October 2013 Special Issue

Mainstream Messenger

Facing Paternalism in Word and Deed and Truth!

"Let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth." 1 John 3:18

What You Should Know About CBFO

STATEMENT OF FACTS

After receiving reports of tensions within the CBFO office and a recommendation from a past CBFO Moderator that the job descriptions of the Coordinator and Associate Coordinator be clarified, on May 6, 2013 the Moderator and Moderator-Elect met with the Coordinator to discuss the matter. The Coordinator wanted to clarify the job descriptions himself. The officers informed him they would appoint a committee to clarify the job descriptions.

The Coordinator reportedly assumed a hostile, belligerent and abrasive attitude about this and, during a time when the Moderator-Elect was absent, aggressively attempted to bully and browbeat the Moderator into submitting to his will on the matter. The meeting did not end well.

At the CBFO Officer’s meeting on May 23rd, the Moderator asked the Coordinator to leave before they went into an executive session. The Coordinator refused saying he was CEO and had authority over the Officers. After 30 minutes of heated discussion, the Officers took a break during which time the Coordinator left.

After the break, the Officers read a brief statement from the Associate Coordinator indicating she felt she was working in a hostile environment. They also discussed the Moderator and Moderator-Elect’s May 6th meeting with the Coordinator. Then the Officers heard from the Executive Director of Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists, who had an office in the same building and had been co-signing CBFO checks for ten years. He reported on statements the Coordinator made to him and on observations of abusive relations within the office. The Officers decided to investigate the matter more thoroughly over the next three weeks.

During the week after that Officer’s meeting, the Coordinator instructed the Associate Coordinator to no longer use Mainstream’s Executive Director to co-sign CBFO checks. He also instructed her to no longer permit the Executive Director to have access to the office mail box where he received his mail.

After the next three weeks, CBFO’s Officers conducted extended separate interviews with the Coordinator and Associate Coordinator. At the end of that process, all six members unanimously voted to relieve the Coordinator of his duties. When officers asked him to resign for the good of the organization, he refused.

The Coordinating Council met on June 15th. At that meeting the Officers read a brief, general statement prepared by the Associate Coordinator indicating that she could no longer work in the hostile environment created by the Coordinator. The Associate Coordinator was summoned to the meeting to answer a few questions and then dismissed from the meeting. The Officers recounted the conclusions they drew from their interviews and recommended that the Coordinator be terminated.

The Coordinator announced that he had consulted with legal counsel for advice on how he should defend himself. He defended himself by asserting that the Moderator had a conflict of interest in this matter because she and her husband attended seminary together with the Associate Coordinator and her husband. They were all close friends. He also berated the Modera-
tor and Associate Coordinator caricaturing them as being “like a couple junior high girls upset because ‘he doesn’t like me.’”

After admitting to the Coordinating Council that, in private conversations with Mainstream Baptists’ Executive Director, he had questioned the integrity of the Associate Coordinator’s credentials and her call to ministry, the Coordinator asserted that the rest of the Executive Director’s observations were not true. Mainstream’s Executive Director was unable to respond being out-of-town attending the funeral of his mother-in-law.

After considerable discussion in which some questioned the officer’s authority in personnel matters, some questioned whether the officers had followed the organization’s whistleblower policy, and others vigorously attacked the process that the officers used in their deliberations, the Coordinating Council decided to follow a recommendation from CBF’s national Coordinator. They elected a committee to supervise the Coordinator and they engaged a Mediator to see if relations within the office could be repaired.

[Note: a fact that may or may not be related to a conflict of interest.

The husband of CBF’s national Coordinator went to college with CBFO’s Coordinator. They have been close friends with CBFO’s Coordinator and his wife for decades.]

The Associate Coordinator, the Moderator, another officer, and at least one member of the Coordinating Council resigned after the June 15th meeting. The Associate Coordinator postponed her resignation after the Coordinating Council convinced her to try working with a Mediator for one month.

On June 17th the Executive Director of Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists vacated his office and resigned as one of CBFO’s representatives with the Oklahoma Conference of Churches (OCC) and as CBFO’s alternate Communion Leader with OCC. He no longer has any official relations with CBFO.

On the evening of June 17th the pastor and deacons at First Baptist Church in Oklahoma City met to discuss the treatment that the Moderator, a member of their staff, had received from the CBFO’s Coordinator. The deacons sent a letter to the Coordinating Council expressing their dissatisfaction with the outcome of the June 15th council meeting. Among other things they wrote:

We believe the behavior of the Coordinator in his oversight of a female Associate Coordinator has been demeaning, demoralizing, inappropriate and unprofessional. . . . We also witnessed this played out in his manipulative, condescending and emotionally abusive tone he directed at the CBFO Moderator, who is also a young female minister who serves on our ministerial staff.

