

## AN ANALYSIS: PART ONE

# The changing face of the Baptist State Convention

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

**M**any Baptists in North Carolina are struggling to get a handle on the seismic shifts in denominational life during the past three decades.

Pastors and other church leaders who keep up with denominational news are fairly well informed about contemporary issues, but sometimes at a loss when it comes to communicating concerns to the congregation.

On multiple occasions churches have asked me to meet with denominational relations committees or to speak to larger groups about changes that have taken place in the Baptist State Convention (BSC). Many moderate-leaning congregations are struggling to interpret how those changes could or should impact decisions they make in terms of relationships with the larger Baptist family.

This article begins a series of reflections in which I will attempt to explain, not so much “where have all the moderates gone,” but why many moderate Baptists have become decidedly less enthusiastic about supporting today’s BSC.

## The 1980s

Coming into the 1980s, the BSC was enjoying a time of growth. The 1960s and 1970s were good years for Baptists across the country, and North Carolina was no exception.

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) controversies over two books that were criticized for being too liberal were harbingers of troubles to come, but the denominational waters were relatively smooth in the Tar Heel state, where the BSC was growing, ministries were expanding and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS) was blossoming.

During the 1980s, the BSC elected presidents who were both moderate and conservative. Veteran state missionary Roy Smith succeeded Cecil Ray as executive secretary in 1983, and the BSC developed a reputation as one of the most progressive and forward-looking state conventions.

Sarah Ann Hobbs, former executive director of Woman’s Missionary Union of North Carolina (WMU-NC), was named director of the missions division for the

BSC, the first and last woman to serve as head of a BSC division (the equivalent position today is “executive leader” of a group), and the only woman in the SBC to serve in a comparable position.

The youth and campus ministry department also enjoyed a national reputation with comprehensive programs and progressive leadership in the central offices as well as on campuses across the state.

When the national strategy to turn the BSC to a more conservative course first took hold in 1979, Tar Heel Baptists took notice. An ad hoc group of pastors and others concerned about the SBC’s new direction met twice in 1986 (at Meredith College in Raleigh and Providence Baptist in Charlotte) to discuss “forming an alliance of individuals and congregations that would reaffirm historic Baptist principles of freedom and assess future organizational prospects.” Two additional meetings were held in early 1987, and the “Southern Baptist Alliance” held its first annual convocation at Meredith College May 14-15 of that year. Henry Crouch, pastor of Providence Baptist in Charlotte, was elected as the first president and Myers Park Baptist in Charlotte donated office space for the fledgling organization’s use.

Alan Neely of SEBTS was named acting executive director in 1988 and served for a year. In 1992, the organization changed its name to “the Alliance of Baptists,” further distancing itself from the SBC.

With an eye toward trustee turnovers and changing fortunes at SBC seminaries, Wake Forest University sought the freedom to appoint its own trustees. Despite heavy debate, BSC messengers approved the move.

The school, founded in 1834 as one of the young Convention’s first projects, shifted to a “fraternal” relationship with the BSC. The Convention would later change its governing documents to describe the relationship as “historic” rather than fraternal.

The sea change in the SBC had its first major impact in North Carolina when strongly conservative appointees gained a majority on the board of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest. SEBTS had developed a reputation as one of the more progressive Southern Baptist seminaries, a place where women were affirmed both as ministers and as

faculty members.

The new trustee majority wanted to shift the school to a decidedly more conservative trajectory, and president Randall Lolley resigned in 1987, saying that he could not continue to lead the school without being guilty of insubordination for refusing to carry out the new mandate.

The changes at Southeastern sent shock waves through much of the state where many pastors and church staff members were Southeastern alumni. Many wore yellow ribbons as a sign of support for Lolley.

Students protested on campus. Lewis Drummond, an evangelism professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, was elected president and served in a caretaker role until 1992, when Paige Patterson began a 10-year quest to completely reshape the school.

## 1990-1995

While Patterson’s reign at Southeastern reflected an inexorable swing to doctrinal fundamentalism on the national scene, BSC supporters sought ways to continue making room for both conservatives and moderates.

In 1990, to accommodate BSC churches that felt increasingly disenfranchised by the rightward-marching SBC, messengers approved an “Optional” giving plan by which churches could choose to send less money to the SBC. In 1991, the optional plan forwarded about 20 percent of BSC contributions to the SBC, rather than 35 percent, as in the basic budget.

As the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) got under way in the early 1990s,

Baptists from North Carolina were in the forefront of the movement. Many saw CBF as an attractive alternative to the growing stridency of the SBC and the more liberal approach of the Alliance, and wanted to support it.

From the earliest CBF gatherings onward, the North Carolina delegation was one of the largest on hand.

