

LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

COOPERATION:
CHURCHES WORKING TOGETHER
THROUGH THE LOCAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION
FOR MAXIMUM KINGDOM MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

COOPERATION: CHURCHES WORKING TOGETHER THROUGH THE LOCAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION FOR MAXIMUM KINGDOM MINISTRY

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Cooperation is a concept which many churches hold to as a basic belief, yet few incorporate it into their ministry plan. With the exception of giving money toward a denominational budget, many churches operate totally independently of other churches. Believers in Jesus Christ can do more in a community as a unified body rather than as splintered groups with individual, and often self-serving, agendas.

This thesis project draws together several years of observations and experiences of churches as they have joined together in unity and cooperation. A survey and interview process is used to gain insight and vision from churches and leaders from a variety of denominations. This project also focuses on the scriptural basis for cooperation among churches and unity among believers. The desired outcome is to develop a biblical model of church cooperation through which the churches within a local Baptist association may work together in cooperation and unity for the glory of God.

Abstract length: 156

DEDICATION

To Fran, my wonderful wife,
for her loving encouragement through the Doctor of Ministry process,
and to our children, Jill and Sara.

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CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO COOPERATION.....	1
The Problem.....	5
Statement of Limitations.....	6
Theoretical Basis	6
Methodology	9
Literature Review	11
Books.....	11
Internet Sites.....	14
Articles	16
Biblical Passages.....	17
Questionnaire	21
CHAPTER 2: THE PRESENT STATE OF COOPERATION WITHIN THE NEW SALEM BAPTIST ASSOCIATION	23
History of the New Salem Baptist Association.....	27
Churches of the New Salem Baptist Association.....	28
Organization of the New Salem Baptist Association	31
Work of the New Salem Baptist Association.....	32
Statistical Analysis of Smith County, Tennessee.....	33
Analysis of Opportunities and Threats	37
Conclusion	40
CHAPTER 3: CHURCH LEADERS' UNDERSTANDING OF COOPERATION AND ASSOCIATION	42

Cooperation Defined.....	42
A Scriptural Basis for Cooperation	43
The Benefits of Cooperation	48
The Drawbacks of Cooperation.....	49
Examples of Cooperation.....	50
Steps a Church Can Take to Strengthen Cooperation	52
Examples of Cooperation through the Local Association	53
Stone Association of Southern Baptists Putnam County, Tennessee	53
Cumberland Baptist Association Clarksville, Tennessee.....	54
Green Mountain Baptist Association Barre, Vermont	55
Fannin Baptist Association Bonham, Texas.....	56
Central New York Baptist Association Candor, New York.....	58
Nashville Baptist Association Nashville, Tennessee	59
CHAPTER 4: A MODEL FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING AND COOPERATION AMONG THE CHURCHES IN A LOCAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION	62
The Strategic Planning Process in the Local Church	67
The Preparation Phase.....	71
The Participation Phase.....	76
Session 1: A people on Mission	77
Session 2: A Vision for the Future	79
Session 3: A Strategy for Victory	82
Session 4: Go Forward In Cooperation	85
The Implementation Phase	88
The Revitalization Phase	89

The Association Planning Strategy	90
Association Planning Strategy: The Preparation Phase	91
Association Planning Strategy: The Participation Phase	93
Association Planning Strategy: The Implementation Phase.....	95
Association Planning Strategy: The Revitalization Phase	96
Conclusion	97
CHAPTER 5: A NEW DAY OF COOPERATION: RECOGNIZING AND ADDRESSING THE SIX LEVELS OF COOPERATION.....	98
APPENDIXES	
A. QUESTIONNAIRE AND RESPONSES ON COOPERATION	106
B. LETTER TO PASTORS IN FANNIN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION.....	125
C. CHURCH MEMBER VISION SURVEY	131
D. A CHECKLIST OF CORE VALUES	132
E. A SAMPLE OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESS STUDY.....	134
F. A SAMPLE OF OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS STUDY	156
BIBLIOGRAPHY	160
VITA	165

ABBREVIATIONS

ACP	Annual Church Profile
APS	Association Planning Strategy
DOM	Director of Mission
KJV	King James Version
NAMB	North American Mission Board
NKJV	New King James Version

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO COOPERATION

The sign reads “Unity Revival” with several names of pastors and churches listed, followed by the dates, times and locations of a series of meetings. Five churches, in a community of over one hundred churches, join together for these meetings which rotate each night to the various church locations. The pastors of the churches along with a respectable number of members of each night’s host church attend the services. At the end of the week the pastors have a good feeling that they have joined together and strengthened the cause of cooperation and unity. This level of cooperation is played out among churches across the cities and towns of the United States. There is an inner longing in the hearts of many pastors and church members to see the church join together to make a real impact in the community. All the while, the church is splintered and its influence is gradually losing ground. What can be done to awaken the church to the realization that it is more than an individual congregation which meets in an individual building?

