

Chasing Jesus: North American Baptist Covenant approved

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In a quickly organized meeting, leaders of Baptist conventions and networks comprising more than 20 million adherents in North America explored “additional opportunities for fellowship and cooperation” on April 10 in Atlanta.

Attending were top officials of three black Baptist denominations, the American Baptist Churches (U.S.A.), the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and some others at odds with the conservative theological and social stances of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Former president Jimmy Carter, a lifelong Baptist lay leader, sponsored the gathering at the Carter Center. Bill Underwood, president-elect of Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, helped recruit the participants. The meeting was pulled together “in less than two weeks,” said Underwood, adding that there has long been a “yearning for this kind of gathering.”

After a wide-ranging discussion over four hours, the 18 participants approved a statement titled “A North American Baptist Covenant.” They agreed to hold a convocation, probably in 2007, “to explore other opportunities to work together as Christian partners.”

All the meeting’s participants have ties to the Baptist World Alliance, but they felt the need “to create an authentic and genuine prophetic Baptist voice in these complex times,” according to the covenant statement.

Aside from sharing the gospel “and its implications for public and private morality,” the signers concurred on their “obligations as Christians to promote peace with justice, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, care for the sick and marginalized, welcome the stranger among us, and promote religious liberty and respect for religious diversity.”

Noting the historic nature of the diverse group, Carter emphasized: “All the participants insisted there be an aggressive follow-up.” -*Associated Baptist Press*