

connections

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.

June 2001

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My experience with Baptist gatherings has been limited. In my teen years of the late '50's and early '60's, I was involved in associational youth events and in the state BSU programs. In those more idealistic days I was proud to be in partnership with other Baptists as part of the world's largest and most effective system for implementing the Christian mission.

I felt no sense of divisiveness then, although the issue of civil rights for all persons was coming to the forefront. In my naïve understanding there seemed to be no "they" or "them" for "us" to oppose, except as the "unsaved" in our world, for whom Christ died, and as the sick, afflicted, and hurting ones to whom we were called to minister.

By the late '60's and early '70's I had served on church staffs, and after seminary I served as pastor of a rural Virginia congregation for three years. On my seminary campus and in local, state, and national, meetings of SBC churches, I now discovered a different atmosphere. While people generally were still friendly in public, I always felt a need to guard my thoughts and my words until I knew the stance of those with whom I spoke. It was clear that there was an "us" on one side opposed to a "them" on the other side.

After Catharine and I joined with Pullen in 1972, Baptist denominational relationships became less important for us until 1992, when Pullen voted to approve its first same-gender union. Although I had opposed that action, I was privileged to represent our congregation at meetings of the Raleigh Association as a member of Pullen's opposition.

Now, nine years later I have just experi-

enced first-hand a meeting of the Alliance of Baptists — a gathering of Baptists from many different locations, with many different ways of doing Christian ministry, with many points of view, and with all views heard and respected. The sense of acceptance was awe-inspiring. We expressed many differing points of view, in our workshop discussions and especially in our discussions and votes in the business sessions. But always there was respect for those who held those differing opinions.

This Baptist meeting was almost entirely "we" and "us," much like my naïve picture of Baptists in the '50's. But not entirely. "They" and "them" were not physically present but

FIRST PERSON VIEW

BY MIKE WATTS, MEMBER OF PULLEN MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH, RALEIGH, NC



2001 Convocation

were not forgotten, either. Many of us could and did express some sadness at what might have been in our relations with the SBC, but without acrimony. We've grown past that.

Another "they/them" was the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Here a note of hope was present. Although there are differences between the CBF and the Alliance, many Alliance members are also members of CBF and are working toward ways to reconcile our differences. The big stumbling block between us is the question of welcoming and affirming persons of all gender orientations. Shall the Alliance witness to its own ideal of openness by not having an official presence at the next meeting of CBF, in protest against their stance? And if so, then are there ways for us to keep lines of communication open?

Perhaps the highlights of the Convocation for me were the two [\(concluded on page 4\)](#)

Congratulations to Alliance board member **Cathy Tamsberg**, who has been called as Minister of



Cathy Tamsberg

Outreach and Adult Education at the Alliance-affiliated **Pullen Memorial Baptist Church** in Raleigh, NC. The Wesley Theological Seminary graduate

began her work with Pullen May 14.

Alliance member **Terry Minchow-Proffitt** has been called as pastor of Delmar Baptist Church, St. Louis, where he is to begin work July 1. Terry goes to St. Louis from the pastorate of the Alliance-affiliated Broadview Baptist Church in Temple Hills, MD.

Alliance member **Larry Matthews** announces the premier issue of *Leadership in Ministry*, a newsletter for participants in his workshops of the same name and others interested in applying Bowen Family Systems Theory to the practice of leadership in ministry and other work settings.

To view the newsletter, go to www.LeadershipinMinistry.com for a preview. You may visit other pages on the site, select the last item on the menu, and follow instructions to open and read.

happenings

NEW ALLIANCE CONGREGATIONS IN CALIFORNIA AND PENNSYLVANIA

A warm Alliance welcome to our newest affiliated congregations. **San Leandro Community Church**, San Leandro, CA, whose pastor is **Kay Wellington**. One of four congregations dismissed from the ABC/USA affiliated American Baptist Churches of the West because of their welcoming and affirming stance, the San Leandro church is the third of these to affiliate with the Alliance. On April 30, the church also was accepted into membership of the American Baptist Churches in the Rochester-Genesee Region in upstate New York.

Also affiliating with the Alliance is **Central Baptist Church** in Wayne, PA, where **Marcus Pomercy** and **Marcia Bailey** share what the church calls a “pastoral partnership.” The church, long affiliated with the American Baptist Churches in the USA, voted April 18 to affiliate with the Alliance and begin making contributions. Board member Martha Barr is a member there. Like the San Leandro church, Central Baptist is part of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists. Unlike San Leandro, however, it has not been sanctioned by its region.