For churches within the Southern Baptist Convention, cooperation has been promoted and viewed as contributing to convention causes, mainly mission offerings, and being a member of the local association. The churches, local associations, state conventions, and Southern Baptist Convention are separate entities all their own. In the Baptist world, they are referred to as autonomous which means they are independent of control, and yet, interdependent in cooperation.

The churches and local Baptist association are the main focus of this thesis as the writer explores the biblical basis, historical background, and polity issues among them. The local association is the main avenue of cooperation for most Baptist churches. These associations provide local fellowship, training, ministry, and mission opportunities for the churches and believers within those churches. The level of cooperation and inter-relatedness among the churches is best seen through the association. On the local level, as the association goes, so goes the cooperation among the churches.

Three definitions beg to be given as we begin this examination of cooperation among churches within the local association. The first is a definition of what is meant by the word “church.” In *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, a church is defined as follows:

“A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.”¹

Therefore, the church is basically defined in two ways: 1) as all believers in Jesus Christ around the world and across time and; 2) as an individual collection of believers in a specific location. The first sense of church is the picture of all true believers in Jesus Christ who have placed their faith in Him as Lord and Savior. This inclusive definition of church crosses time,

¹ Charles S. Kelly, Richard Land, R. Albert Mohler, *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2008), 85.

geography, culture, and denominations. The church is the manifest body of Christ in the world, living out His teachings and following His command to “make disciples of all nations.”² This inclusive definition of the church is referred to in this thesis as the “Kingdom of God.”

The second definition of the church is a local body of baptized believers who have covenanted together for fellowship, ministry, teaching, worship, and evangelism. In this sense, there are hundreds of thousands of individual churches throughout the world, all operating as independent units of the body of Christ. These churches may be comprised of a few members or several thousand. They are characterized by denominational affiliations, cultural distinctions, and theological understandings. The New Testament refers to individual churches such as the church of Ephesus and the church of Smyrna, to mention just two.³ These churches also have as their functions worship, teaching, evangelism, ministry, and fellowship; but how they carry out these functions is often very different.

The second word which needs definition is cooperation. Cooperation is the voluntary act of persons or groups working together toward a shared goal. It can be simply defined as doing more together than we can do by ourselves. Cooperation among churches, therefore, is the voluntary interaction and shared efforts of churches toward the common mission of Jesus Christ.

The third definition needed is of the organization referred to throughout this thesis as an association. The use of associations as a cooperative fellowship of churches dates back over

² Matt. 28:19 (NKJV) All biblical references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

³ Rev. 2:1, 8.

three hundred years to the Baptist churches in England in the mid-1600's.⁴ These churches joined together for mutual care, fellowship, and missions. State conventions did not begin to form until the early 1800's and the Southern Baptist Convention in May of 1845.⁵ From this early beginning of associations through today, a Baptist association can be defined as "a self-governing fellowship of autonomous churches sharing a common faith and active on mission in their setting."⁶

Churches often have a realization of the importance of working together; however there are many differences between theory and practice. Churches and church leaders talk of cooperation and may even characterize themselves as being cooperative, but too often they operate independently of others. Baptists pride themselves in being independent and autonomous bodies, meaning there are neither hierarchical structures nor authoritative office which pass down directives to the local churches. Baptist churches and Baptist associations, to that extent, make their own decisions for programming, organization, and ministry.

The design and desire of this thesis is not to surrender the Baptist distinctive of the autonomy of the local church, nor is it the desire to form a hierarchy which directs and demands cooperation between individuals and churches. The goal of this thesis is to develop a biblical basis and a missional model for Baptist churches within a local association to work together in cooperation for the advancement of the overall work of Jesus Christ. To help achieve this goal, a number of scripture references will be examined as they relate to cooperation among churches,

⁴ J.C. Bradley, *A Baptist Association: Churches on Mission Together* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1984), 18.

⁵ Ibid., 27.

⁶ Ibid., 15.

specific examples of churches and associations working together will be studied, and a survey of church leaders will be administered and analyzed to gain a greater perspective on the power of cooperation.