Supporters wanted a way to support CBF while also remaining fully engaged in BSC life, and in 1994 BSC messengers approved a third giving plan designed toward that end. The Convention’s original

plan was renamed “Plan A.” The earlier “Optional Plan” was renamed “Plan B,” and the amount sent to the SBC was lowered to 10 percent.

A new “Plan C” was approved that would forward 10 percent to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and nothing to the SBC. In both Plan B and Plan C, some of the difference was directed toward special mission projects and causes typically favored by moderates.

The optional giving plans played a major role in promoting unity within the BSC, despite its obvious diversity. There was, however, a limit to the level of diversity judged to be acceptable.

In a 1992 move that would presage later conflicts, the BSC’s General Board approved a financial policy requiring the Convention to decline financial contributions from churches that accepted or endorsed homosexuals, effectively excluding such churches from membership. Pullen Memorial in Raleigh and Binkley Memorial in Chapel Hill were the first to be forced out, and Wake Forest Baptist Church in Winston-Salem left voluntarily over the same issue.

When the policy was approved, the General Board had a clear moderate

majority, but was under considerable pressure from outraged conservatives. Although few moderates were comfortable with the idea of ordaining homosexuals or performing “union” services for gay or lesbian couples, many believed the new policy violated traditional Baptist principles of church autonomy and soul competency.

It became clear that the rising tide of conservatism was washing through the Tar Heel state, eroding cherished Baptist tenets and making the BSC a less inclusive organization.

While BSC folk worked in a variety of ways to maintain strong bonds of fellowship and cooperation, patterns pioneered in the SBC began to emerge. The pastor’s conference, held prior to the annual convention, took on an increasingly conservative flavor and served as a rallying point for promoting political candidates.

More obviously, both moderates and conservatives began to put forward candidates for BSC president as point people for a point of view, as opposed to the older consensus model of electing presidents as a way of honoring them for past service to the Convention.

SBC strategists had shown that the

committee-appointing responsibilities that go with the position could be used to advance an agenda rather than just maintaining the status quo, and North Carolina Baptists were well aware.

Moderates held the office for the first half of the decade, but in 1995 conservatives broke through with the election of Greg Mathis, a Hendersonville pastor and teacher at Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute. Mathis’ election began a string of conservative victories that remains unbroken.

The likeable Mathis won in part because he pledged to work with Baptists across the spectrum and to make balanced appointments. Mathis delivered on his promise, proved to be a popular president, was re-elected, and quickly became the most recognizable face on the conservative side of the aisle.

Most candidates who have followed him have made the same promises, but the vision of balance Mathis promoted has since gone by the wayside, leaving many moderates with a distinct “out of pocket” feeling.

In our next installment, we will consider more about efforts to keep the family together, and examine why they ultimately failed. **BT**

## AN ANALYSIS: PART TWO (1996-2002)

# 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.)*

**W**hile 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 50 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 startup 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**

## AN ANALYSIS: PART THREE (2003-2008)

# The changing face of the Baptist State Convention

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

If the past five years are any indication, the Baptist State Convention (BSC) of North Carolina is headed toward accelerated polarization as conservative leaders flex their muscles while moderate-leaning churches and educational institutions drift to the periphery or jump ship altogether.

### Budget business

The BSC's Plan C giving channel, which allows churches to support the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) rather than the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), was challenged during several of the BSC's annual meetings in the early part of the decade.

Detractors claimed it was neither appropriate nor constitutional for the BSC to accept and channel "Cooperative Program" money to CBF, even though the BSC carefully designated its giving plans as "Cooperative Program Missions Giving" to indicate a distinction from the classic "Cooperative Program."

After a constitutional challenge in 2002, a study committee chaired by respected conservative Charles Page affirmed the constitutionality of the plan in 2003, but the finding did not satisfy SBC-only loyalists. Anti-drug activist Ted Stone made motions in both 2004 and 2005 calling for the elimination of Plan C, gaining 44 percent of the votes in 2005.

In November 2007, messengers approved a budget that includes all four giving plans. The previous month, however, the BSC's Executive Committee — composed almost entirely of conservatives — had voted to create a committee to reexamine the giving plans. A 15-person committee was announced at its Dec. 11 meeting, and many observers anticipate a return to a single plan in the near future.

### Leadership changes

In June 2005, as conflict arose after Committee on Nominations members rejected a number of moderate trustees put forward by BSC-affiliated institutions and agencies, executive director Jim Royston

resigned unexpectedly and returned to the pastorate. Associate director George Bullard was named acting executive director July 18, but some conservative leaders pushed for his removal.

After a closed-door meeting involving Convention officers, Board officers, and conservative spokesman Greg Mathis, an agreement was worked out that called for Bullard to retire by Aug. 31 of the following year. In a tense meeting on Nov. 14, just prior to the BSC's annual meeting, the Executive Committee and Board of Directors agreed, on sharply split votes, to replace Bullard with Mike Cummings, a conservative highly respected by moderates, as interim executive director.

