



Experiencing Fellowship Identity

THE BAPTIST PASSION for freedom is a major reason why there is so much diversity in Baptist life. ... While diversity is threatening to some and downright devastating to others, it flows naturally from the Baptist preoccupation with the right of choice. — Dr. Walter B. Shurden, “The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms”

One essential quality of our Fellowship identity is diversity in expression and common devotion in love. In this way, each Fellowship congregation is a letter of introduction to an intriguing facet of the body of Christ.

Settle into a Fellowship congregation and you will sense that this introductory letter speaks clearly a language of presence and of the love of Christ to all people. And each expression will be unique.

Being a unique expression is itself an act of 21st century strength. Franchises, brands, chains, trademarks and copyrights all permeate our culture and give off the not-so-subtle message that “this is what you should look like, act like, be like.”

These expected expressions of identity — from brand names to religious worldviews — constantly remind the church to look and act in familiar and repeated ways all over. Is it any wonder that our anxieties, jealousies and insecurities are often born from the captivity to be, to do or at least to look like the expected expression of a church?

So consider the power of uniqueness among the congregations in our Fellowship.

As our congregations have sought missional clarity, the unique expression of each congregation has been shaped more definitively. This breadth and depth is beautiful and often unexpected:

Selah Congregation, Flagstaff, Ariz. — Greg Long pastors this CBF congregation that draws its members from the Navajo Nation in Arizona. Did you know you had a Native American sister church there?

At a recent meeting of the Together for Hope Council in Arizona, Long shared the ways that the stories and

traditions of the Navajo heritage enriches his congregation. His dream is for Selah Congregation and CBF friends from Together for Hope to help provide an economic development project on tribal land — to open capped water wells for agriculture and farming.

You can read more about Greg Long and Selah Congregation on pp. 14-15.

First Baptist Church, Tucker, Ga. — For more than 30 years, FBC Tucker has been home to the Randolph Department, a Sunday school department comprised of more than 60 adults with special needs and limitations. The Randolph Department also gathers every Wednesday evening for Great Banquet — their own Wednesday night supper with an open microphone for prayers and singing.

One Sunday every October, the Randolph Department fills the choir loft and leads the entire morning worship with rousing hymns, songs, prayer and joy. The total dedication of their teachers and the demonstrative love of the whole congregation are inspiring and moving.

CBF of the Bahamas, St. Cleveland’s Church, Freetown — Yes, there is a Fellowship of CBF churches in the Bahamas! St. Cleveland’s is led by Preston Cooper and recently hosted the second annual CBF Bahamas Convocation. Pastors and leaders of the other CBF churches came by boat and plane from the different islands in the Bahamas to join the minister of culture for the Bahamian government to welcome us as a U.S. delegation, and to praise the leadership and work of CBF churches across the Bahamas.

John McIntosh is the revered founder of CBF Bahamas. McIntosh came from his congregation on the Acklins Island to preach and lead the convocation. The energy of convening together from various islands inspired the whole convocation as we planned for disaster recovery and congregational education while Passport Camps led youth activities.

Don’t think that God is in a predictable box or that church is a cookie-cutter endeavor — certainly not in the Fellowship!

We find beauty in our diversity. It takes practice to appreciate diversity, and it takes an intentional effort to reach out and celebrate that beauty. There is much to learn from exploring the diversity of our Fellowship identity.

Suzii Paynter, CBF Executive Coordinator

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EXECUTIVE COORDINATOR • Suzii Paynter
ASSOCIATE COORDINATOR, FELLOWSHIP
ADVANCEMENT • Jeff Huett
EDITOR • Aaron Weaver
ASSOCIATE EDITOR • Emily Holladay
ASSISTANT EDITOR • Candice Young
ASSISTANT EDITOR • Carrie Harris
PHONE • (770) 220-1600
E-MAIL • fellowship@thefellowship.info
WEB SITE • www.thefellowship.info
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