The Problem

For several years, there has risen a personal conviction on the part of this writer of the need for a deeper level of cooperation and joint ministry among churches. This desire is for churches to be intentional in their work together as believers in Jesus Christ who can do more in a community as a unified body than as splintered groups with individual, and often self-serving, agendas. Over the course of many years, in different churches and locations, a common sense of resistance has been found among leaders, even those in recognized Baptist associations, to join together in fellowship, worship, missions or ministry. To the lost world, this disunity and disharmony are stumbling blocks to hearing the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the past decade, an additional tension has been added to the struggle for cooperation within the local congregations and associations. That added element is the renewed emphasis on church planting. It is the writer's observation that many established churches view the new church plant as a competitor and an intrusion into their "church field." The leaders within the new church plant may add to the separation by implying that the existing churches are not relevant or connected to the rising generations. In response, the existing congregations may falsely accuse the leaders of the new church plant of being less than orthodox in their approach to ministry, methods, and worship. This spirit of envy, strife, and division creates a great barrier

to cooperation among the churches. The fuel is kindled for a fire of hostility and competition instead of a passion for unity and cooperation.

The question which this thesis seeks to address is, “How do churches, established churches and new church plants work together in the local Baptist association to maximize the effectiveness of the Kingdom of God in impacting the lostness of the community, region, and world?”

Statement of Limitations

Due to the nature and scope of this thesis, the following issues will not be addressed:

1. The need for new church plants within a given area will not be addressed nor will the steps needed to begin these new church plants.
2. The issue of which types, preferences, styles of worship, government, discipleship, etc. are the best or more effective within the local church will not be addressed.
3. The study will not examine the cooperation of churches within other countries or cultures of the world, except where that cooperation is within the ministry of the local church or association.
4. This study will not attempt to explore the understanding of cooperation within denominations other than Baptists.

Theoretical Basis

The Bible will serve as the main source for the theoretical basis of this project. Specifically, the scriptures of the New Testament provide the main writings on the operation and

cooperation of the church. A selection of the scriptures dealing with cooperation is listed later in this chapter in the review of the literature.

Jesus spoke of the unity of His followers and, in fact, prayed for that unity on the night before His death. Unity would be a distinguishing characteristic which Jesus said would testify “that the world may believe that You (God, the Father) sent Me (Jesus).”⁷ He taught of the exclusive nature of the Kingdom of God and its singular entrance as He referred to Himself as “the Door”⁸ and “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”⁹

The Apostle Paul wrote thirteen of the twenty-six books of the New Testament. In these letters to the churches and church leaders, he emphasizes the unity that needs to exist between believers and churches. He refers to several analogies of the church which include the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, God’s field, and God’s building. Each analogy points to the importance of unity and cooperation.

During the first fifteen centuries, unity was maintained through the hierarchy of the main branch of the church, the Roman Catholic Church. Even with its doctrinal issues, the church saw the individual churches as part of a larger, worldwide organism. Great lengths were taken to ensure there were no divisions with uniformity as the goal.

The Protestant Reformation brought about a dramatic change in the church in that there was no longer only one expression of church. Individual groups began to form around the teachings of the reformers and within the various countries. Through the following centuries,

⁷ John 17:21.

⁸ John 10:7, 9.

⁹ John 14:6.

other groups of believers joined together which were not associated with specific reformers but found cohesion based on doctrine, church government, or expressions of worship.

Today, there are thousands of churches and hundreds of denominations. The 2010 U.S. Religious Census: Religious Congregations and Membership Survey¹⁰ reports there are roughly 344,890 religious congregations in the United States with over 150 million adherents. The Hartford Institute for Religion Research reports that these congregations are grouped into 217 denominations.¹¹ The largest denomination would be the Roman Catholic Church with 67 million members with the second largest being the Southern Baptist Convention with 50,816 churches and almost 20 million members. This thesis is written with a primary focus on Southern Baptist churches and associations.

For Southern Baptist churches, the basic source of authority is the Holy Bible and the central figure is Jesus Christ, the worshipped Son of God who died on the cross and rose from the grave. The purpose and mission of these churches are to glorify God and bring individuals into salvation and a right standing with Him through faith in Jesus Christ. With all these points of similarity, it is hard to imagine how the church has become so divided in fellowship and scattered in unity and purpose. One may ask, “Why is it so hard for churches to get along and see the need they have for one another?” The answer may be found in helping believers and churches realize the benefits they receive as they cooperate together through local associations.

¹⁰ *2010 U.S. Religious Census: Religious Congregations and Membership Study*, <http://www.rcms2010.org> (accessed November 4, 2012).

