

NORTH
CAROLINA

BAPTISTS Today

25 years

of risks, freedom
and fulfillment

page 4





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BAPTISTS Today

An autonomous national Baptist news journal



Editors Walker Knight, with wife Nell, Jack Harwell and John Pierce have guided the independent news journal through most of its 25 years. The Woodruff Carriage House, near Mercer University's law school in downtown Macon, Ga., currently houses the *Baptists Today* offices. **Page 4**

welcome

NEW GROUP SUBSCRIBERS

Center Hill Baptist Church
Lexington, N.C.
Brian Alexander pastor

•
First Baptist Church
Marion, N.C.
Scott Hagaman pastor

•
Tabernacle Baptist Church
Raleigh, N.C.
Randall Lolley interim pastor

•
Wingate Baptist Church
Wingate, N.C.
Derrill Smith pastor



News journal marks 25 years of risks, freedom and fulfillment

Baptists Today is owned and operated by an independent board of directors committed to a free press. The directors gathered last September for a retreat. Winnie Williams (first row, fourth from right) of Seneca, S.C., is current chair.

MACON, Ga. — Twenty-five years ago this month, the first issue of *Baptists Today* (then known as *SBC Today*) rolled off the press. It fulfilled the dream of founding editor Walker Knight and a host of others to provide a truly independent voice for Baptists during a time of change and challenges.

Through peaks and valleys, the only autonomous, national news journal serving the larger Baptist family has become a trusted source of news, opinion and features for many across the U.S. and beyond.

From the fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention to the emergence of new moderate Baptist organizations and entities to growing partnerships between various old and new Baptist groups, *Baptists Today* has helped church leaders — laity and clergy — to better understand the ongoing denominational shifts and to make more informed decisions.

As the Baptist landscape and media technology have rapidly changed, so has the approach to news delivery by *Baptists Today*.

The monthly print edition contains a large portion of original content found nowhere else. It is supplemented by a popular

web site, www.baptiststoday.org, that provides daily news from around the world, alternating blogs by *Baptists Today* editors, archives of past print editions, online subscriptions and much more.

While *Baptists Today* has gone through many changes over the past quarter-century, the publication remains firmly rooted in a commitment to provide readers with honest reporting and the opportunity to express diverse opinions. An independent board of directors guarantees editorial freedom from any denominational control.

That freedom is honored through a long-term, mutually beneficial partnership with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the support of many other Baptist individuals, churches and groups committed to historic Baptist understandings of freedom.

The fingerprints of so many are on what has emerged as a unique and widely appreci-

ated source of information for Baptists.

Three persons involved in the early development of the news journal launched in April 1983 offered their reflections.

Larry McSwain

The only way to describe the formation of *Baptists Today* 25 years ago is with one word — providence.

No other explanation makes any sense of the unbelievable and remarkable set of events that brought into being the formation of this voice for sanity and freedom in Baptist life.

In the fall of 1982, I made the initial call on behalf of the “Gatlinburg Gang” to ask Walker Knight if he would consider beginning a new publication to address forthrightly the growing takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention.

For those too young to know and those too old to remember, the Gatlinburg Gang was the nickname given by the press to a group of Baptists called together by Cecil Sherman and Kenneth Chafin to fight the war for the soul of the SBC declared by Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler.

After traditional Baptists failed to win

The feeling is mutual

Hawaii, N.C. Baptists enjoy partnership

Story and photo by Tony W. Cartledge

Baptists in Hawaii occasionally remind themselves that Hawaii is nice, but Paradise is elsewhere. They welcome visitors to their island home, but also want to expand the population of heaven.

Baptists from North Carolina are committed to assisting them in those efforts. When the Baptist State Convention (BSC) of North Carolina entered a partnership with Hawaii-Pacific Baptists in 2005, the agreement was to last for just three years. It has since been extended through at least 2009.