ALLIANCE WILL BE REPRESENTED AT CBF'S GENERAL ASSEMBLY

As reported in the last issue of *connections*, Alliance members voted during the annual meeting April 21 to set aside a recommendation from the board of directors to have no official presence at this year's General Assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

In taking its action, the board was responding to a memorandum from CBF indicating that general assembly exhibitors are expected to be in agreement with an “organizational value” adopted last fall in a divided vote of CBF's coordinating council that forbids direct funding of groups that affirm homosexual practices.

Alliance members instead adopted a substitute motion expressing grief and urging support of an anticipated move to rescind the new CBF policy either by the coordinating council or the general assembly

itself. This action in turn elicited an official protest from CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal that the Alliance was interfering in internal CBF affairs.

Besides adopting the substitute motion, Alliance members instructed Executive Director Stan Hasty to enquire of CBF whether the Alliance would be welcomed as an exhibitor at the general assembly, scheduled for June 28-30 in Atlanta.

Following a telephone conversation with Vestal and consultation with Alliance President Paula Clayton Dempsey, Hasty announced the Alliance will exhibit after all. He said CBF has placed no limitations on Alliance materials to be displayed. Because of the decision to exhibit, he noted further, the Alliance will not sponsor an after-hours reception in Atlanta as previously announced.

CHURCH NEEDS

University Baptist Church, Charlottesville, VA, a congregation of 400 resident members located near the University of Virginia and the UVa Medical Center, is seeking an experienced individual for the position of Associate Minister for Music and Students. The church's announcement of the position continues: “We seek a theologically moderate candidate skilled in collaborative planning of formal, liturgical worship. Excellent choral directing of varied musical

styles, with emphasis on traditional high church music, is essential.... Ministerial leadership and counseling skills in working with university students and with church members of all ages are required....” You may visit the church's Web site at www.universitybaptist.org, while résumés may be sent to: Associate Minister Search Committee; University Baptist Church; 1223 West Main St.; Charlottesville VA 22903.

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We gratefully affirm our partner organization, Baptist Women in Ministry, acknowledging that whereas the Alliance of Baptists has sought to support women in ministry, clergywomen and laywomen alike, we have, in Robert Frost's memorable line, "miles to go before we sleep."

Let me be plain here. Even as we wag a collective tongue gloating at the backwardness of the Southern Baptist Convention's anti-womanist declarations and policies, we do the cause of women in our churches far more good when we dare critique ourselves. To put the matter bluntly, when it comes to the rightful role of women as pastors, the larger onus is on us.

Why? Simply because, unlike the Southern Baptist overlords, we claim to be for women. Yet with rare exceptions, even the most progressive of our congregations in the Alliance are not calling women as pastors. So women continue to hear the tinny sound of the still too-common refrain, "Our church is not ready yet."

So when will we be ready? When Larry King asked me on his program last June 14 — a program I was invited to join only because Raye Nell Dyer of Baptist Women in Ministry asked the famous host to include me — to predict whether we will see the calling of more and more women as pastors in the near future, I replied as honestly as I knew how, "I think it will continue to go very slowly."

It will continue to go too slowly because we remain captives to our culture, the same cultural conundrum that caused one of our own finest New Testament scholars, Malcolm O. Tolbert, to write in *The New Has Come*: "The conclusion of the matter is this. I do not understand the pattern of male dominance reflected in the Bible as an expression of the will of God. It is rather the reflection of the culture in which Jews and Christians as well as pagans lived." To which women and men who care about the rightful role of women must ask, yes: "How long, O God, how long?"

On Resurrection Sunday I finished an interim preaching engage-

ment at Ravensworth Baptist Church in Annandale, VA, a congregation whose worship is guided by the Revised Common Lectionary. As is true every Easter Day, two Gospel readings are offered — from the Synoptic Gospel whose year it is in the lectionary or John 20: 1-18. My choice this year was the reading from John and the leading role he assigned to Mary Magdalene. Of the six or seven Marys named in the New Testament, Mary of Magdala is referred to most frequently.

She was a participant in Jesus' Galilean ministry and apparently was the leader of a group of women who provided financial

support to Jesus' mission. According to John, she was a witness to the crucifixion and burial; was the one who went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body; was the first back at the tomb on Easter morning; was the first to see the risen Christ; and was the first to report the empty tomb, thus becoming the first evangel of resurrection good news.

