

connections

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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.

UCC partnership approved easily but other issues draw lengthy debate

Participants in the Alliance's Annual Meeting April 21 approved a resolution affirming an ecumenical partnership with the United Church of Christ. A joint UCC-Alliance dialogue team will continue working over the next two years to develop a covenant of understanding to be presented to both bodies in 2003.

While this matter of business passed the Annual Meeting easily and unanimously, two other issues drew lengthy debate.

The first involved a proposed name change of our organization and the second was a discussion about whether and/or how the Alliance should participate in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's June General Assembly.

The Board of Directors had recommended the name be changed to The Alliance of Baptists in the U.S.A. to indicate more clearly the national nature of the organization. But the membership felt that name was too limiting and referred it back to the board for more study.

The body then debated the CBF issue. Last fall CBF told potential exhibitors that their presence at the assembly would indicate acceptance of CBF's Core Values. These values include a negative statement about homosexuality. (Go to www.cbfonline.org



Paula Clayton Dempsey, left, chaplain at Mars Hill College in North Carolina, was reelected to a second one-year term as president of the Alliance during the Annual Meeting April 21. Craig Henry, an attorney from Monroe, LA, was reelected vice president. Relma Hargus, a newspaper reporter from Bataon Rouge, LA, was elected to a first term as secretary.

to read the entire statement.)

The board had decided in its meeting prior to the Annual Meeting that the Alliance would neither exhibit at the CBF meeting this year nor host a reception. However, some felt that CBF might revisit and reverse its homosexuality statement. Others believed the Alliance should be at CBF to provide a clear voice on the issue.

Therefore, the following substitute motion was adopted: Consistent with our stance of becoming ever more a welcoming and affirming organization as to sexual orientation, we, the Alliance of Baptists, grieve over the newly adopted Cooperative Baptist Fellowship "Statement of an Organizational Value" on this subject and urge support for the motion to rescind this action and to develop ways to continue discerning the church's response to homosexual persons in our day.

a still more
excellent
way

2001 CONVOCATION & ANNUAL MEETING

In this issue is coverage of the meetings held April 20-22 at Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, GA. More information about the meeting can be found on the Alliance website, www.allianceofbaptists.org

celebrating the call of Christ for men and women to live in equal partnership





The board of directors approved a \$10,000 increase to the 2001 operating budget, bringing it to \$286,935. To finance a board meeting on the West Coast in September, the directors' expenses were increased from \$18,000 to \$26,500. The board also increased the amount going to the National Council of Churches of Christ from \$1,000 to \$2,500, an amount suggested by the NCC for a member organization the size of the Alliance.

Wanda and John Burton-Crutchfield of Henderson, NC, with Anne and Flynn Harrell of Columbia, SC. Wanda is an outgoing member of the Alliance board and Flynn completed six years of service as a board member last year.



Becky Drysdale and Elsie Phillips were two of the volunteers staffing the registration desk. Both are members of the host church, Oakhurst in Decatur.



Former Alliance board member Shanta Premawardhana talks with two recipients of Alliance Mission Offering funds: Jerry Jarrell representing A Gathering of Baptists and Others Interested in Spirituality, and Sarah Reed, a student at the University of Chicago representing Strive.

Board members Ken Williams, pastor of First Baptist Church in Rochester, NY, and David Waugh, pastor of Metro Baptist Church in New York City.



Ed Galbreath of Stockbridge, GA, chair of the Alliance's Missions Committee, talks with C.H. Chiromo, president of the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe, a recipient of Alliance Mission Offering funds. A missions fair was held on Saturday afternoon so that participants could learn more about the 24 organizations which receive mission funding from the Alliance.



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GO WEST — AND TELL THE ALLIANCE STORY

The Board of Directors will hold its September board meeting in Oakland, CA, and will then participate in an event sponsored by The Alliance of Baptists and American Baptist Churches of the Pacific Coast. The purpose of the event is to bring more awareness about the work of these two groups to churches on the West Coast.

The gathering will be Saturday, September 22, from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. at Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church in Oakland. Former Alliance president Nancy Hastings Sehested will speak along with Michael-Ray Mathews.

Workshops include: Meet the Alliance of Baptists, Environmental Stewardship, Conflict Transformation, Faith-Based Initiatives and Church-State Separation, Art as Prison Ministry, Current and Creative Worship Resources, and The Church Responding to Gay and Lesbian Relationships.

Registration is \$25 (\$15 for students). Mail to the Alliance of Baptists, 1328 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036.

Prescient as they were about the need for such a new movement, our founders did not know nor could they have known how dramatically the Baptist landscape would change over the following decade and a half. Nor can we know how much it will be altered in the course of the next 15 years. So the first thing I want to say about the state of the Alliance is that we've come this far by grace and that most assuredly it is only God's grace that will lead us on.

While we cannot begin to divine all that lies ahead, we do have signs along the way to keep us going. Much of our admittedly modest growth over the past few years has resulted from the affiliation of congregations from American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. with the Alliance.

Of special note is that most if not all these churches have affiliated with the Alliance largely because of our welcoming and affirming stance toward gays and lesbians. These are congregations that have been attacked and sanctioned because they dared declare that the good news of God includes in its orb those of a same-sex orientation and know the Alliance does too. What an unanticipated blessing has befallen us for doing nothing more than what is simply right.

When several years ago we deliberated whether to become a place of refuge and welcome for gays and lesbians, we thought perhaps we were putting the life of the Alliance on the line. Maybe we were. Yet in the ongoing process of being such a welcoming body, we are coming to learn first-hand the truth of the gospel paradox that one finds life by losing it, not by trying to save it.