¹¹ Hartford Institute for Religion Research, “Fast Facts,” http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html (accessed November 4, 2012).

Methodology

This project will examine the cooperative ministry of the churches within a specific Baptist association, the New Salem Association of Baptists. The association is made up of ten churches and one Hispanic mission, all of which are located in Smith County, Tennessee. The writer is the pastor of one of these churches, the First Baptist Church in Carthage, Tennessee. In addition to the association, the churches are also affiliated with the Tennessee Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention. A local ministerial alliance also functions within Smith County and involves approximately twelve to fifteen churches of various denominations in monthly meetings for the pastors and three community-wide events through the year.

During the course of the research for this thesis, a survey will be administered to church, associational, and convention leaders to gather personal reflections on the subject of cooperation and note specific events and actions the church leaders consider as examples of cooperation. A copy of the survey is included at the end of this chapter.

The project will study biblical texts, case studies, and current writings on the subject of cooperation among churches to establish a biblical and theoretical basis for cooperation. A sampling of Baptist associations from across the United States will also be included to discover a common design for cooperation.

This project will be divided into the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction to Cooperation

This chapter will introduce the thesis, state the problem to be addressed, and present the methodology of the study. In addition, limitations and the theoretical basis for the project will be

stated. This chapter will include a review of the literature used for the research, including scriptural passages which deal with unity and cooperation among believers.

Chapter 2: The Present State of Cooperation within the New Salem Baptist Association

This chapter will examine the lines of cooperation within a local Baptist association and the churches that make up the association. Careful examination will be given to cooperation among the local pastors in the New Salem Baptist Association and the level to which the churches serve as “the church in a city/county” as opposed to a city of churches.¹²

Chapter 3: Church Leaders’ Understanding of Cooperation and Association

This chapter will focus on the responses from a questionnaire given to more than fifty pastors, church leaders, and denominational workers. This questionnaire examines the respondents’ understanding and practice of cooperation among churches. This chapter will also explore the organization and ministry of several Baptist associations from across the United States, seeking to establish a model for churches working together in a strategic way for the kingdom of God.

Chapter 4: A Model for Strategic Planning and Cooperation Among the Churches in a Local Baptist Association

Moving from the results of the questionnaire and examination of local associational models, this chapter will take the principles of cooperation and apply them to local churches ministering within the organization and resources of the local association. The design will include an intentional independence of the churches in planning and forming their specific strategic plans, while at the same time, an interdependent, working together to form a cohesive

¹² Bill Easum and Dave Travis, *Beyond the Box* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2003), 70.

associational strategic plan which recognizes the shared strategies among the churches and incorporates that strategy into the association.

Chapter 5: A New Day of Cooperation

This concluding chapter will present a summation of this study of cooperation among the churches. The summation will re-establish the local Baptist association's purpose for existence by leading the churches of the association to serve together for the expansion of the Kingdom of God.

Literature Review

Listed below is a representative list of the books, articles, and scriptures that are related to the subject of cooperation:

Books

Breaking the Missional Code, by Ed Stetzer and David Putnam presents a challenge to the local church to move beyond the church growth and church health movements to what is now the missional church. The focus is on empowering people to live missionally, transform their community, and multiply churches through church planting. This missional movement relates to other churches through networks which are seen as the new paradigm of partnerships.

A Baptist Association: Churches on Mission Together by J.C. Bradley is a classic book on understanding the work and role of the local Baptist associations of churches. For traditional Baptist churches, the local association is still the basic organization of cooperation.

The Baptist Faith and Message by Charles S. Kelly, Jr., Richard Land, and R. Albert Mohler, Jr. provides the theological discussion of the Baptist statement of faith, adopted by the

Southern Baptist Convention in 2000. Article 14 provides a clear statement of the Baptist understanding and organization for cooperation among churches and lists a number of related scripture references.¹³

Baptist Polity by James L. Sullivan provides a thorough understanding of the cooperative relationships between the local Baptist church, the local Baptist association, the state Baptist convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention. The majority of Southern Baptist churches understand cooperation through these formal organizational structures. The future of cooperation for many Baptist churches will begin with understanding their current polity in the context of the present times.

Beyond the Box: Innovative Churches that Work by Bill Easum and Dave Travis introduces the concept of “the church in a city”¹⁴ as opposed to a city filled with churches. This concept pictures the individual churches within a city working and serving together as part of the overall church of the city. The purpose of the church then becomes the transformation of the city, not just the growth of the individual churches. Church life is no longer about “my church” but now becomes centered in “the church.”

