

*the coalition for*  
**baptist principles**

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 2 Cor 3:17*

## **2007 BIENNIAL GATHERING**

We are very excited about the biennial gathering of The Coalition for Baptist Principles.  
Our featured speaker this year is



**Walter B. Shurden**

Professor of Christianity at Mercer University in Macon GA  
& Executive Director of The Center for Baptist Studies.

&

The Howard Moody Award for commitment to baptist principles will be given to



**Molly T. Marshall**

President and Professor of Theology and Spiritual Formation  
Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Shawnee KS

**Come & join us!**

**Sunday ☼ July 1, 2007**

Washington DC Convention Center ☼ Room WCC-146A

9:00 p.m. *\*or as soon as convention plenary ends*

## forging beyond fear

by Thomas R. McKibbens, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Worcester MA & Chair, BP Steering Committee

In the early hours of Easter morning this year, my wife and I were driving to church. A little rabbit scampered in front of our car, turned toward our headlights, and jumped straight up (at least three feet high!) in terror. We were able to stop, and the terrified rabbit ran across the road and out of harm's way. The expression of fear on that rabbit's little face was sad while at the same time endearing to us.

Robert Parham of Ethicsdaily.com recently wrote a column (June 8, 2007) entitled "Overcoming the Politics of Fear with Faith," in which he said, "The rightful role of faith in politics may be to overcome fear—fear of immigrants, fear of gays, fear of the homeless and poor, fear of science, fear of Islam, fear of change, fear of fairness, fear of sacrifice, fear of the unknown and the known." Clearly, fear has been and is being used to promote policies and garner votes on the national level.

And just as clearly, fear is often used at the denominational level to promote positions on controversial subjects. We will see it once again at the biennial in Washington. Demagoguery playing on fear

will, as usual, raise its pious-talking voice as issues are debated.

Baptist principles are not trumped up ideas made up on the spur of the moment. They are deeply rooted in God. They may have setbacks, but they will not be ultimately defeated any more than God will be defeated. We will be dedicated in the defense of Baptist principles, but we will not be rabbits jumping in terror before any oncoming danger. We will calmly and confidently stand firm on the principles that have brought this denomination through the storms of the past. We will speak and act for those principles; we will honor them in our friends and in our lives; and we will celebrate them with great joy. But we will not live in terror when they are threatened.

The advice given long ago to a young minister may well be for all of us: *...I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you...; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline* (II Timothy 1: 6-7).



## for the gospel to mean something, it must cost you something . . .

by Abigail Hastings, BP Coordinator and member of Judson Memorial Church, NYC

As I write this, I am preparing for one last trip to close out the family home in Texas after our father's death (at the age of 90!) shortly before Christmas. Those of you who have gone through this kind of thing know it can be a daunting journey to sift through years of a life collected. As if panning for gold, our work sometimes uncovers unexpected nuggets of writings or keepsakes we had never seen. My father – C.B. Hastings – had reams of paper filled with biblical studies he had done well into his late 80s, and this on his *beloved* computer and in three languages.

Mom's treasures came, however, as much of her life did while chasing five little ones, on bits of paper stuck in books or on the back of a recipe or tattered envelope. One such scrap, written after learning of something particularly egregious done by that cabal that hijacked the Southern Baptist Convention, made her feelings about these men especially clear in a reference to their private parts. This was not the mother we knew! Her

feelings of disgust with the takeover had always been evident, but we had not known that saucy side of her.

And then I came across this – on the back of an empty deposit slip – "When will Baptists grow up? For gospel to mean something, it must cost you something."

When we think about all that has transpired in the ABCUSA in the past two years, it feels that the cost has been great. We have been fractured and left financially vulnerable. Our hope for common ground was elusive, and the way many debates went was disheartening if not downright sickening.

But "unity at all cost" was not viable, nor should it have been. To stand for the principles of soul freedom – and yes, even church autonomy (bad rap that even that cherished principle is getting) – means that a line is drawn, and that particular gospel truth has a price tag to go along with it.

