

American Baptists, CBF discuss closer cooperation

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Author and activist Tony Campolo brokered unpublicized dialogue early this year between heads of two national Baptist groups that share much in common, according to officials of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Leaders of American Baptist Churches USA and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship met in Pennsylvania and Georgia to explore closer cooperation between the two groups, interim CBF coordinator Pat Anderson told the CBF Coordinating Council in late February.

Anderson has filled in since last summer's retirement of former executive coordinator Daniel Vestal and will stay on to ease the transition for his successor, Suzii Paynter, who began work March 1.

Anderson took part in a short meeting at ABCUSA headquarters in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, a Philadelphia suburb. Campolo, an American Baptist minister who spoke at the 2003 CBF General Assembly in 2003, has "expressed his deep desire for CBF and ABC to be one," said Anderson.

"He said his life dream is for it to be the Cooperative American Baptist Churches of the USA, or something like that," Anderson said. "He said he realizes that at the age of 76, that dream will probably not come true in his lifetime, but he just wanted to focus on that dream."

Continued Anderson: "We had a nice conversation about things we hold in common, much of our shared history and projecting the things that we should focus on together, because we have similar issues and problems and challenges as denominational entities. Nothing concrete came out of that conversation, other than just an intentional desire for us to figure out ways to work more closely together as Cooperative Baptists and American Baptists."

After the half-day meeting at ABC headquarters, American Baptist general secretary Roy Medley brought a similar delegation to visit the CBF Resource Center in Atlanta February 5. Anderson said leadership teams of both organizations “made the commitment to each other that we would be more in touch with each other and would be looking to each other’s people and organization for ways that we can interact.”

Anderson said Campolo, professor emeritus of sociology at Eastern University and founder and president of the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education, expressed disappointment that neither American Baptists nor Cooperative Baptists are doing enough with young people, a key to future vitality of both organizations.

He proposed a national event bringing youth groups from both American Baptist and CBF churches together for a concert and a Bible conference that would call on young people to commit to two years of service in Christian work, Anderson reported. Campolo also envisioned collaboration between American Baptist and CBF-affiliated colleges and divinity schools to provide internships and student engaged-learning opportunities.

American Baptists and the CBF already have a track record of collaboration. The two groups have jointly appointed missionaries, and they met together in 2007 in Washington. They have partnered in disaster response, and both belong to the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty and the Baptist World Alliance. —ABP