Cooperation: The Baptist Way to a Lost World by Cecil and Susan Ray examines the basic doctrines of Baptist cooperation and the specific ways that cooperation is lived out through the Cooperative Program, the Southern Baptist method of funding worldwide ministry and missions. For many young pastors and new congregations, the Cooperative Program may seem to be out of touch with the present day, more reminiscent of the church their parents attended.

¹³ Kelly, Land, and Mohler, 141.

¹⁴ Easum and Travis, 70.

For traditional Southern Baptists, the Cooperative Program is still a vital link of cooperation and partnership with over 10,000 missionaries serving the cause of Christ around the world.

Holy Cooperation! Building Graceful Economies by Andrew McLeod explores the way believers and churches work together to share resources and care for one another. This resource addresses a very practical cooperation which is presented as the norm for the churches in the New Testament. In fact, churches joining resources to meet the needs of others have been a means of cooperation through the centuries. Feeding the hungry or providing a shelter for the homeless can cross many barriers and form a common ground between believers from diverse backgrounds.

The Present Future by Reggie McNeal presents a vision of the church which moves from building-centered to kingdom-focused. Instead of the emphasis on the community coming into church, the focus is changed to the church going into the community. This outward direction then moves the various churches from competitors for attendance to co-laborers in the community.

Southern Baptist Identity edited by David S. Dockery, contains the transcripts of presentations made during Baptist Identity conferences held at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. These series of presentations examine the cooperative nature of Baptist churches and what the future holds for those churches. This work also addresses the perceived future for Baptist associations and state conventions.

To the Ends of the Earth by Jerry Rankin gives the biblical foundation for the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom is more than a church or denomination. It is bigger than the North American concept of Christianity and reaches across generations and throughout the centuries. The Great Commission of Jesus Christ, found in Matthew 28:18-20, serves as the marching

orders of the church to spread the news of Jesus to all the peoples of the earth. In the Great Commission, one finds the unifying purpose of the church through which there can be cooperation.

Viral Churches by Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird explores the partnerships being created through the church planting movement. These partnerships and church-planting networks are made up of churches from the same denomination as well as from other denominations. They also consider the challenge of young pastors moving into established churches and the beginning signs of shortages of leadership among the existing churches.¹⁵

Internet Sites

The web site for the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention which addresses the future needs of local Baptist associations is <http://www.namb.net/associational-strategy>. Several papers and workbooks are included on this web site which recognizes the need for the traditional Baptist association structure, strategy, and methodology of the past fifty years to be changed to address the needs of present-day churches. It has been this writer's observation that many new pastors and newly-planted churches have little interest in supporting organizations which they see as ineffective and obsolete.

The web site for the Leadership Network, <http://www.leadnet.org>, has many articles which specifically address the benefits and need for partnerships and networking among new churches and leaders. These articles provide up-to-date and relevant information on multiple topics for the church of the 21st Century.

The research blog for Ed Stetzer and Lifeway Christian Resources,

¹⁵ Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Viral Churches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 32.

an affiliated organization with the Southern Baptist Convention, is <http://edstetzer.com>. Stetzer is widely known and well respected as a statistical researcher in the church planting networks as well as within established churches and conventions. Many of his writings, as well as his printed books, examine the subject of cooperation and partnerships from a variety of directions.

The web site which provides contact information for the local associations within the Tennessee Baptist Convention is <http://www.tnbaptist.org/assocsearch.asp>. These associations are autonomous entities which are made up of the local churches and have a close relationship to the state convention. Information on each Baptist association in Tennessee, including the New Salem Association of Baptists, is included in this site.

The web site for the New Salem Association of Baptists is <http://www.newsalemassociation.org/>. This local association will serve as the focus of much of the research and will be used as the setting for the proposed model presented in this paper of churches working together in association. This site provides information on the association and the ten churches and one mission which make up the association.

A formal dialogue between Mark Driscoll and Jack Graham on the future of denominations and networks as the avenues of cooperation is found at <http://pastormark.tv/2012/01/25/with-a-little-help-from-my-friends-elephant-room-round-2-notes>. Discussion is given on the important issues of sending missionaries, planting churches, flexibility, and leadership. Instead of forming battle lines, name calling, and suspicion, there is a frank discussion concerning the relationships between the denominations and networks.

