

The Alliance of Baptists is dedicated to the preservation of historic Baptist principles, freedoms, and traditions, and to the expression of our ministry and mission through cooperative relationships with other Baptist bodies and the larger Christian community.

Kyle Childress has been pastor of Austin Heights Baptist Church in Nacogdoches, Texas, for 13 years, by some definitions a long pastorate. His church members realize that by giving him opportunities to study and learn — keeping him fresh — they are only helping themselves. “The church knows that to keep me sharp helps keep them sharp,” he said.

That’s why he has had their full support as he has participated in two Lilly Foundation-funded programs at Duke Divinity School in Durham, NC. Kyle has completed one program, a year-long monthly seminar on medicine and Christianity held on the Duke campus. Among the participants were hospital chaplains, medical school faculty, pastors, and medical professionals.

The seminar focused on many aspects of medicine. “We read heavily on what is going on in medical ethics and what the Christian faith has to say,” he said. “For me it was an opportunity to do some study, reading and reflection about a field that, other than visiting in hospitals, I hadn’t done much on since I left seminary.”

As a result of the seminar, Kyle has invited medical professionals in his church to read the same literature which

With a 13-year pastorate,

Kyle Childress stays fresh with study at Duke

he studied. “We’ve talked about it and are looking for new ways for the church to minister, not just to people in the hospital but also to people working in medicine,” he said.

Kyle wants to find ways in which he can help doctors and nurses have a clearer sense about their calls and about how their Christian faith fits into their calling. “I also want us to learn how to be better patients,” he said. “A lot of times we expect medical science to solve all of our problems, to fix us. That’s not necessar-

Kyle Childress with Alliance Associate Director Jeanette Holt at the CBF General Assembly in Fort Worth. Kyle is a former Alliance board member.



ily a Christian view, although we obviously believe in health care.”

The second program Kyle is participating in — he’s about half-way through — is a three-year colloquium on excellence in ministry that meets at Duke for two days in September and May. Among the dozen participants are academicians, clergy and laity. Kyle is the only Baptist in the group. “We do a lot of reading and writing, exploring from the clerical and congregational point of view what good, excellent ministry looks like,” he said.

This colloquium is part of Duke Divinity School’s larger research on what is going on in churches. “Duke is working with other groups to find out what is happening in our churches and with clergy. What are they getting paid? What’s their education? Their gender breakdown? What are good churches doing? What does a good minister do? How do you sustain a good ministry over a long period of time? What’s a minister’s family life like? We are reading and writing about all of this,” he said. “We’re seeing a higher percentage of clergy reaching retirement age and fewer students going to seminary. What is that going to do to churches?”

Austin Heights is a small but active congregation that averages about 100 on Sunday. It was organized in 1968. The church offers an AIDS ministry, started the local Habitat program, and is a recognized leader in the community on racial reconciliation.

Several members are on the faculty at nearby Stephen F. Austin University. “They do expect me to do my homework and be prepared which I like,” Kyle said. “They encourage me to do things like these Lilly programs because they know and expect that I am going to bring it back to them.”

UCC, Disciples, Alliance dialogue team making progress

At the half-way mark in the current round of ecumenical conversations involving the Alliance, the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), members of the joint dialogue team have reached agreement on the nature of the ongoing relationship they plan to recommend to all three bodies next year.

Although several models of potential partnership have been explored, the team agreed during its last meeting, held May 7-8 in Baltimore, to recommend an ongoing relationship built on a “deepening ecumenical friendship” between and among the three participating bodies. The decision followed a brief presentation during the closing session in Baltimore by Robert



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The Alliance at CBF

Former Alliance board member Bill Sapp of Louisville, KY, and his mother Oletha Sapp of Austin, TX, spent some time in the Alliance booth in the exhibit area at the General Assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in Fort Worth at the end of June. Several Alliance members were a part of the Assembly program including Julie Pennington-Russell, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Waco, TX; Roger Paynter, pastor of First Baptist Church in Austin, TX; David Massengill, member of Metro Baptist Church in New York City; and Charles Johnson, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio, TX.



