships** – We respect the calling and passions of other Christians (individuals, congregations, organizations and institutions) and commit to minister with them as mutual partners, actively working together to pursue a common mission.

**Leadership** – We enlist servant-leaders from local churches who guide us in understanding the needs of their congregations and communities. We seek leaders who reflect the multi-faced make-up of our fellowship.

**Flexibility** - We aim to be adaptable, responsive and relevant so that we may act quickly and effectively as new needs and ministry opportunities arise.

**Spiritual Formation** – We draw upon the breadth and depth of the whole Christian tradition to undergird our common life and ministry. Our life together is shaped through the practice of prayer and other spiritual disciplines.

**Christian Education** - We are committed to Christian higher education and lifelong learning to equip all baptized believers for mission and ministry. We also support equipping persons called by God to vocational ministry through quality theological education.

We have kept these deeply-shared values in mind and heart as we have developed this report, and we have been aware of our existing statements of identity and mission:

**Identity:** We are a fellowship of Baptists in North Carolina sharing a commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, sensitivity to the Holy Spirit in our midst, and a reverence for God’s Word. Our oneness is expressed through a devotion to historic Baptist principles of faith and practice. This devotion calls us to join together in responding to Jesus’ call to go into all the world to share God’s love (Matthew 28:19-20).

**Mission:** Bringing Baptists of North Carolina Together for Christ-Centered Ministry

## A Vision of Transformation, Engagement, and Community

Drawing on our heritage and history, honoring our identity, values, and mission, acknowledging our strengths and growing edges, and trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Vision Team believes that that CBFNC will participate in God's mission by pursuing three overarching commitments:

### • A Commitment to Transformation

*"Be transformed by the renewing of your minds"  
(Romans 12:2)*

We serve a God who declares, "Behold, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5) Transformation is the work of the Spirit in the lives of Christians, congregations, mission partners, and the world. We are concerned for the conversion of all people into the image of Jesus, for the ongoing growth and spiritual formation of Christians, for creative and innovative missional collaboration, and for the renewal of all creation. We desire to be agents of God's newness.

### • A Commitment to Engagement

*"Be doers of the word" (James 1:22)*

We seek to be engaged with the world and with our communities. We want to follow the foremost commandment of Jesus to love God with all we are and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Luke 10:27). CBFNC desires to assist congregations and Christians in discovering and fulfilling their divinely-appointed mission. Our greatest potential for engagement is through the incarnational living of the members of every congregation. We want to connect followers of Jesus who share a common missional calling and passion. We envision a future for CBFNC that focuses on the mission of God in the world. We desire to be agents of God's love for connecting Christians and congregations to that mission and encouraging them in their ministries.

### • A Commitment to Community

*"Be devoted to one another in love" (Romans 12:10)*

Our name—Fellowship—points toward our deep desire for connection. We seek that beautiful Scriptural experience expressed by the word *koinonia*. CBFNC exists to support connections among congregations and Christians, to facilitate conversation, and to create missional partnerships and networks within our fellowship, as well as the broader Christian and religious communities. We need to live in fellowship and partnership with one another because it bears witness to the unity of the Body of Christ. We need one another in order to grow in faithfulness and effectiveness; innovation and creativity flourish more readily and abundantly in community. We desire to build community among the congregations, individuals and partners of our Fellowship, so that we can be agents of God's reconciliation in the world.

## Making our Vision Reality: Areas of Focus

Across these twenty years, CBFNC has developed important, vibrant, and vital mission and ministry initiatives and programs. They will provide a strong foundation for our life together in the future. We celebrate and give thanks for the transformative difference CBFNC has made in our state and beyond, and we commit ourselves to continue making that kind of difference.

As we move into the future to which the Spirit calls us, we will need the gifts and commitments of the whole CBFNC family and of individuals, congregations, partners, and groups which will be drawn to us in the future. We will pray for and support the significant contributions of CBFNC's staff, its Coordinating Council, and its Ministry Councils; their guidance and work will be crucial to our achieving our vision. We will nurture mutually encouraging and productive relationships with our ministry partners, and we will convene and participate in new networks for shared learning and meaningful collaboration. We will focus on the development and growth of congregational leaders, laity and clergy, because we know that healthy leaders are essential for the thriving of our churches. We will explore new and renewed forms of gathering for experiences of mission, ministry, and witness.

To make our vision of transformation, engagement, and community reality, we commit ourselves to four "Areas of Focus." Areas of Focus invite connection and collaboration across the organization, and they bring together people and resources in exciting and effective ways. Areas of Focus are needs, challenges and possibilities for which targeted attention, resources, and creativity are most likely to pursue and to realize all three elements of our vision.

Our Areas of Focus will be transformative, making us more like Jesus. They will require engagement, using the gifts of a broad cross-section of our individual constituents, participating congregations, and other ministry partners. They will nurture community, acknowledging that we need growing relationships with each other in order to be effective.

