

North Carolina CBF Head Stepping Down

North Carolina's first full-time Cooperative Baptist Fellowship coordinator is stepping down after five years on the job.

Bob Patterson, 60, told the state CBF's 26-member Coordinating Council Tuesday of his desire to "phase out" as paid leader of the 210-church network, the second-largest state chapter of a national organization of moderate Baptists based in Atlanta.

A press release said Patterson expressed a desire to step aside "some time in 2004" to pursue personal and family interests. He suggested a target date of July 20 but offered to stay on until a successor is named.

According to the press release, Patterson noted "imminent changes" in North Carolina Baptist life and said he hopes his early announcement will help focus interest in "the exciting next chapter" of CBF of North Carolina's work in the state.

The announcement comes just before the state CBF's 10th anniversary general assembly, scheduled March 19-20 in Greensboro. It also coincides with a meeting this weekend of CBF-friendly moderates to discuss new ways to work together now that the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina is controlled by conservatives loyal to the Southern Baptist Convention.

Moderator Larry Hovis said in a statement the state CBF is indebted to Patterson for "outstanding service." The organization grew in numbers of participating churches, staff, budget and ministries during his tenure. "We respect his desire to begin a new chapter in his life and ministry and the process of spiritual discernment that has led him to this decision," said Hovis, pastor of Memorial Baptist Church in Greenville, N.C.

Hovis said in an e-mail interview that he would meet with the state CBF's moderator-elect, Roger Gilbert of Mt. Airy, to begin enlisting a search committee for Patterson's successor. The search committee that recommended Patterson in 1998 worked over a year. Hovis said he hopes the new committee can enlist a leader "much sooner" than a year, but he acknowledged it could take that much time.

Patterson, a layman, began leadership of the North Carolina CBF, Feb. 1, 1999. Before that he worked 23 years for the U.S. Defense Department. He felt a call to ministry in mid-life and went to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He became familiar with the CBF as a member of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas.

Patterson said in an e-mail that he is open to working as a pastor and wants to pursue interests in improving race relations in his community.

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