An online collection of articles from Independent Baptist pastors and leaders is found at <http://www.abaptistvoice.com/English/Books/TheCaseForIndependentBaptistChurches.htm>. This online resource makes a strong argument for the independence of churches with no formal

conventions, connections, or cooperation. It is easy to assume that cooperation among the churches and denominations is accepted as the best and most efficient approach of living out the Christian faith. These articles present the opposite view that the church is the only entity established by Christ, and therefore, any other groupings or organizational structures are man-made and should be avoided. There is a compelling article on the financial resources that are given to denominations and the better use of that money through independent mission work that could be accomplished if given directly from the church to the missionaries.

Articles

“Benefits to Belonging to an Association of Churches” by Fred Malone presents four strong benefits to churches which are a part of a local association. Each of the main points is broken down into the specific ways an association works together with the participating churches. This article is found at:

<http://www.trinitybaptistreformed.org/files/Download/Benefits%20of%20Joining%20an%20Association.pdf>

“Paul’s Teaching on Benevolence and Church Cooperation” by Bobby Duncan examines the writings of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament which deal with churches working together to care for the needs of one another. For Christians, having a biblical basis for cooperation among churches is very important. This article is found online at:

<http://www.acoc.org/bduncan/Benevolence%20and%20Church%20Cooperation.pdf>

“Baptists and Voluntary Cooperation” by William J. Pinson, Jr provides a brief historical understanding of cooperation among Baptist churches. This article can be found at:

<http://www.baptistdistinctives.org/articles/baptistsvoluntarycooperation.shtml>

“Cooperation among Churches Called Biblical and Effective” by Gary D. Meyers presents a biblical basis for cooperation among churches. The article makes the case for cooperation in the areas of fellowship, relief, missions, ministry, and training of pastors. In addition to scripture references, the article gives a brief history of cooperation within the Southern Baptist Convention. The article can be found at:
<http://www.bpnews.net/BPnews.asp?ID=20294>.

Biblical Passages

The following scripture passages will be incorporated into the thesis, providing a strong biblical foundation for the importance of unity among believers and cooperation among churches. The passages quoted are from the New King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

Psalm 133:1 states, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” This Old Testament scripture goes on to compare this unity with the precious anointing oil which was used to anoint Aaron, the first high priest of Israel. It also is compared to the morning dew which brings refreshment to the earth.

Proverbs 6:16-19 lists seven things which the Lord hates and are seen as an abomination to Him. The last of these abominable things is “one who sows discord among the brethren.” In other words, one who would cause a break in the unity of Christian brethren is one who displeases God.

Deuteronomy 6:4 states, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” This verse states the basic principle for the Jewish nation, and for Christians, that the LORD is one. He is one God who reveals Himself as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In John 10:30, 14:9-10, and 17:20-23, Jesus understood and taught that He and the Father are one. Jesus' prayer was that the unity of the Father and Son would be the unity of the disciples. He prayed in John 17:21, "that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."

Matthew 5:23-24 and 18:15-17 give Jesus' teaching on the importance of reconciliation among believers when there has been an offense. Regardless of who is at fault, Jesus instructs the believer to make the first move in order to continue and strengthen the relationship.

In John 13:34-35, Jesus gives a new commandment to His disciples, "that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." This commandment was to be the distinguishing characteristic of the believers as Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." That love for one another would be the unifying element among believers and their testimony to the world.

The early church modeled that Christian unity as Acts 2:1 says "they were all with one accord in one place." Later in the same chapter, verse 44-45, it is written, "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need." Later, in Acts 5:32, the church continued that unified care for each other, "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common."

The importance of unity and cooperation among believers continues through the writings of the Apostle Paul. Romans 12:4-5 states, "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,⁵ so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and

individually members of one another.” The analogy of Christians being as the different, unique parts of one body gives a clear picture of unity and a cooperative spirit of working together.

The entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 12 addresses the analogy of many parts in one body. There is no place for one part to feel left out, nor is there opportunity for a part of the body to feel another part is unnecessary. Paul strongly states in verse 27, “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.”

1 Corinthians 1:12-13 raises the central theme of unity as Paul writes, “Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” A resounding “No” rings loud and clear throughout the letter as Paul affirms the truth that the body of Christ, the church, is not divided. Jesus is the one and only Savior who died for mankind’s sins and it is in the name of Christ that a believer is baptized.

Continuing in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4, Paul says division, strife and envy exist within the church because the people are “carnal and behaving like mere men.” Disunity is a result of the sinfulness and selfishness on the part of the believer.