### 20th Anniversary Vision Team

Guy Sayles (First, Asheville, team chair); Ray Ammons (First, Gastonia, CBFNC moderator); Donna Bissette (Ardmore, Winston-Salem, CBFNC past moderator); Jack Glasgow (Zebulon, Zebulon); Scott Hagaman (First, Marion); Craig Morrison (Snyder, Fayetteville); Bailey Nelson (Mt. Airy); Dave Odom (Yates, Durham); Haven Parrott (First, Kannapolis); Nathan Rice (First, Mebane); Jeff Roberts (Trinity, Raleigh); Greg Rogers (Oakmont, Greenville); John Vestal (Greystone, Raleigh)

### Coordinating Council

Ray Ammons (First, Gastonia, moderator); Donna Bissette (Ardmore, Winston-Salem, past moderator); Kathy Driver (Trinity, Raleigh); Mike Eddinger (Westwood, Cary, treasurer); Heather Folliard (Hillsong, Chapel Hill); David Hailey (Hayes Barton, Raleigh); Marion Horton (Zebulon, Zebulon, recorder); Jeff Mathis (First, Sylva); Rick Matthews (College Park, Winston-Salem); Doug Murray (First, Wilson); Mike Queen (First, Wilmington); Lisa Rust (First, Lumberton, moderator-elect); Susan Taylor (University, Chapel Hill)

## Our Areas of Focus are:

### 1. Showing mercy and seeking justice

*"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)*

As we live and share the Good News of God's rule and reign, we will show mercy and seek justice in our local communities and beyond those communities in regional, national, and global contexts. We will respond with compassionate help to people who do not have the fullness of life God intends for them, and we will address systemic causes of injustice. We live in diverse communities which have unique and ever-changing needs. In collaboration with local congregations and other partners, CBFNC will explore, implement, and provide training and resources for ministry initiatives which serve the marginalized and vulnerable, which work for justice, and which seek the restoration of all creation. We commit ourselves to form holy friendships with the people whom we serve, to learn from them, and to raise awareness of their concerns and hopes.

### 2. Nurturing healthy congregations

*"Listen to what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:7)*

We will encourage the flourishing of congregations, which are the primary communities in which followers of Jesus develop practices of faith that express the love of God and neighbor. We recognize a great diversity of congregations. There are established churches, some of which feel significant anxiety about their vitality and do not have a sense of a hopeful future, and others of which are experiencing renewal and growth. There are also new and yet-to-emerge groups of disciples who are exploring new expressions of Christian community. CBFNC will nurture opportunities for mutual learning about the dynamics of healthy congregations, facilitate the discovery and sharing of life-giving innovations, and encourage the thriving of a wide variety of Christian communities.

### 3. Empowering laity for missional living

*"May God strengthen you with power through the Spirit in your inner being" (Ephesians 3:16)*

We will gratefully learn from and effectively nurture the lay people of every generation in our congregations to see their engagement with work, family, civic responsibilities, and recreation as arenas of mission, ministry, and sharing their faith. We will connect laity from our congregations to one another for experiences of spiritual growth, relationship-building, and ministry. Empowering lay people enriches their faith, deepens their identity as followers of Jesus, enhances the ministries of congregations and other partners, and fosters a fuller sense of community within CBFNC.

### 4. Clarifying identity and covenant

*"If one suffers, all suffer; if one rejoices, all rejoice" (1 Corinthians 12:26)*

We will help our participating congregations to discern, articulate, and renew the covenants, mutual expectations, and reciprocal promises which shape their sense of identity and sustain their sense of community. We will clarify the nature of the commitments which knit together CBFNC, its participating congregations and other partners in witness, mission, and ministry. We will encourage the development of greater interdependence and deeper relationship among our congregations. We will nurture the capacities of our congregations and of CBFNC as a whole for creative and reconciling relationships which are nourished by promise-making and promise-keeping and which point toward the Beloved Community.

## CBFNC Coordinating Council Response

The Coordinating Council expresses its gratitude to the 20th Anniversary Vision team for their hard work, discernment, and service to our fellowship. We believe they have captured the mind, heart and spirit of our fellowship and have helped us understand where our constituents believe God is calling us to focus our energy and attention during the next chapter of our life and ministry together.

In response, the Coordinating Council is committed to the following:

1. We affirm the report in its entirety and will lead the CBFNC staff and Councils to strive to live out its essence. Toward that end, we will seek to orient our current, ongoing ministries, as well as future ministries, around the Overarching Commitments of Transformation, Engagement and Community. The 2014-2015 strategic ministry plan developed by our staff and ministry councils is an attempt to begin to grow into these Commitments.
2. We will lead CBFNC to grow in the four Areas of Focus: Showing mercy and seeking justice; Nurturing healthy congregations; Empowering laity for missional living; Clarifying identity and covenant. To sharpen our focus in these areas, we will charge all ministry councils, teams and other groups to plan future ministries to strengthen these ministry areas.
3. We believe that the Overarching Commitments and Areas of Focus have value not only for CBFNC corporately, but for individual congregations as well. We will, through our communications tools, assemblies and other avenues, strive to educate congregations regarding the components of the vision and ways they might strengthen their individual ministries and communities of faith.
4. As a way of expanding our focus on mercy and justice, we will prioritize filling the vacant social ministries position with someone who can coordinate current and future social ministries.

In conclusion, we move that the 2014 General Assembly join us in affirming the 20th Anniversary Vision Team report and our response as a pathway for our fellowship to move into our third decade together.