

Connections

October 2003

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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.

OAKHURST
FACTS

- Celebrating his 14th year as pastor, Lanny Peters has served Oakhurst longer than any other person. Lanny came to Oakhurst from First Baptist Church in Washington, DC, where he had been associate pastor for seven years. A native of Lexington, NC, he earned a master of divinity degree from Southeastern Seminary.

- Rufus Honeycutt has been a member of the 90-year-old church for 83 years. He came when he was 7. He remembers well the pastor from 1920.

- Walker Knight, founding editor of *Baptists Today*, is a long-time member of Oakhurst.

- The pastoral staff includes Alliance board member Chris Copeland, the associate pastor; and Karen Shipp, the minister of music.

- Oakhurst is affiliated with the Alliance of Baptists and the American Baptist Churches.



- Pastor emeritus and Alliance member John Nichol has the second longest tenure, 13 years.

Out in Front

“Transformative moments” characterize Oakhurst

Being afraid to step out and learn about others different from themselves – at the risk of alienating friends — has never been a problem for the members of Oakhurst Baptist Church in Atlanta.

Oakhurst was birthed in 1913, and spent more than half of its life as a traditional Southern Baptist congregation. In 1963 the SBC’s Church Growth Division named it the “Outstanding Church of the Year,” as membership soared to 1,700.

But the church that celebrated its 90th anniversary on Aug. 31 is a far cry from that one recognized in 1963. At the anniversary service, long-time church members talked about the transformative moments in the church’s life that have made it into what it is today – a 450-member congregation that welcomes everyone regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

Change began when the church welcomed Cuban refugees fleeing an

unpopular government in the late 1950s and early 60s. Lasting transformation came in the late 1960’s when the church integrated racially, among the first in Atlanta to do so. This one decision cost the church 1,000 members but led to a new covenant of commitment to minister to all, and the church’s course was set. It accepted women as deacons and ordained ministers. It opened its doors to gays and lesbians.

So it is no wonder that Oakhurst is now leading the way toward building strong – not tangential — ecumenical and interfaith relationships in its community. The strong push toward understanding is led by Lanny Peters, who on Aug. 1 celebrated 14 years as pastor.

Lanny is completing a Doctor of Ministry degree at Columbia Theological (continued on page 2)



Lanny Peters

2004 CONVOCATION • APRIL 16-18, 2004 • FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, DAYTON, OHIO

Lifting our
lights
together:

Strengthening our
commitment to
ecumenism and
interfaith relationships

- 7 p.m. Friday April 16 through worship Sunday, April 18

- Confirmed speakers include: **Charles Kimball**, chair of the religion department at Wake Forest University, on Saturday night; **James Fowler**, director of the Center for Ethics and Public Policy Research in Atlanta, Saturday afternoon; and **Karen Thomas Smith**, Alliance partner in Morocco, on Sunday morning. Stephanie Ford, Earlham

School of Religion, Richmond, IN, will lead morning prayers.

- Doubletree Hotel. \$89 per night, single/double; \$99 for a suite. 937.461.4700. Airport transportation provided by the Doubletree.

- Steve Lucas, pastor of Highland Park Baptist Church in Austin, TX, is chair of the Convocation committee.

CONVOCAION AT A GLANCE

Fewster, Clifton announce retirements

Alliance member **Lowell Fewster**, for more than 12 years executive minister of the American Baptist Churches of Connecticut, has announced his retirement, effective Dec. 31. Fewster made the announcement in his column in the ABCCONN bimonthly newsletter. After quoting from the late Roman Catholic Archbishop Oscar Romero's "A Prayer for Those in Ministry," he described his years in the Connecticut post "as the most fulfilling of my ministry experience," adding: "I am grateful for what together we have accomplished, for the seeds we have planted, for the nurturing of seeds already planted. I am strongly committed both to the major tasks before us through the remain-

der of this year and to providing for a strong transition, preparing the way for new leadership."

Thomas Clifton, another key American Baptist leader and

Alliance member, will retire by year's end following a decade of distinguished service as president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, KS. Clifton, ninth president of the 102-year-old theological school — affiliated with the

American Baptist Churches in the USA and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship — previously held pastorates in New York, Indiana, North Carolina and Ohio. Clifton "has led the seminary with wisdom and

vigor ... during times of extraordinary challenges," said William Mankin, chair of Central's board of directors, in a letter. "His vision has profoundly shaped what the seminary is today." (*Associated Baptist Press*)

Brian Dixon was installed as pastor of the Alliance-affiliated **Dolores Street Baptist Church in San Francisco** Sept. 28, where he has served since July 1. Previously on staff at Druid Hills United Methodist Church in Atlanta, Dixon is a graduate of Candler School of Theology at Emory University, Atlanta. New Alliance Secretary **Mary Sue Brookshire**, now of San Diego, represented the Alliance and brought greetings during the festive service of installation.