Tar Heel Baptists and their Aloha cousins have found a kinship that is lasting. Just ask Steve Irvin, pastor of Pali View Baptist Church on the windward (eastern) side of Oahu, one of the oldest Baptist churches around.

The church sits at the foot of the majestic Koolau Mountains, a visually stunning spine of lush, nearly vertical ridges that are often hidden by clouds. The teal and cerulean waters of Kaneohe Bay beckon from below.

Christian missionaries first came to Hawaii in 1820 and enjoyed several periods of significant influence. The first Baptist church in the islands was not founded until 1926, however, and growth was slow. When Pali View Baptist was birthed in 1952, it was the first Baptist church on the windward side of the island.

Baptist congregations dot the area now, and most of them began as missions of Pali View, whose relatively small size belies its importance in the area. In addition to its mission efforts, Pali View started the first preschool program in eastern Oahu, and many area residents know of the church because of the sterling reputation of its preschool ministry.

Buildings in the tropics, especially older ones, face many challenges. With termites ravaging door and window frames, and with louvered glass windows growing both creaky and cranky, the education building at Pali View was in need of some major work, and there were significant obstacles to getting it done.

Fortunately, a veteran mission team from Cool Springs Baptist Church in Sanford, N.C., was looking for a project. A couple from another church joined a group of men from Cool Springs on a mission to Pali View in October 2006. The Cool Springs crew had previously worked in Belize, El Salvador, West Virginia, Mississippi, New York, Nevada and Alaska.

The team undertook a major effort to repair three exterior walls and replaced the entire front of the church's two-story educational building on their first trip, along with all of the upstairs doors. The men from Cool Springs returned the following May to replace the windows in the back, and also

Canada fell through, she asked N.C. Baptist Men partnership director Mark Abernathy where God needed them most. Soon, the team was on its way to Pali View.

Team members painted exterior walls and did evangelism training with church members. They distributed energy bars and bottled water labeled with information about the church in a community park.

Irvin, who has worked in Hawaii for most of the past 20 years, said the teams' visits have accomplished far more than just construction work. Members of a small church on a small island in the middle of the ocean can feel isolated, he said.

Contact with people from another place has contributed to "a good, strong feeling of being a part of a larger body."

The good feelings work both ways. Cool Springs team leader Eric Berndt, a salesman for a wholesale florist, said giving time, energy and money to missions is "what we're commissioned to do. If we don't, we're failing as Christians."

His team, which includes an 81-year-old bricklayer, has enjoyed knowing the Pali View members.

"People in Hawaii are some of the nicest, most genuine people I've ever met," he said. "All we have to do is get there. They furnish vehicles

for us to drive, provide lodging in the church, and they literally fight over who's going to feed us."

Shelton's team of four men and six women ranged in age from their mid-20s to 75-year-old Frank Fisher, a longtime pastor in the Truett Association. Shelton was particularly pleased that her team members, from an area that is "99 percent white," had the chance to experience cultural diversity among Hawaii's many ethnic peoples without the addition of a language barrier.

"It helped us to realize that we're all God's children," she said.

God's children in Hawaii come in many hues and speak many languages. Fortunately, many Baptists from North Carolina are fluent in the languages of faith, hope and love. **BT**



Pali View Baptist Church sits between the Koolau Mountains and Kaneohe Bay on the eastern side of Oahu.

painted the exterior of the building and a missionary house.

They're planning another trip this May to replace all the large louvered windows and window boxing in a long outside wall.

A team from the Truett Association in far western North Carolina found its way to Pali View in August 2007, with Carissa Shelton as team leader. Shelton teaches agriculture to middle schoolers and serves as youth director, choir leader and a Sunday school teacher at Moss Memorial Baptist Church in Hayesville, where her father Charles has been pastor for 26 years.