K. Welsh, ecumenical officer of the Disciples of Christ.

In his remarks, Welsh pointed to the passage in the Gospel of John (15:12ff) in which Jesus declared to his disciples: “You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father.”

Welsh is one of two Disciples representatives who have participated as observers in the current round of talks involving the UCC and the Alliance. Both these bodies, whose representatives have been talking since 1997 about the shape of an ongoing ecumenical relationship, invited Disciples participation in formal actions last year.

Following the May meeting of the dialogue team, Welsh stated: “Based upon our participation as observers in the past two dialogue sessions ... Disciples are encouraged to look at the

DIALOGUE TEAM MEMBERS

For the United Church of Christ: Lydia Veliko, Cleveland (co-convener); Timothy C. Downs, Atlanta; John Deckenback, Baltimore; Julie Peeples, Greensboro, NC; Alice O’Donovan, Tolland, CT; and Mike Castle, Centerville, OH.

For the Alliance of Baptists: Stan Hastey, Washington (co-convener); Martha Barr, Saint Davids, PA; James E. Hightower Jr., New Orleans; Ramonia Lee, Suitland, MD; Steve Lucas, Austin, TX; and Cathy Tamsberg, Raleigh, NC.

For the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): Robert K. Welsh, Indianapolis; and Thomas McCracken, Murfreesboro, TN.

possibility of becoming full partners in this dialogue that offers such promise for the future of the ecumenical movement.” He said his board will consider the matter when it meets in November.

UCC Ecumenical Officer Lydia Veliko and Alliance Executive Director Stan Hastey, co-conveners of the dialogue team, welcomed Welsh’s willingness to pursue the possibility of Disciples involvement as a full partner in the talks.

Noting that Disciples and Baptists are finding each other locally in the same way Baptists and UCC folks have done, Veliko observed: “The dialogue between the Alliance of Baptists and the UCC is such a vital one because it touches at the heart of local ecumenical energy and efforts. The work of the local, regional, and

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Message to Muslims: Many Baptists repudiate Vines' statement

(This month's column by Stan Hasteley consists of a statement delivered July 5 at the First Annual Interfaith Dinner of the Islamic Circle of North America during that body's 2002 convention in Baltimore MD. He was asked to represent the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America as well as the Alliance.)

Your invitation honors us in that it amounts to a gracious acknowledgment that not all Baptists view Islam and Muslims as does the Rev. Jerry Vines of Jacksonville, FL, whose vile comments about your faith, about Allah, and about the Prophet demean you and disgrace us. Tonight I come to offer the unequivocal assurance that many Baptists in this nation and beyond repudiate without qualification what Jerry Vines said, that we are ashamed at what he said, and that we humbly apologize.

Please know that many of us share instead the views of the founder of the Baptist movement on this continent, the noble Roger Williams of Rhode Island, who fearlessly contended for religious and civil freedom for all regardless of creed. Roger Williams is now more relevant than ever before, given the explosion of pluralism in this nation, for as his contemporary biographer Edwin S. Gaustad reminds us, our courageous ancestor "had strong opinions about what government should do about religious pluralism" — they should "leave it alone."

Concerning those whom Williams, in his own dated and inadequate 17th-century words, described as "Turks, Jews, infidels, and papists," his advice, Gaustad writes, was the same — "leave them alone.... Religion has the power to persuade, never the power to compel. Government does have the power to compel, but that government is wisest and best which offers to liberty of conscience its widest possible range."

And what of Roger Williams' 21st-century descendants? My colleague Ken Sehested of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, who is responsible for my invitation to address you tonight, has written: "Peace is the will of God. From the first

chapter of (Hebrew) Scripture, where God pronounced creation 'good,' to the very last, in (the Christian Apostle) John's vision of a tree 'for the healing of the nations,' God pursues peace." Furthermore, Sehested declares: "Peace was the mission of Jesus.... The fruit of the Spirit is peace.... Peace was the witness of the early church.... The foundation of peace is justice.... Peacemaking is rooted in grace.... Peacemaking is not optional for the church.... God's promised future is peace."

