

COGBE retreat ignites passion, fervor for reaching the lost

By J. Gerald Harris, Editor

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NORCROSS — The Conference of Georgia Baptist Evangelists (COGBE) met for their annual retreat in Norcross Jan. 8-9. Despite the wintry cold and hazardous highway conditions almost 60 of the GBC's finest vocational evangelists met for a time of fellowship and inspiration.

The outgoing officers, led by President Bill Prince, chose not to accept any recognition of their terms of service and requested instead that the money budgeted for such expressions of appreciation be directed to the Baptism Assistance Project.

At the end of the retreat Prince gave Brian Fossett, director of Southern Baptist Evangelistic Association, Inc., a check for \$1,000 for the BAP.

In 2006, with financial assistance from the North American Mission Board, the national organization known as the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists (COSBE) developed the BAP to assist the churches that have struggled to identify and reach people in their church and community with the Gospel.

The Baptism Assistance Project provides an evangelistic team to churches who request assistance at no cost to the church. The participating church must commit to a detailed planning and preparations process prior to the meeting and agree to take an offering at every service.

The evangelistic team that participates in one of these events will receive a modest pre-determined honorarium and appropriate travel and lodging expenses. The offering that is received will go back into the Baptism Assistance Project budget.

In speaking to the group, Steve Parr, vice president for evangelism for the Georgia Baptist Convention, declared, "I wish every church in the Georgia Baptist Convention should have a revival, but let's be realistic, 40 percent probably won't be doing that."

Parr continued, "However, this year with our emphasis 'Across Georgia 2010' we want to challenge every Georgia Baptist church to engage in at least one of the following intentional evangelistic initiatives: (1) have an evangelistic revival, (2) implement a servant or community evangelism project, (3) take the Scripture to every home in the community, (4) train every member to share the Gospel, or (5) implement a personalized local evangelistic effort that has proved to be effective.

"What if 3,000 of our churches were to participate in 'Across Georgia 2010' by using one of these initiatives! We could significantly increase our number of baptisms."

Frank Page, vice president of evangelization for the North America Mission Board, preached on John 4 at the retreat and pointed to the Samaritan woman, who encountered Jesus at Jacob's Well, as an enthusiastic witness.



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Evangelist Bill Prince, left, hands a check to Brian Fossett, director of the Southern Baptist Evangelistic Association, Inc. The \$1,000 check is for the Baptism Assistance Project. Christians are not confronting the culture in which they are living. They are simply adjusting to it and accommodating to it.

"The message that we have concerning Jesus Christ and his saving power is going to mean nothing to this culture unless the unbelievers can see genuine Christians who have been transformed by a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. If they see the church acting like the world they are not going to think one thing about being saved."

Mike Stone, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Blackshear, preached a sermon from I Peter 3 on "Five Characteristics of the Death of Christ on the Cross." In describing the condescension of Jesus, Stone declared, "The Creator would become a creation, the Infinite becoming finite, and Eternity stepping into time and Jesus Christ for a period of more than 33 years would step onto the earth and walk and live and move among us and veil his deity behind this façade of humanity so that he may live in sinless perfection and be tempted in every way that we have been tempted and He would preach as no man ever preached."

Buddy Perstroppe, pastor of Hampton's First Baptist Church, brought the concluding message and preached on "God's Incredible Gift" from II Corinthians 9:15. He proclaimed, "We are to be motivated to gratitude by the Giver.

"There is some errant theology today. We often think of those with power as being aloof and distant, and sometimes we may even think of God that way — that He is awesome, but aloof and distant. Then there are also those who think of God as casual and as their good buddy. What we find in Scripture as we



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Georgia Baptist evangelists gather around Frank Page to pray for his ministry as vice president of Evangelization for the North American Mission Board.

Page also challenged those present at the meeting to spread the word about God's Plan for Sharing, Southern Baptists' national evangelism initiative. The battle cry is "Pray! Engage! Sow! Harvest!"

The newly elected officers of COGBE are Dennis Nunn, president; Jon Reed, vice president; Erica Branch-music director; Levi Skipper-secretary/treasurer; Jeff Cleghorn, chaplain; and Frank Cox, pastor of North Metro First Baptist Church in Lawrence, as pastor-advisor.

Nunn, founder and president of Living the New Life Ministries, remarked, "We have a lot to do if we are going to reach our state for Christ, because 76 percent of our churches do no evangelistic training."

Inspired and inspiring preaching marked the evangelists' retreat. Mike Gibbs, pastor of Alapaha Baptist Church, delivered a message on II Peter 2:3 and urged those present to "Be Diligent."

"Spend some time reading the Word of God in context; and then simply put in practice what the Word says," Gibbs declared. "We need to be careful that we are rooted in the Word of God We don't need entertainment. We need men who will proclaim the Word of God."

Bill Harrell, pastor of Abilene Baptist Church in Augusta, preached a sermon entitled, "Our Disturbing Message for a Decadent Culture." He proclaimed, "If you stand up in a church and preach what God wants you to preach the world is not going to like it, but God's people will be edified by it and those who are lost will be convicted by it."

The Harrell added, "We are living in a decadent culture. Most churches and

think about the giver of our gifts is that God is a God who is infinite, but a God who is also intimate.”

Among Georgia’s vocational evangelists there is no apathy about reaching the lost for Christ. Their commitment and passion for reaching the unsaved is not only evident, but also exemplary. The recent retreat only served to increase their passion and ignite their fervor.

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