It is important to note Paul’s analogy of the church moves to an agricultural field as he writes in 1 Corinthians 3:6, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” The solution to disunity and sectarian division is the realization that church leaders and believers are united as “laborers together with God.”¹⁶ This terminology will be important later in the thesis as the relationships between church planters and existing church pastors are explored. Christians need each other in the work of the Kingdom of God.

¹⁶ 1 Cor. 3:9 (KJV).

Ephesians 4:1-6 presents the call for Christians to “bear with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Unity and cooperation are presented as the goal for which the believer gives his effort, work, and determination. This passage also presents the seven-fold unifying factors of the Christian faith, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.”

Philippians 2:1-4 calls believers to be “like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” The believer is then instructed to “look out not only for his own interests, but for the interests of others.” Philippians 2:5-11 then presents the Lord Jesus Christ as the supreme example of that self-giving spirit, concerned for the needs of others.

In terms of churches cooperating together in ministry, Barnabas and Saul, the first missionaries, were sent out from the church in Antioch in Acts 13:1-3. On the way back, elders were appointed by the missionary team in each town where churches were started (Acts 14:23).

Acts 15 gives an account of the Jerusalem Council as the apostles and elders came together to discuss a doctrinal dispute. Once the matter was settled, a letter was written and taken to other churches for clarification.

In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul writes of a combined offering being collected from different churches to address the needs of the needy in Jerusalem. This offering is to be given freely and without obligation or compulsion, “*So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).*”

Questionnaire

Listed below is a copy of a cover letter and questionnaire distributed to over fifty pastors and denominational leaders. The purpose of the questions is to gain a better understanding of cooperation within the local churches. Approximately twenty questionnaires have been completed.

Dear Pastor,

For the past four years I have been enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Liberty Theological Seminary in Lynchburg, Virginia and am now in the process of writing my thesis paper. My paper is dealing with cooperation between churches and its impact for the kingdom of Christ.

I need your help!

Part of my thesis will reflect the thoughts of pastors, staff members, and denominational leaders on the subject of cooperation of churches. I have listed several questions below for you to give your thoughts and input.

Please send your responses back to me by way of reply e-mail by February 1, 2012 if possible. You can print the questions and mail them to me if that would be easier for you:

Tim Frank
607 Main Street N
Carthage, TN 37030

If you would like to discuss the questions and cooperation in general, I will be happy to call for a phone interview or even work out a visit. Feel free to call me if you have questions. You can call me at 931 261-8452.

Thank you for your help in this process. I look forward to finishing writing this thesis and completing my DMIN degree program.

Tim Frank
First Baptist Church
Carthage, Tennessee
tfrank@fbccarthage.com

Questions on Cooperation

1. How would you define cooperation as it pertains to churches?
2. What scriptures do you refer to when sharing on cooperation?
3. What are the benefits of cooperation between churches?
4. What are the drawbacks of cooperation?
5. What are specific examples you have seen of cooperation among churches?
6. What are hindrances you have seen to cooperation among churches?
7. What are steps a church can take to strengthen cooperation with others?
8. What do you see as the future of cooperation between churches?

CHAPTER 2

THE PRESENT STATE OF COOPERATION WITHIN THE NEW SALEM BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Cooperation among churches may occur in many different settings and combinations. Cooperation may be through formal membership within organizations and denominations, or it may be through churches and believers informally working together for an event or cause. In Southern Baptist churches, the basic avenue for cooperation is within the local Baptist association. These associations are groups of churches in a geographical area which join together for the purpose of fellowship, missions, and ministry.

The Baptist association is the oldest form of cooperation in Baptist history. J.C Bradley, in *A Baptist Association*, cites eight periods of the historical development of the Baptist association.¹ Those periods can be summarized as follows:

- 1650-1707 Baptist churches in England began associating together to provide assistance to one another. The main focus during this period was fellowship among the churches.
- 1707-1800 Associations began forming in America among the Baptist churches. The oldest of these associations were the Philadelphia Association, the Charleston Association, and the Sandy Creek Association. The main focus of these early associations was evangelism and fellowship.

¹ Bradley, 25ff.

