

# Bush praises moderate church in SBC speech: Faith-based grant went to Cooperative Baptist church

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Touting his desire to build a “more compassionate society,” President George W. Bush thanked Southern Baptists assembled for their annual meeting last month for being “soldiers in the army of compassion.” The president also highlighted, apparently inadvertently, a church that is now aligned with the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and no longer sends funds to the SBC.

Bush spoke June 21 to the Southern Baptist messengers (delegates) in Nashville by live video from the White House. It was the fourth consecutive year that Bush has addressed SBC messengers—all by live satellite except for a taped message in 2003.

Often smiling broadly at the cheers, shouts, whistles and applause he was receiving, Bush touched on four elements known to resonate with many Southern Baptists—a proposed “family amendment” designed to prevent homosexuals from marrying, continuing legislation to curtail the practice of abortion, the appointment of more conservative judges and government aid for faith-based organizations.

“I am proud that we have now opened billions of dollars in grant money to competition that includes our faith-based charities,” the president said. “For example, my administration awarded College Park Baptist Church in Orlando, Florida, \$5.8 million to build 68 homes for low-income seniors.”

Pastor Ron Crawford told *EthicsDaily.com* that the church was recently awarded a contract through HUD to build a second facility for persons who are disabled or near the end of life. The first, also built with HUD money, is 22 years old.

College Park Baptist Church describes itself on its Web site as a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship church located in the Orlando area. The site provides online links to the CBF and other moderate Baptist entities but not to the SBC.

The Atlanta-based CBF split from the SBC in 1991 over differences on issues including biblical inerrancy and the ordination of women. The convention views the 1,800-church CBF as a competitor and refuses to accept money that churches channel through it.

Adding to the irony, Crawford said, is the fact that the church voted two years ago to no longer send funds to either the Southern Baptist Convention or the Florida Baptist Convention unless a member designates them that way. "That's not because we're mad with anyone," Crawford said. "We feel like we were called to a different part of the vineyard."

In business sessions, Southern Baptists followed the lead of the American Family Association in dropping its eight-year-old boycott of Disney parks and products, reelected president Bobby Welch and recommended that church members monitor their children's schools because of what the resolution said were "homosexual activists and their allies" promoting "homosexuality as a morally legitimate lifestyle."

The statement said parents should decide whether their kids are best educated in public, private or home-school settings. Welch said he did not support another resolution that would urge parents to pull Christian students from public schools. "Everybody doesn't have to go to Disney," he said. "Everybody has to go to school."