The following April, messengers at a special called meeting elected Milton Hollifield, former head of the BSC evangelism group and a favorite of conservatives, to become executive director. Hollifield expressed a desire to be inclusive of both SBC and CBF churches. He affirmed his support for the SBC's 2000 Baptist Faith and Message Statement, but said he would not regard it as a litmus test for employment.

After taking office, Hollifield eliminated one of the six executive-level staff positions by consolidating Convention Relations with a new administrative post that replaced the former associate executive director position. With vacancies available, he hired well-known conservatives to top-level spots in evangelism, business services, and the new administration and convention relations post. When the executive-level communications post became vacant after Norman Jameson was tapped to lead the *Biblical Recorder*, Hollifield moved public relations into the administration office, leaving just four "executive leader" positions.

Elected leadership was also changing. BSC presidents began appointing more hard-line conservatives to strategic committees. The 120-member Board of Directors became overwhelmingly conservative, with just a handful of moderates left by 2007. Some moderates were invited to serve but declined, contributing to the imbalance.

Alan Blume, a longtime leader in Conservative Carolina Baptists, was elected

as president of the Board of Directors and chairman of the Executive Committee for 2007 and re-elected in 2008, with another year of eligibility remaining.

### Entity relationships

Serious concerns arose in 2005 as some members of the nominating committee adopted an SBC-style approach to choosing trustees for BSC-affiliated institutions. After entity heads had submitted their recommendations in line with customary practice, the committee announced that members of churches affiliated with the Alliance of Baptists — which affirms homosexuals — could not be considered.

Other nominees were rejected because their churches did not support the SBC. And, the committee rejected two of four recommendations and all alternates suggested by the *Biblical Recorder* for no stated reason, retaining two conservatives recommended by the *Recorder* and replacing the others with pastors pre-chosen by the committee's liaison.

The presidents of BSC-related colleges, social service institutions and agencies met several times in 2005 to discuss a response to the nominating committee's newly activist approach.

Some chose not to wait. In 2005, Baptist Retirement Homes (BRH) asked the BSC for a change of relationship that would allow it to appoint its own directors while giving up money over a four-year period. The proposal was initially approved by the Executive Committee, but later reconsidered and rejected.

In response, BRH voted in December 2005 to appoint its own directors with or without BSC approval. The BSC appointed a study committee to meet with BRH representatives, and the committee proposed a path in 2007 by which BRH could "return to the fold" and receive funds that had been escrowed.

With no positive response from BRH, the committee acknowledged that the relationship was broken. It recommended that the BSC not pursue legal action against BRH, but seek other avenues for ministry to

senior adults. In January 2008, the Executive Committee appointed a new study committee to explore alternative services the BSC could offer to elderly adults.

As BRH's request for a new relationship was being turned down in September 2005, the N.C. Baptist Foundation and the institutions of higher education asked the BSC Executive Committee to appoint committees to study their future relationships with the BSC.

In the spring of 2006, the Executive Committee made sweeping recommendations, based on the committees' reports, that would have given more authority to entity CEOs in choosing trustees or directors, and would have allowed the colleges to have "non-traditional trustees" who were neither Baptist nor from North Carolina. The recommendation was broadened to include all BSC-related entities. The BSC Board of Directors approved the proposal, and relations between the BSC and its entities appeared to be on the upswing.

The initial proposal, however, was changed a few months later, reducing funding for schools choosing non-traditional trustees and requiring that all trustees, even non-traditional ones, come from churches meeting strict guidelines with regard to homosexuality. The colleges quietly withdrew their support for the measure, while many conservatives openly criticized it. The recommended amendments failed at the 2006 convention, receiving only 38 percent of the vote.

Wingate University announced prior to the 2006 annual meeting that it would appoint all of its trustees for the next two years, as allowed by the BSC's governing documents since 1993. An amendment later approved by the convention changed the provision to say that educational institutions could appoint only "up to 50 percent" of trustees to be elected in a given year. Wingate and the other schools notified the Convention that their governing documents no longer matched.

With the higher education institutions on the verge of walking out, BSC administrators conferred with college presidents and worked with the Council on Christian Higher Education to propose that the BSC and the schools sever their current relationship in a way that satisfied the Convention's governing documents and immediately start a new relationship in which the schools would begin appointing their trustees and giving up convention funding over a four-year period, beginning in 2009.

Scholarship funding for students in BSC churches would be disbursed through the BSC rather than by the schools, though it is likely that scholarships will be denied to students attending schools whose trustees don't meet restrictive criteria. The proposal was approved by convention messengers in 2007, and requires a second approval in 2008.

While BSC moderates stewed over perceived mistreatment of the agencies and rejoiced in anticipation of greater freedom for the schools, new emotional wells were tapped when the BSC's relationship with Woman's Missionary Union of North Carolina (WMU-NC) deteriorated.