This distillation of a Christian theology of peace, I am pleased to say, comes from a new resource titled, *Peace Primer: Quotes from*

Islamic and Christian Scripture and Tradition," a document jointly published by the Muslim Peace Fellowship and the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America. These two groups determined last January they would publish such a document and engage in a series of joint training sessions in conflict transformation theory and practice. The first of these events was held in Detroit in April; the second is scheduled for October. They are being co-sponsored by Baptist congregations and mosques in each location and are, I suggest, an

antidote to the poison some blasphemously spew out in God's name in our time.

These and other efforts around the country give us hope, the hope that despite our differences we share a common humanity. Despite our differences, we share in common the *imago dei*, the very likeness of God, the essence of being. And despite our differences, we share a common destiny, a destiny we are called to shape together with God's help.

That destiny calls us to wage peace, not violence, be such violence of word or in deed. As the martyred Baptist pastor Martin Luther King Jr., put it in his vision of the blessed community it is our common vocation to nurture: "The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it.... Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already void of stars."

perspectives



By Stan Hasteley

UCC, Disciples, Alliance dialogue team (continued from page 2)

national leaders on behalf of the relationship between the Alliance and the UCC is done for the sake of the mission and ministry of the congregations. This is an ecumenical development to celebrate, not least because it models an intentional commitment to brothers and sisters in Christ."

Hasteley agreed, saying: "These conversations are gaining momentum, not because our evolving friendship was dreamed up in a conference room in Cleveland, Indianapolis or Washington," referring to the cities where the UCC, Disciples and Alliance are

headquartered. "Rather, our ecumenical friendship is evolving naturally, as like-minded people from these three bodies find one another in their own communities," he elaborated. "It seems our task is to encourage and facilitate such encounters, always remembering that God's Spirit moves where it will and that we must hurry along to catch up with what God is already doing in the churches."

Two additional sessions in the current round of talks have been scheduled, both to be held in Baltimore and hosted by the UCC's Central Atlantic Conference — Oct. 30-31 and Jan. 16-17, 2003.

Alliance member **Ben Wagener** has been called as pastor for spiritual formation by the Alliance-affiliated Vienna Baptist Church, Vienna, VA, effective Sept. 15. For the past eight years he has been pastor of Community of Grace

Church, Richmond, VA, another Alliance-affiliated congregation. Vienna Baptist will host next year's Alliance convocation, to be held April 24-26.

happenings

Laura Stephens, a 2002 graduate of Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, is

the new minister of education at Alliance-affiliated Wake Forest Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, NC. She assumed her new duties June 30. Laura is a candidate for ordination by Oakhurst Baptist Church, Decatur, GA, where she served an internship focusing on youth ministries. While at Candler School, she also was a board member of the Georgia Alliance of Baptists.

The Alliance-affiliated Broadus Memorial Baptist Church, Charlottesville, VA, has called **Eric Howell** as its new pastor, effective Aug. 1. His previous pastorate was with Hickory Rock Baptist Church, Louisburg, NC. He is a graduate of Texas A&M University and Duke Divinity School.

connections

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ALLIANCE RECEPTION IN FORT WORTH

The Alliance sponsored a reception at Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth following the Friday evening session of the General Assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Among those attending was Bill Stone, a member of First Baptist Church in Arlington, at left above. Also there to enjoy the homemade tamales were Al Staggs, a dramatist and hospital chaplain who is a member at Broadway, and Andy Lester, professor of pastoral theology and pastoral counseling at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth. Andy brought the Covenant Address at the Alliance Convocation in 2001.



Premawardhana

ALLIANCE WILL BE REPRESENTED AT CONVENTION IN ZIMBABWE

Alliance Vice President Shanta Premawardhana and Executive Director Stan Hastey will represent the Alliance during the 39th Annual Congress of the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe, to be held Aug. 30-Sept. 1 at the Baptist Conference Centre near Gweru, Zimbabwe. In addition, Shanta has been asked to make a presentation on the Alliance during a meeting Aug. 21 of the executive committee of the Sri Lanka Baptist Sangamaya (Convention). A motion to enter into a formal partnership with the Alliance is anticipated. Look for a full report in the October issue of *connections*.