The deacons said they would not tolerate this kind of conduct and

"unanimously voted to immediately suspend our relationship with CBFO until appropriate, honest, and respectful leadership has been restored."

Since June 15th divisions have arisen within other CBFO churches regarding the propriety of decisions made by the Coordinating Council. A number of individuals who previously made significant contributions to CBFO have withdrawn support from the organization.

From late June until July 27th the Associated Coordinator and the Coordinator received separate counseling and coaching by phone from persons associated with the Center for Congregational Health.

Fees for the services of the Center for Congregational Health have been paid by CBF’s national office which has an
ongoing relationship providing funding for
the Center.

Terms for the kind of work the Center would perform for CBFO were set by the leadership of CBF’s national organization.

The Mediator stated that she was instructed to work only with the Coordinator and Associate Coordinator. Any work with the Moderator, CBFO officers or others would come at their own expense and only if they requested it for themselves.

At the July 27th Coordinating Council meeting, the Mediator stated that she limited her work to direct communications with the Associated Coordinator and Coordinator. She also stated that she deliberately ignored the written statements sent to her by the Associate Coordinator from CBFO officers and the Executive Director of Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists.

The Supervisory Committee met with the Associate Coordinator one time during the month that she was working with the mediatorial process. Her coach at the Center for Congregational Health helped her prepare for her meeting with the Supervisory Committee by asking her what it would take for her to feel better about working for CBFO. She decided that she might feel better if the Supervisory Committee would listen to her side of the conflict. The Officers were the only people at CBFO who had ever listened to her tell her side of the story.

When the Associate Coordinator met with the Supervisory Committee, she asked twice for permission to tell them her side of the conflict. The first time one of the members said that that was not the purpose of the meeting. The second time a different member said they already had a good idea about what he observed in the office. Nor has he ever been permitted to respond to the Coordinator’s public statements questioning his veracity.

During the afternoon session on July 27th the Associate Coordinator advised the Coordinating Council that the healthiest thing she could do for herself and her family was to resign. The Council accepted her resignation.

The Mediator stated that she was instructed to work only with the Coordinator and Associate Coordinator. Any work with the Moderator, CBFO officers or others would come at their own expense and only if they requested it for themselves.

On July 26th the Associate Coordinator and Coordinator received one two hour supervised face-to-face session together with the Mediator from the Center for Congregational Health. That two hour session convinced the Associate Coordinator that the Coordinator was still incapable of admitting any fault in the way he had been treating her.

On July 27th the Moderator-Elect, a regional executive with a major international telecommunications company, assumed the duties of the Moderator who had resigned. At the close of the morning session, he resigned.

The Mediator requested that the Moderator-Elect remain in office for another month. He agreed with the proviso, “As long as I do not have to do anything with [the Coordinator].”

On September 27th the Supervisory Committee reported that they were working with the Coordinator to bring harmony to the organization. They also offered a vigorous defense of the Coordinator saying:

There have been some statements made that the Cooperating Baptist Fellowship of Oklahoma is somehow over-looking an “institutionally condoned abuse relationship within CBFO”. The Interim Committee first wishes to state that the issues that the Associate Coordinator raised against the new Coordinator were work-place related, were in the nature of a difference of opinion as to the
priorities of the work in the office, and, admittedly, consisted in large part of a difference in styles of communication. The Interim Committee, and both parties, as well as the mediators and counselors, have acknowledged that there were hurt feelings, anger, and a lack of understanding of roles in the office. However, none of what happened between the Coordinator and the Associate amounted to abuse. To characterize what happened in the offices of the CBFO as “institutionally condoned abuse” is simply not true.

At the Coordinating Council meeting on September 28th the Council elected a former moderator to be the Interim Moderator of CBFO.

THESE ARE THE FACTS. DRAW YOUR OWN CONCLUSIONS

Respectfully Submitted,
Bruce Prescott, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists

What You Should Know About CBFO

—Continued

From CBFO’s Whistleblower Policy:

The Whistleblower Policy is intended to serve as a means of reporting all serious improprieties that potentially impact the integrity and effective operation of the Organization.

III. No Retaliation

No director, officer, or employee who in good faith reports Wrongful Conduct will suffer harassment, retaliation or adverse employment consequence. Any director, officer, or employee who retaliates against anyone who has reported Wrongful Conduct in good faith is subject to discipline up to and including termination of employment or removal from the board or directors, as applicable. This Whistleblower Policy is intended to encourage and enable employees and others to raise serious concerns within the Organization prior to seeking resolution outside the Organization.

QUESTION: Does “anyone” and “others” above apply to the Associate Coordinator, the Moderator and/or the Executive Director of Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists?