



**CONSERVATIVE BAPTIST ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
Dr. Stephen LeBar, CBAmerica, 2006**

Early History

The Conservative Baptist Association came into existence in 1947 with the purpose of providing a fellowship of churches that hold in common certain basic convictions concerning core issues of biblical faith and Baptist polity. The very word “conservative” gives identity to the movement, because the intent was to conserve (to keep, to retain) the basic biblical distinctives that have historically distinguished Baptists as a people of God. Furthermore, Conservative Baptists have, from their inception, been deeply involved in a worldwide missionary outreach.

The initial core of churches was comprised of those departing from the Northern Baptist Convention (now American Baptist Churches) over issues of theological liberalism, abandonment of Baptist polity and centralized denominational control. In 1943 the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society (now WorldVenture) had been formed because of similar issues and the appointment of missionaries under the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society regardless of their liberal positions.

In a series of conferences held in 1947, about 3,000 people endorsed the recommendations of an appointed committee. Included was a reaffirmation of faith in the New Testament as divinely inspired, trustworthy and authoritative. The outcome of those meetings was the formation of CBA of A. The Conservative Baptist Home Mission Society (now Mission to the Americas) was formally launched in 1950.

By 1953 there were 500 churches in national association, and an additional 240 churches fellowshipping in state associations. From the outset, fellowship was offered to “autonomous Baptist churches without regard to other affiliations.” Myron Cedarholm, the second General Director, listed several fundamental principles of the movement. (1) It was a confessional body, declaring its fundamental doctrines. However, Cedarholm went on to say, “The CBA believes that details of interpretation and application are the prerogative of the local church, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit.” (2) It was a fellowship of independent churches. He emphasized that the Association is not a denomination. It has no power to make decisions for the churches or to impose programs upon them. It has no desire to establish centralized authority, ecclesiastical connectionalism or dependent organizations that the churches must support. “However, there rightly exists among the churches an interdependency.” (3) It had “no organic relationship to the organizations which its churches support.” Each of the agencies was independent of the others. (4) It refused to make contributions a prerequisite for membership.

There has always been some confusion as to how the church association relates to the two mission societies. As early as 1949, the leaders of the three groups recognized the “growing confusion that exists in the minds of many people, who regard these various conservative organizations as one and the same.” The consensus was that each should function as an autonomous group and should seek to serve its own constituency. Nonetheless, in the years that followed, numerous unsuccessful attempts were made to bring all under one organizational umbrella. The latest attempt came to a halt in 2004.

Recent History

In January of 2002, the National Coordinating Council, made up of key leaders from the various CB entities, issued a “Call for Change Among the Conservative Baptist Family.” Citing our strong heritage of biblical integrity, missionary zeal and passion for the local church, the council observed signs of plateau, and even decline. Two task forces were created to address the concerns and to propose “radical solutions to assure a healthy and bright future together.”

The Organizational Task Force was to address the lack of networking and organizational cooperation among the CB family, which the NCC defined as “all CB-affiliated ministry agencies, local churches, schools and various governing bodies.” This group was mandated to recommend a national CB organizational strategy that would result in greater Kingdom impact. The Doctrinal Task Force was to address cultural, societal and theological challenges that the organizations face. This group was mandated to identify key doctrinal issues and how the CB family believes God would have us respond to those issues in a sound, unified and biblical framework.

After diligent and sacrificial labor by the two Task Forces, a Vision Summit was called in Littleton, CO on September 10, 2003. Forty-two CB leaders representing the numerous CB entities gathered to hear the reports and recommendations. It seemed that the endeavors would continue and result in the desired outcomes.

On October 27, 2003, the NCC met in Portland, OR, and received the final report from the Doctrinal Task Force. The NCC then voted to conclude the work of the task force, “sensing that the Task Force had substantially fulfilled its purpose.” As stated in the Final Report from the Council dated November 28, the churches and agencies in the CB family will continue to be guided by the doctrinal statements currently in use. In the same report, the Council announced that the Organizational Task Force recommended dissolution due to “inability to make progress on a plan to consolidate CB ministries.”

The report went on to say, “The spiritual and relational challenges we face as a CB movement will not be solved by structural changes. Nor will greater ministry be advanced by a centralized leadership structure. The challenge is to strengthen the ties between our churches in regional associations and resource those regions to effectively serve our churches. The pledge of the schools is to come alongside the local church to help equip the next generation of leaders. The mission agencies renewed their dedication to sacrificially serve CB churches in the realization of their global witness.”

On January 28, 2004, the CBA (association of churches) Board met and made significant decisions. It ratified the Mission, Vision and Values Document that was developed in concert with the Organizational Task Force and the Regional Directors. Next, it empowered the Regional Directors to develop a “new day for CBA.” Further, it resolved that in the change process, the existing uniqueness of each region, including millennial positions, would be honored. Finally, a resolution prevailed that linked CBAmerica with the CB churches in the Philippines on specific issues of Biblical inerrancy.

On March 17, 2004, the Regional Directors met in Chicago, functioning as the CBAmerica Transitional Leadership Team. At this meeting a new paradigm for CBAmerica was envisioned. The new model is a Fellowship of Regions, bound together by mutual and accountable privileges and responsibilities. The Regions share core values, mission and vision. Relationships among the Directors and among the Regions are covenantal, with mutual submission to the greater good of the whole. The Regional Directors are the national coordinators of service to and among the local churches. The National CBAmerica office serves as the hub of operations and networks among the Regions.

On June 24, 2004, the CBAmerica Board of Directors voted to accept the recommendations of the Transitional Leadership Team, including the new paradigm of relationships, the new organizational structure, the new model of ministry, and a new National Director, Dr. Stephen LeBar.

A NEW PURPOSE STATEMENT

CBAmerica exists to serve, resource and represent regional fellowships of Conservative Baptist churches.

A NEW MODEL...church driven, through Regional Ministry Hubs

- Individual believers enter into a covenantal fellowship (membership) of a local CB church.
- Individual churches enter into a covenantal fellowship (membership) of a CB regional association.
- Individual regional associations enter into a covenantal fellowship (membership) of CBAmerica.
- Individual national fellowships enter into a covenantal fellowship (membership) of CBGlobal.

Other entities with Conservative Baptist roots are affiliates, with whom we partner in serving the churches.