More and more the Alliance is taking the shape of a truly national movement and organization. To refer to the Alliance as an *association* is, I believe, increasingly descriptive of who we really are. Yes, the Alliance began nearly 15 years ago as an individual-member organization. Yet within the first year a few brave congregations had ap-

proached the founders about affiliating as churches. And like the Philadelphia Baptist Association, founded in 1707 with churches from five states and individual members, we already are in fact a non-geographical Baptist association.

Beyond the matter of affiliation and membership, the Alliance in other ways more and more is taking on the characteristics of

associations and conventions of churches. Thanks to the generous initiative of the Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board of the American Baptist Churches, all Alliance-affiliated churches are now eligible for participation in that agency's retirement programs. We have positioned ourselves, in the tradition of Baptist associations, to assist and participate in the ordination of clergy. We have developed a highly effective placement service to help churches and professional clergymen and clergywomen find one another. And we provide increasing opportunities for hands-on mission opportunities.

Thanks to talented and committed Alliance people, we have developed some of the best curricular resources available today to churches on the topics of baptism and the Lord's Supper, social justice, multiculturalism,

ecology and sexual orientation. Quite early in our history, we began the *Formations* curriculum published by Smyth & Helwys, now used in many hundreds of churches within and beyond the Alliance.

Perhaps most important of all, what the Alliance offers Baptist congregations and individuals is a connection with other progressive churches and people across this nation at a time in Baptist history when such folks need and are beginning to look for one another. Yes, my friends, we are in the process of securing a niche in Baptist life whose potential significance far exceeds our present strength.

perspectives



By Stan Hasteley
Executive Director

These are excerpts from the State of the Alliance Address given April 21 at the Convocation. More of the address will be included in the next issue of *connections*.

BOARD MEMBERS

A change in the bylaws was adopted that provides for directors to serve one four-year term. Previously directors had been elected to a three-year term with eligibility to be elected to a second three-year term. The Nominating Committee recommended and the membership approved that those directors just completing a three-year term be offered a one-year extension. Those include Kathy Berry of Virginia, Bill Butler of Maryland, Bill Ingram of Virginia, Ramonia Lee of Maryland, Alisa Monfalcone of Georgia, and Paul Richardson of Alabama.

New directors elected for the first time are: Willard Bass of North Carolina; Sylvia Campbell of Virginia; Chris Copeland of Georgia, Tim Dean of Texas; David Gooch of Tennessee; Carolyn Gordon of Missouri; Donna Poynor of Florida, and Louise Stanford of South Carolina.



Bill Ingram was
chair of the
Nominating
Committee.

2001 Operating Budget
Through April 15

Needs: \$80,773
Receipts: \$80,912

2001 Mission Offering:

Goal: \$92,000
Receipts: \$26,325

May 2001

The Alliance of Baptists
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During Lent, Briggs Church promoted our annual Unified Missions Offering, which includes the Alliance. Each Sunday we had a guest speaker or special event to promote a cause or organization included in the offering.

On Sunday, March 25, we had a “Common Ground Discussion” on Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations. This topic was inspired by the Alliance’s inclusion of the International Center in Bethlehem in the “Bridges of Hope” Offering.

To give focus to the issue, we used the biblical stories of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac. Bob Maddox, pastor at Briggs, did a brief exegesis of the text. Rabbi Mark Robbins, of Georgetown University’s Campus Ministry staff, presented a Jewish perspective on the text. Imam Yayha Hendi, also of Georgetown’s Campus Ministry staff, presented a Muslim perspective. And Jeanette Holt spoke, representing Christianity.

All three addressed the text and gave their views on how the issues involved there are still at work in the Middle East today.

The panel discussion was followed by a time for questions by those in attendance, which included Briggs Church members, Jews and Muslims from the community.

Following the forum, a worship service was held in which Yayha prayed a traditional Call to Prayer in Arabic, Mark sang Psalm 30 in Hebrew, and Jeanette read the gospel text and spoke about the Alliance support of the Bethlehem project.

Briggs Memorial promotes offering

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By Timothy B. Tutt
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Alliance offering allows seminary students to attend The Gathering

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The writings of John Scotus Eriugena, a spiritual guide in the Celtic tradition, provide the theme of the eighth annual Gathering of Baptists and Others Interested in Spirituality.

Eriugena taught that God speaks through two books, the little book of Scripture and the great book of Creation. This year’s conference — “The Other Sacred Book: Nature in Spiritual Formation and Practice” — will be June 10-16 at Mars Hill College in Mars Hill, NC, and will offer Enneagram training for spiritual guides, an experiential prayer retreat, and “Ecology As Spiritual Practice,” the concluding workshop.

Richard Cartwright Austin, a Presbyterian minister, author, activist and organic farmer, will be a featured speaker during two of the three events. Austin will guide the midweek experiential prayer retreat and will be keynote speaker at the concluding conference, “Ecology as Spiritual Practice.”

The Alliance is again providing student scholarships through its Global Mission Offering. An application form is available from the Campus Minister’s Office at Mars Hill College.

Cathy Tamsburg, a former recipient of one of the scholarships, said The Gathering “has become an annual grounding event for my spiritual life. I have been enriched and my relationships with fellow Baptists have deepened because the Alliance has made it possible for me to participate in the Gathering.”

The cost, \$150 per person for each event, includes program fee, materials, housing in double rooms and meals. Commuters pay \$100 and are provided lunch and dinner. Single rooms are available for an additional \$15 each night. A \$50 deposit is required by June 1 to avoid a \$25 late fee. It should be sent to Debra Huff, Campus Ministry; PO Box 6675; Mars Hill, NC 28754-6675.