

**... through your word, through your testimony,
your struggle and your prayers**

article and photos by Steve DeVane

Fellowship Baptists in North Carolina celebrated generational diversity and rejoiced in spiritual unity March 19-20.

More than 1,300 Baptists gathered for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina's annual General Assembly at First Baptist Church in Winston-Salem. Under the theme, "Generations Connected — One Family, One Faith, Many Journeys," they appreciated the past, enjoyed the present and envisioned the future.

The meeting included nearly 60 ministry workshops, two worship services, a preaching conference, several networking events and a celebration of CBFNC ministries. Sermons from a CBF patriarch and a young couple ministering on a college campus highlighted the weekend.

Workshop leaders discussed racial diversity in missions; understanding Muslim women; Hispanic leadership; the challenges of poverty; creative teaching methods; mission trips; reaching young people while keeping older folks; religious liberty; responding to CBF's critics; and numerous other subjects.

Networking events included retired ministers, divinity school students, youth ministers, children's ministers, CBFNC advocates and ministers' spouses.

Cecil Sherman, who served as the first coordinator for CBF's national group in the early- and mid-1990s, preached during the evening worship service on March 19. Sherman related CBF's early years to Acts 15, when church leaders discussed whether Gentiles needed to become Jews before they joined the church.

"The church was forced to adapt to changes and she's been doing that ever since," he said.

Change was also forced upon CBF, Sherman said. He talked about three "faces of CBF." First, he talked about the "face of conflict." When he asked how many people remembered the spirit of Southern Baptist Convention meetings in the 1980s, the crowd groaned.

Nevertheless, one cannot understand the birth of CBF outside that history, Sherman said. "If there hadn't been a conflict, we wouldn't be," he said. Sherman said CBF formed at the right time because those involved in the conflict knew when to quit. "We quit because we were at risk of becoming like the people we opposed," he said.

CBF also has the face of growth, Sherman said. During the organization's early days, income was needed to support missionaries. "We had to grow to meet our obligations," he said. Sherman said he wishes CBF would grow larger to send missionaries who are ready to go, but the group cannot afford to send them.

CBF also has struggled with its identity, in effect wondering what it's going to be when it grows up, Sherman said. He said he sees the organization as a missions delivery system, a supporter of theological education and a teacher of Baptist polity.

Sherman said he realizes that his generation will not determine the next face of CBF. He shared some ideas he hopes those who have that responsibility will keep in mind. First, CBF should stay in



touch with "mainline Baptists," including those from traditional and smaller churches, he said. "Know your people and you'll make good decisions," he said. Next, Sherman said missions should always be CBF's priority. "That's what the people want," he said. Lastly, CBF's leadership should be willing to grow and not be satisfied with just meeting the budget and organizing the group. That leadership will mean the difference between vitality and mediocrity, he said.

During a ministry celebration on the morning of March 20, CBFNC staff members talked about recent ministry efforts involving youth, Hispanics, pastor search committees, college students and churches.

Later, CBFNC passed its 2010-11 budget of \$1.33 million. The organization also expects to bring in another \$2.03 million for various state and national ministries through its Mission Resource Plan. Those attending the General Assembly also approved the Council Development Committee report. Donna Bissette, who had been serving as CBFNC's treasurer, is moderator-elect and will serve in 2011-12. Steve Little, who was elected last year, will serve as moderator for 2010-11. Greg Rogers, who served as moderator in 2009-10, becomes past moderator.

In his Executive Coordinator report, Larry Hovis presented a focus statement that will serve as a vision for CBFNC's next chapter: Collaborating with North Carolina Fellowship Baptists to develop and strengthen Christ-centered missional community in these rapidly changing times (see related article on page 7).

During worship on the morning of March 20, Craig and Jennifer Janney preached from John 17.

The Janneys are both on staff at Chowan University. Craig Janney is assistant dean of strategic communications, athletic chaplain and instructor in religion. Jennifer Janney is associate minister to the university and instructor in religion.

The Janneys both graduated from Chowan and Gardner-Webb University's Christopher White School of Divinity. They said they represent the young generation of CBFers who found their identity in the CBF identity.

Craig Janney said his voice hadn't yet changed when conflict was raging in the Baptist life. He discussed learning about the controversy in divinity school. "We didn't live in the conflict about which Dr. Sherman spoke last night, but we have ears and we hear," he said. "The strange part of these younger Baptists is that we have



this absurd optimism for unity and we learned it honest.”

Jennifer Janney said CBF has a rich history filled with joy and pain, tears and laughter. “I know it came at a cost, but rest assured with the model that has been set before us we have a rich future as well,” she said.

In John 17, Jesus entrusts the future to God, praying that His disciples be one. Craig Janney said he’s heard that prayer echoed in their generation. The younger generation is proud of differences and praises diversity, he said.

Jesus prayed for Christians to be one, but not for them to agree on everything, Jennifer Janney said.

CBF’s generations are connected, Jennifer Janney said. “We have come to faith through your word, through your testimony, your struggle and your prayers,” she said.



Fostering Community ...

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Organizational Alignment – The Markers and Pathways, along with expressed needs of congregations who have conducted a self-assessment, will become the basis for making decisions regarding the deployment of CBFNC resources (finances, staff and volunteer leadership, calendar, programs and ministries).

Happy Birthday, North Carolina Fellowship Baptists. We’re sixteen. We’ve got our driver’s license, and keys to the family car. We mustn’t get distracted. Let’s keep both hands on the wheel and both eyes on the road. Let’s maintain our focus on fostering the kind of community that is committed, first and foremost, to participating in God’s mission in North Carolina and the world in these wonderful, but challenging times.