In January 2006, with the future direction of the BSC uncertain, the WMU-NC executive board approved changes designed to clarify the organization's relationship with the BSC. In April, WMU-NC members approved amendments to the organization's constitution to change the terminology of its relationship with the BSC from "auxiliary" to "cooperative partner." Another amendment moved hiring policies from the WMU-NC bylaws to its personnel manual.

Hollifield opposed the changes, saying the term "cooperative partner" increased the BSC's liability exposure and insisting that WMU-NC staffers, as BSC employees, were ultimately subject to the executive director's approval. The WMU-NC Executive Board said it would stand by a 1997 agreement in which former executive director Roy Smith affirmed WMU-NC's full control of hiring and budget administration.

With neither side willing to give in, WMU-NC's Executive Board decided in the fall of 2007 to move out of the Baptist Building in Cary and set up a separate payroll system in order to preserve its autonomy. The BSC executive committee responded by recommending that WMU-NC be removed from the annual North Carolina Missions Offering, its primary source of funding. Convention messengers approved the recommendation over considerable opposition, and within weeks the BSC Executive Committee appointed a committee to envision a competing "women's ministry" directly controlled by the BSC.

The entities legally separated Jan. 1, 2008, and WMU-NC announced plans to move its headquarters to an office suite in Raleigh. In February 2008, WMU-NC revived the "Heck-Jones Offering" with a goal of \$1.2 million, enough for one year's operating expenses. Despite continued assurances from WMU-NC that the organization wanted to continue working cooperatively with the BSC and its churches, BSC officials persistently characterized WMU-NC's move as "leaving the BSC."

### Autonomy issues

Rising tensions between the BSC and its entities were accompanied by an extended rift over church autonomy. In 2003, McGill Avenue Baptist Church in Concord was ousted from the Cabarrus Association and the BSC after baptizing two men who were presumed to be gay. Many moderates opposed the expulsion as a violation of church autonomy.

In 2005, Bill Sanderson, pastor of Hephzibah Baptist in Wendell and president of Conservative Carolina Baptists, prepared a motion that would amend the BSC's Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws to exclude any churches that affirm or endorse practicing homosexuals. He agreed to have the matter referred to the BSC Board of Directors, which appointed a study committee and later recommended that the



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“Sanderson Amendment” should go forward the following year.

Messengers at the 2006 convention meeting approved the measure by more than the required two-thirds margin. Critics said the move violated church autonomy by empowering the BSC to meddle in local church membership policies. Convention officials argued that the BSC is also autonomous and has the right to determine which churches qualify for membership.

Shortly after the meeting, Hollifield mailed a letter to pastors and directors of missions, professing to clarify the amendment’s potential impact. The letter included a position paper arguing that a homosexual person cannot become a Christian without first renouncing homosexual behavior. Many pastors regarded the letter as an attempt to impose a particular theological view on the churches.

During the next few months, at least six churches voted to leave the BSC voluntarily, joining a handful that had withdrawn during the previous year. A growing number of churches reduced their giving to the BSC.

The trend became particularly noticeable

in 2007, as BSC income dipped \$378,000 below the previous year and \$1.55 million short of the \$36.5 million budget. At least \$750,000 of the decline was in the giving plans typically favored by moderate churches.

Through the first three months of 2008, giving to the BSC was almost 15 percent, or \$1.34 million, below budget expectations, and more than \$650,000 below the previous year’s giving, which was below 2006 levels.

### Moderate stirrings

As discontent with the BSC grew, about 500 moderates met in Greensboro in December 2004 to discuss options for cooperating and supporting institutions in ways other than through the BSC. Similar meetings were held in Charlotte in December 2005 and in Raleigh in December 2006.

In response to church requests, CBFNC developed a “Mission Resource Plan” (MRP) to provide an alternate channel for contributing to BSC colleges, institutions, and agencies in addition to CBF-NC, CBF national, and other causes typically favored

by moderates.

More than 50 churches had adopted the plan by the end of 2007, and by April 2008, the count was up to 69, with others considering a move. Just over \$1 million was contributed through the MRP during the 12 months ending March 2008, more than triple the previous year.

With tensions unabated and disenchantment growing, attendance at the BSC’s annual meetings declined from more than 5,500 messengers in 1997 to just 2,549 in 2007. Results of relatively predictable votes suggest that the drop in attendance is due largely to an absence of moderates, many of whom have said they are tired of the fight.

Many moderates have remained active in BSC-related work such as disaster relief and partnership efforts coordinated through N.C. Baptist Men, but the sense of alienation in other areas is keen. With most of the BSC’s institutions distancing themselves from the Convention and moderate churches feeling increasingly disenfranchised, it takes no prophet to foresee a growing community of intentional exiles from the BSC. **BT**

## NOTES