After a three-month mission experience in Australia, Shelton felt burdened to lead a team from Truett Association on a mission trip. When initial plans for a project in

AN ANALYSIS: PART TWO (1 9 9 5 - 2 0 0 2)

The changing face of the Baptist State Convention

(Editor's note: This is the second of a three-part series on changes impacting the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina in recent decades.)

While division ruled in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) during the 1980s and '90s, supporters of the Baptist State Convention (BSC) made many efforts to maintain unity.

The efforts intensified after conservative victories in BSC elections became the rule in the late 1990s. Moderates were concerned that the new run of conservative BSC presidents would follow the pattern of SBC leaders and appoint only like-minded people to the committees responsible for nominating persons to serve on the Convention's powerful General Board (now called the Board of Directors) and to guide its institutions and agencies.

The elected leaders, for their part, sought to remain true to their conservative values while continuing to work cooperatively with moderates. For the first seven or eight years, they appointed balanced committees that increased the number of conservatives on the General Board, but continued to appoint moderates, as well.

A shift of power was clearly in the works, but it was gradual rather than radical.

Budget matters, entity shifts

In 1997, conservatives pushed for and won a fourth giving plan. Many had been unhappy with the approval of Plans B and C, which reduced the portion of Cooperative Program funds going to the SBC to 10 percent and zero, with Plan C sending 10 percent to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) instead.

The new "Plan D" sent the same 35 percent to the SBC as Plan A, but reduced the amount of undesignated BSC funding from 65 to 35 percent. The extra 15 percent was designated for the BSC's Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute and other causes typically favored by conservatives.

As millions of dollars migrated from Plan A into Plan D, the BSC faced a growing financial challenge, losing 15 cents on every dollar moved.

There was activity among moderates during that year, too. Trustees of Meredith College in Raleigh voted to cut ties with the

BSC, retaining the same "fraternal" relationship that Wake Forest University had entered with the Convention in 1986.

Meredith, founded as a college for women in 1891 and named for BSC pioneer Thomas Meredith, hired its first non-Baptist — and first female — president in 1999.

Also in 1997, North Carolina Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem asked for and was granted a new relationship that called for the BSC to elect just half of the hospital's trustees, with the hospital choosing the other half.

Reconciliation efforts

With tensions on the upswing, two of the BSC's top elected leaders worked to reverse the trend. Convention president Greg Mathis (a conservative) and General Board president Mike Queen (a moderate) traveled the state in 1997 to encourage support for a new plan that would draw General Board members from 10 statewide regions, rather than from associations. In the process, they became friends and shared a mutual desire to promote unity over polarity.

A "Committee of 20" conservative and moderate leaders was appointed to explore options for reconciliation. Response from participants was so positive that the group was expanded to a "Committee of 80."

Encouraged by the apparent progress, Convention messengers voted to form a "Commission on Cooperation" to study options for keeping N.C. Baptists together, with David Crocker and Greg Mathis as co-chairs.

In 1999, after a lengthy process of negotiation and debate, the Commission on Cooperation proposed a novel recommendation that called for moderates and conservatives to share power by rotating the presidency in alternating years. The motion was approved by the General Board and promoted throughout the state. At the annual meeting, however, it failed to receive the two-thirds majority required for a constitutional change, garnering about 55 percent of the vote.

Despite the setback, reconciliation efforts continued. In 2000, Convention messengers authorized the creation of a

"Unity Committee," which brought a "Unity Report" in 2001.

The committee's recommendations called for changes to the BSC bylaws that would instruct BSC officers, the Committee on Committees and the Committee on Nominations to seek a balanced slate of nominees who "desire unity and cooperation."

The report was hotly debated and ultimately referred to the BSC Constitution and Bylaws Committee. That committee declined to recommend any changes in 2002, however, effectively killing the proposal.

Polarization grows

With unity efforts largely dead in the water, political activity in BSC life heated up. Throughout the years of contested elections, moderates had relied on an informal network of insiders to recruit and promote candidates. Conservatives were more organized, with a group called Conservative Carolina Baptists (CCB) taking the lead role, publishing a newsletter and holding periodic meetings.