After running to tell the male disciples she had seen and spoken with the risen Savior, Mary dashed back to the tomb, where she awaited the arrival of the men. In her historic translation of the New Testament in 1924, Helen Barrett Montgomery translates John's account of what followed:

"Meanwhile, outside, Mary stood sobbing near the tomb. Still sobbing she stooped and looked into the tomb, and gazed at two angels in glistening white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?'" She answered,

'Because they have taken away my Master, and I do not know where they have laid him.'"

Former Roman Catholic Archbishop Cristophe Munzihirwa of the Democratic Republic of Congo, killed in 1996 in his country's bloody civil war, once said, "There are things that can be seen only with eyes that have cried." So it was with Mary Magdalene, a weeping woman whose powerful witness to the risen Christ swayed all of history this side of the cross. We should want to be like her.

perspectives



By Stan Haste
Executive Director

These are excerpts from the State-of-the-Alliance Address given April 21 at the Convocation. Part I of the address was included in the May issue of *connections*.

BAPTIST PEACE FELLOWSHIP OF NORTH AMERICA SUMMER CONFERENCE

Baptists from Canada, Puerto Rico, Mexico and the U.S. will gather at Oberlin College in Ohio for the 16th annual Summer Conference of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, July 9-14. This year's theme, "For such a Time as This," is based upon Esther 4. Evening preacher Cindy Weber, pastor of Jefferson Street Baptist Community in Louisville, KY, and Bible study leader Bob Paterson-Watt, pastor of Woodbine Heights Baptist Church in Toronto, will explore this theme and its relevance for 21st century Christians.

There will also be a full program for children, youth and young adults, and afternoon opportunities to explore the greater Cleveland area. For complete registration information, contact the BPFNA, 704.521.6051, or visit the website at www.bpfna.org.

OFFERING APPLICATION DEADLINE

Organizations and causes seeking funds from the **2002 Alliance Mission Offering** are required to submit an application by Aug. 1. Application forms and guidelines for potential recipients are available from the Alliance office. This requirement applies both to new applicants and those that already have received grants in past offerings.



2001 Operating Budget

Through May 15

Needs: \$104,684

Receipts: \$96,177

2001 Mission Offering:

Goal: \$92,000

Receipts: \$32,246

June 2001

First person view

(continued from page 1)

workshops I attended. The first one, "Rightly Dividing the Truth," was a discussion of the state of things among our Alliance congregations in the matter of welcoming and affirming persons without regard to their sexual orientation. My own understandings have grown in the last nine years, but I am continuing to discover that there is room in my soul for more growth. And as we discussed what was taking place in our various congregations, it was clear that even among moderate and liberal congregations in the Alliance there continues to be room for growth.

The other workshop I attended was Bible study on Sunday morning, led by the Miriam Ofelia Ortega, President of the Protestant Evangelical Seminary of Cuba in Matanzas. The things I learned that Sunday morning will always color my understanding of the story in John 4 about Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well. Furthermore, I now have this strange urge to visit Cuba at my earliest opportunity.

This meeting of the Alliance reminded me that even at the age of 58, I still have plenty of room for spiritual growth. I've resolved to start preparing the soil so that I may bloom wherever I find myself planted.

Next year the Alliance of Baptists will meet at Wake Forest Baptist Church in Winston-Salem on the weekend after Easter, April 5-7. Put it on your calendar now because it's an event you won't want to miss.



Cuban pastor wanted to know: 'Can my sight be restored?'

DIAGNOSIS WASN'T POSITIVE BUT IT WAS DEFINITE

Olga Rodriguez had wondered for almost four years if something could be done to regain the sight she had lost in her right eye — if only she could get the treatment.

She returned to Cuba in May with a negative but definite answer, thanks to the efforts of Trinity Baptist Church in Seneca, SC.

Olga was allowed to come to the United States as part of the Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba delegation to the Alliance Convocation. While she was here, Trinity's pastor Bob Ferguson arranged for Olga to see ophthalmologist Richard Blue, Bob's brother-in-law in Athens, GA.

Blue's diagnosis: Olga has irreversible scarring of the retina and nothing can be done to restore her vision. Olga lost the sight in her right eye as a result of a treatment she was receiving four years ago for another problem. An injection was being made in her skin under her eye when the needle slipped and penetrated her eye.

Cuban doctors had told her that perhaps something could be done. "But my brother-in-law discovered that there was nothing he could do to improve her sight," Bob said. "And she was OK with that once she got a firm diagnosis. Until this exam, she wasn't sure what was wrong. Now she knows."

Olga returned to Cuba with a new medicine for her left eye and a new pair of glasses to help her read. She is pastor of a mission church with 10 members near Perico.