Wright ordained at Wilshire

Alliance member Tiffany Wright was ordained to the gospel ministry at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas on Aug. 3.

For the past three years, she has been Singles Minister at Wilshire, where she also works with college students. Born and reared in Texas, Tiffany earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in mass communications at Southwest Texas State University, and an M.Div. at Truett Seminary in Waco, TX. She worked in radio/TV commercial sales before going to seminary.

Tiffany's husband Alan is an Alliance-endorsed chaplain working at Baylor Medical Center at Irving. "The ordination service was especially meaningful because Alan was a part of it," she said.

Oakhurst

(continued from page 1)

Seminary, specializing in interfaith relations, a long-time interest of his. He and another Alliance pastor, James Lamkin from Northside Drive Baptist Church in Atlanta, were part of a group of 44 Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders from the Atlanta area that spent 10 days together in Turkey last fall studying the traditions of the three religions and visiting the holy sites of each.

More recently, Lanny applied for and received a \$16,000 grant from the Lilly Foundation through Columbia Seminary that will allow eight pastors to immerse themselves in interfaith spirituality. The pastors, including Lanny, will study Hindu, Buddhist, Native American and Jewish spirituality. The grant includes a pilgrimage to Morocco, where Oakhurst member Karen Thomas Smith is pastor of a small church in Ifrane. Karen is arranging for the group to attend the international Interfaith Festival in Fez, and engage in interfaith dialogue at Ifrane University.

Lanny's enthusiasm for understanding other

faiths has spread to his congregation. "For me, this journey of interfaith relationships has been personally transformative," he said. "And the congregation has joined me in this interfaith pilgrimage that I am really excited about. We are always looking at ways of deepening friendships and expanding the circle."

As one example of what the church is doing, a group from Oakhurst went to prayers at a local mosque during the holy season of Ramadan. That prompted a group of Muslims to worship at Oakhurst the next Sunday.

"Part of what has been transformative for all of us is the deep caring relationships that have developed across faith lines," he said. "Together, we are looking to find unity while celebrating our uniqueness. Everyone is clear about the importance of his or her own faith. We have found that interfaith dialogue deepens our commitment to our own faith journey while broadening our view of God's work in the world. It has given me and the church a new focus for our ministry."

alliance finances

Through August 31

2003 Operating Budget

Needs: \$200,304
Receipts: \$177,889

2003 Mission Offering

Goal: \$111,000
Receipts: \$47,555

A looming crisis

A crisis in Baptist missions is looming on every continent of the world. It has to do at once with a free-falling loss of confidence in the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and the absence of a strategy to offer an alternative framework of support and partnership for indigenous Baptist groups. It is a crisis that cries out for immediate attention.

Already in the course of our brief history, the Alliance of Baptists has entered into three partnerships abroad that are the direct result of the retrogressive policies of the new Southern Baptist Convention. These policies, characterized by an obsession for authority and control, amount to a headlong rush back to the colonialistic and paternalistic policies of the 19th century. Increasingly, indigenous groups of Baptists here and there around the world are saying a resounding, “No.” There will be many more in the near future.

If the Alliance had the resources to seek partnerships in other parts of the world modeled on those already undertaken with our partners in Cuba, Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka, I believe we still would be overwhelmed by the response to such an initiative. Yet all of us in the Alliance know, all too well, that we scarcely have the funds to do a decent job with the three brave partners we have. Each of them needs much more, economically speaking, than we have to offer.

Nevertheless, the Alliance model of finding and nurturing partnerships characterized by genuine mutuality bears studying and emulating. This is not to say we are the first group committed to a world mission to model real partnership. That is emphatically not the case. We have a lot to learn, for example, from the long and noble experience of American Baptists and their Board of International Ministries. The fact is we have been and continue to learn from the American Baptist example.

That model works from the simple yet essential premise that indigenous leadership is to be so nurtured that missionary person-

nel soon will out of a job or sent on to train new leaders elsewhere. It is a model that recognizes the transparent truth that indigenous people are better evangelists, better church starters, better pastors, better teachers and better administrators than are their North American colleagues and counterparts.

This is a model we have sought to emulate in the Alliance, only without any missionary personnel in the equation. What we have done a bit differently, of necessity to be sure, but also by design, is to seek partners who from the beginning control things on the ground. What we do is provide the means, modest though they are, for our partners to set their own priorities, adopt their own methods, and then inform us how best we can participate.