CCB, consisting almost entirely of ministers, ramped up its efforts to gain control of BSC boards as well as convention officers. In 2002, some supporters called for the nomination of conservatives alone until they held a majority on the governing boards of the BSC and its affiliated institutions and agencies.

That same year, a group called "Mainstream Baptists" was formed with the stated goal of uniting moderates and "cooperative conservatives" in support of maintaining balance in convention leadership. Though led by moderates, the group sought to recruit conservatives who supported balance in leadership, and made efforts to mobilize lay members as well as ministers.

Mainstream Baptists held laity conferences prior to several conventions and promoted candidates in 2002 and 2003, but were unsuccessful in winning the presidency. By 2006, the group was no longer meeting.

Two turning points

The change in elected BSC leaders that

emerged in the late 1990s was accompanied by a change in the Convention's staff leadership. Longtime executive director-treasurer Roy Smith retired at the end of 1997, and was succeeded by former North Carolina and Tennessee pastor Jim Royston.

Royston recognized that he was sailing a divided ship, and encouraged the ongoing efforts at reconciliation. His goal of holding the Convention in the middle, however, was ultimately unattainable, and neither conservatives nor moderates were fully pleased with his efforts.

Within a year of taking the helm, Royston reorganized the convention staff. The process eliminated several positions and angered many moderates, who believed some of the staff shuffling was designed to placate conservatives.

Moderates were particularly upset by Royston's decision to restructure the "youth and campus ministry" staff, whose progressive approach was unpopular with conservatives. The reorganization not only cut positions, but also moved youth and campus ministries — along with Baptist Men and Woman's Missionary Union — into the "evangelism" group, led by Milton Hollifield.

In the next few years, there was a shift in

focus to evangelism as the primary function of youth and campus ministries, and several veteran staffers retired or changed jobs.

In 2003, facing a serious financial crunch caused in large part by the shift in funding from Plan A to Plan D, Royston made deeper cuts that cost several veteran employees their jobs and eliminated a separate position for the executive director of the Council on Christian Higher Education. These moves also bothered moderates, who felt that higher education was being minimized.

A second turning point for moderates took place in 2002 when the Providence Baptist Church in Hendersonville was denied church start funding, largely because of its affiliation with CBF. The church plant was initially sponsored by several moderate Baptist churches and encouraged by BSC leaders, despite its calling of Gail Coulter as pastor.

Providence sought membership in the BSC, but indicated that it would affiliate nationally with CBF rather than SBC. The combination of a woman pastor and CBF affiliation raised the ire of some conservative pastors in the area.

The Carolina Association, led by associational missionary Sandy Beck, refused to sign off on the church's application for church start

funding, stating a belief that the church would be harmful to the association's efforts. Even though Coulter and appointed "mentor" Buddy Corbin had gone through BSC-funded church starter training led by the SBC's North American Mission Board, the Carolina Association's veto was allowed to scuttle start-up funding the church had expected to receive.

BSC officials repeatedly said the BSC was not opposed to assisting CBF-only churches that wanted to participate in the BSC. Moderates faulted Royston's leadership, however, for failing to prevent the debacle. Although Providence was invited to join the United Association, the Carolina Association's veto was given precedence in denying funding for the church.

The conflict was highly publicized and much talked about. Conservatives typically favored the denial of funding, while moderates cried foul. In protest, several churches that had helped birth the Providence congregation either left the BSC completely or reduced their level of giving, choosing instead to help fund the new church directly.

With tensions tight and no end in sight, there was little doubt that increasing polarization was on the horizon, a subject that will be addressed in the next issue. **BT**

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Providence Baptist Church, Charlotte

Providence Baptist Church, Hendersonville

Reynoldson Baptist Church, Gates

Rolesville Baptist Church, Rolesville

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