I revisited Welton Gaddy's opening remarks to us at our last biennial gathering: "I have come here this evening for four specific purposes—first, to identify with The Coalition for Baptist Principles; second, to praise you for your work; third, to urge you not to grow weary in what you are doing; and, four, with all due respect, to request that you do more." That third and fourth purpose have taken up residence with me – not to grow weary; try to

do more.

I wanted to share with you an Op Ed my sister wrote some months ago as we prepare for those "scripture lobbying" biennial days ahead of us... even as we are reminded of what we know to be the good news of the gospel, and lift up yet again those baptist principles we hold so dear.

## You Can Stand for Something Without Trampling Someone Else

*Asheville Citizen-Times*, December 11, 2006

Nineteen years ago, I was an "issue." I was called to pastor a Southern Baptist church in Memphis, Tenn. The Shelby County Baptist Association promptly voted to "disfellowship" our church because we had "violated the word of God by calling a woman as pastor." At the annual conference, the majority voted to sever the 75-year-old affiliation with the Prescott Memorial Baptist Church. I was grateful that we did not live in a time when women like me were burned at the stake. But shunning is still alive and well.

I have read the recent happenings of the vote of the Baptist State Convention of NC to cut ties with congregations that affirm or approve of homosexuality. I sink into despair. I pray for a moratorium on voting in all of our denominations and religious bodies throughout the land. Voting on "issues" has not served our faith, no matter what perspective we bear. Behind every issue are human beings. In our zeal to "stand" on an issue, we can trample on people.

The debates before votes can be particularly divisive. We lob our supporting biblical passages into the enemy camp, and hope that it will explode with new converts to our cause. It never happens. The casualty count rises as we become more hostile and more divisive with each escalating effort.

The greatest hatred I have known has been at the hands of people who also claim to follow Jesus, the Prince of Peace. And I shudder to think of all the times that my own heart has gone to war against my enemies. Like those who oppose me, I too can forget Jesus' radical words to "love my enemies."

The aftermath of a vote can lull us into believing our mission is accomplished. But the end of a vote is the beginning of the work. The messy and tedious task of building just relationships and seeking the common good is ever before us. Wherever two or three are gathered together, there can be a problem. We disagree. We see things differently. I am reminded just how differently during the holiday season as I sit at table with my extended family. I have not been shunned or voted out of my family. We don't slip daggers into the mashed potatoes or set up a separate table for the heretics. We have learned to speak our peace peaceably. We engage in the spiritual practice of welcoming all to the table of grace.

**Nancy Hastings Sehested** is co-pastor of Circle of Mercy congregation (Alliance of Baptist & UCC) in Asheville, NC and is senior chaplain at Marion Correctional Institute, a maximum-security prison in Marion, NC.



[www.baptistprinciples.org](http://www.baptistprinciples.org)

 this & past newsletters are on our website

*email* [coordinator@baptistprinciples.org](mailto:coordinator@baptistprinciples.org)

## THE COALITION FOR BAPTIST PRINCIPLES

### Statement of Purpose

Our denomination, the American Baptist Churches USA, is in crisis due to the efforts of some elements to deny the freedom of individuals and churches to interpret the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In response, the Coalition for Baptist Principles is called to warn of the dangers threatened by that crisis and to urge all American Baptists to reclaim the principles of Christian freedom with responsibility which have always defined our life together as a denomination, including:

- centrality of Scripture as it is interpreted in the gathered community under the Lordship of Jesus Christ;
- soul liberty, by which each person is free to have an individual and direct relationship with God through Jesus Christ;
- protection of the minority, however defined, in humble reverence for God's freedom to choose spokespersons who may challenge conventional understandings;
- freedom and integrity of the local church which, guided by the Word of God and the movement of the Holy Spirit, is free to shape its own life and mission under the authority of Jesus Christ; and
- voluntary association, through which local churches band together to fulfill areas of mutual ministry and mission but not to determine the convictions or practices of those churches.

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### **the coalition for baptist principles**

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