That is but one aspect of the mutuality we seek. Another is that of a mutual solidarity that is proving to be the spiritual fuel that drives the relationships. This piece of our emerging and growing relationships with

overseas partners is what we in the Alliance receive from them. For what they are giving us is truly without price, the nurturing of our spirits through the shared experience of their walk with Christ. In some small yet measurable way, we are their benefactors. But in ways and by means we couldn't even imagine, they have become our mentors.

For a good while now, the leading missiologists among us — those like Alan Neely and Anne Thomas Neil of the Alliance and Barbara and Gary Baldrige of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship — have been telling us the day is coming when we in North America will be evangelized and taught by Asians and Africans and Latin Americans formerly the object of our missionary zeal. The good news is, this is happening already.

The really good news is that there are many others like our Cuban, Zimbabwean and Sri Lankan partners waiting to evangelize and teach us. The sobering challenge we face is getting ourselves ready to become their partners as well. It is a task that will challenge our best thinking and require our fervent prayers.

perspectives



By Stan Hasteley
Executive
Director

Zimbabwe partnership

Newly installed officers and Executive Committee members of the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe pose outside the tabernacle on the grounds of the Baptist Conference Centre near Gweru, where the convention's Annual Congress is celebrated each August. Elected president for 2003-2005 was C.H. Chiromo (center, right), pastor of the Emmanuel Baptist Church of Harare. Four women were elected to top posts, continuing a pacesetting trend of the BCZ in recent years.



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Executive Director: Stan Hastey
 Associate Director: Jeanette Holt
 (202) 745-7609
 Fax: (202) 745-0023
 AllianceofBaptists@cs.com
 www.AllianceofBaptists.org

Newsletter Editor:
 Sue Harper Poss
 P.O. Box 25461
 Greenville, SC 29616
 (864) 848-3346
 Fax: (864) 848-5258
 sueposs@charter.net

Dixon: ‘Baptist Youth Camp offers youth opportunity to experience God in their own way and at their own pace’

The 2003 Baptist Youth Camp — the 12th — enjoyed its largest enrollment ever, and for the first time benefitted from a camp director, made possible with an allocation of funds from the Alliance Mission Offering.

Brian Dixon, pastor of Dolores Street Baptist Church in San Francisco, was the director.

“Baptist Youth Camp offers youth the opportunity to experience God in their own way and at their own pace,” Dixon said. “We hope youth feel comfortable to ask questions and be who they are, beloved created beings. It is out of that experience with the Divine, out of those questions, and out of that belovedness that they are able to develop meaningful worship that forever impacts not only themselves but the world around them.”

The theme this year was *Sabbath: Soil of the Soul*. “Through Bible study, interest groups, afternoon and evening activities, and worship we explored the nature of Sabbath, biblical witnesses of Sabbath, ways in which we all need to experience more Sabbath in our daily lives, and ways in

which we can all practice Sabbath,” Dixon said. “The practices ranged from various forms of prayer as Sabbath, some of which included silence and walking the labyrinth, to play as Sabbath. We believe that all found at least one way that they can now find sacred rest in their busy lives.”

Following morning Bible study each day, youth had the opportunity to participate in interest groups, many of which fed directly into worship. Youth were able to choose from music, art, drama and dance, worship planning, newspaper, outdoor activities, photography/videography, sports and games.

This year Stacey Simpson Duke, an Alliance member and co-pastor of First Baptist Church, Ann Arbor, MI, was enlisted to help shape the music and worship, but as has been the practice of this camp since its conception, worship is planned by the youth.

“What has been the result and was the case this year are some of the most creative services many of us have ever experienced,” Dixon said. “Youth are often able to participate and engage in worship in

ways that they are not in their home congregations.”

While at the camp, participants took an offering of \$230 that will provide a scholarship for one clergy member to attend a Sabbath retreat at Sabbath House, an Alliance-supported ministry in Bryson City, NC.

The 2003 camp was held at Laurel Ridge Retreat Center in Laurel Springs, NC, with 158 participants, both youth and adults, from six Alliance churches: Binkley Memorial Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC; Glendale Baptist Church, Nashville, TN; Myers Park Baptist Church, Charlotte, NC; Northminster Church, Monroe, LA, Oakhurst Baptist Church, Decatur, GA, Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Raleigh, NC; and Wake Forest Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, NC.

“We are grateful to those who saw a need for such a camp and decided that if it was going to exist they would have to create it themselves,” Dixon said. “We have already begun planning for Baptist Youth Camp 2004.”