- 1800-1845 During this period other forms of cooperation began to be seen in America through the formation of conventions and mission societies which reached across associational lines.
- 1845-1917 The Southern Baptist Convention was formed in 1845 and began to join together churches, associations and state conventions under a unified organization.
- 1917-1935 The role of the association was being redefined as it related to the work of the conventions. In 1925, the Southern Baptist Convention established the Cooperative Program which provided a unified funding process for the state and national conventions. The associations began to be identified closely with the national and state conventions.
- 1935-1960 The association reemerged in importance during this time as the avenue through which the conventions communicated with the local churches. The association became an extension of the work and promotion of the national and state conventions. Financial campaigns, Sunday School emphases, and other convention related promotions were funneled through the structure of the association. These were the strongest days for the Baptist associations and conventions. In fact, the highest number of baptisms in the New Salem Baptist Association occurred in 1950 with 258 reported.² The same trend held true for the Tennessee Baptist Convention which baptized over 35,500.³

² Alene Carpenter, *History of the New Salem Association of Baptists* (Carthage, TN: New Salem Baptist Association, 2011), 20.

³ Lonnie Wilkey, "Survey Seeks Needs of TBC Churches," *Baptist and Reflector*, September 28, 2011.

- 1960-1974 The role and function of the association was given a critical analysis during these years. It was determined that the association was more than a mouth-piece for the conventions. The focus was turned to the original function of the association as a fellowship among the local churches.
- 1974-Present The association became recognized as a missionary organization of “churches on mission for Christ.”⁴ The association became the base for mission strategy in the local context. The associations began to build buildings and add staff members. The organization of the association began to be modeled after the local church and, in fact, began to add “ministries that it performed on behalf of the churches under the banner that “we can do more together than we can do alone.”⁵

In 2005, the Associational Initiatives Team of the North American Mission Board issued a position paper that called associations to move back to their role to “assist, support, and resource the unique, God-given vision of the churches to carry out the Great Commission.”⁶ In the paper, the association was reminded that it is made up of the local churches and work with the local churches, however, the association is not one of the churches. The conclusion of the team’s findings was that “the association of the future is going to resource its churches in ways

⁴ Bradley, 35.

⁵ *Associational Design for the Future* (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2005), 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

hat will enable them to be more effective in reaching the lost, develop disciples and leaders, and involve them in kingdom partnerships.”⁷

There are 68 associations in the Tennessee Baptist Convention.⁸ These associations come in all sizes. The largest association is the Nashville association with 196 churches and multiple staff members. The smallest association is the Hiwassee Association with only four churches. The associations in the Tennessee Baptist Convention can be grouped by number of churches as follows:

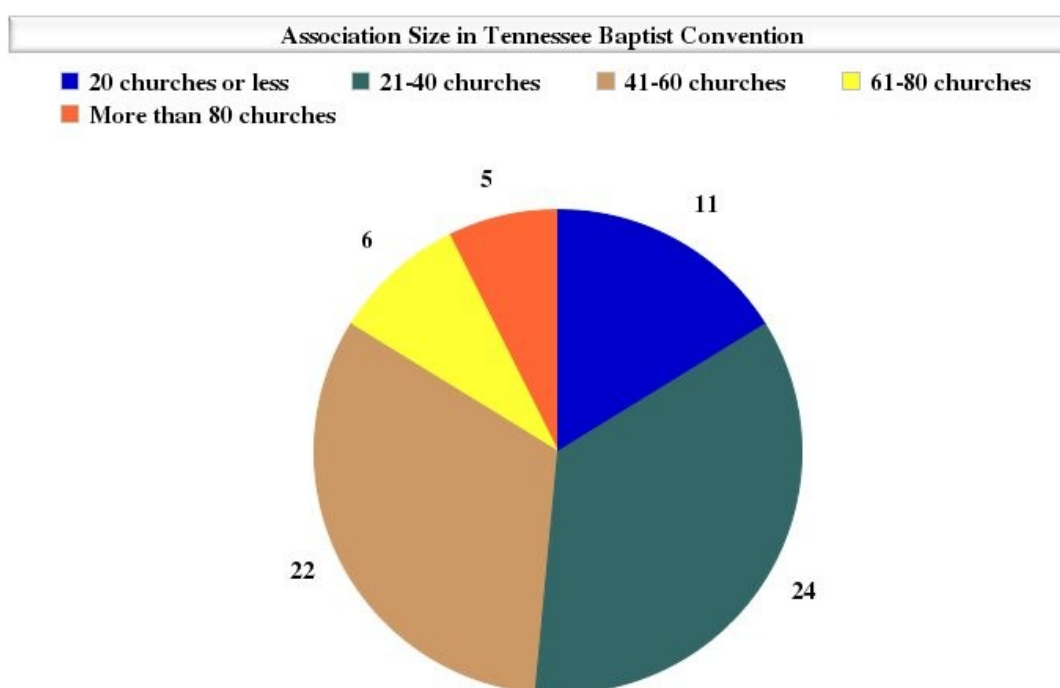


Figure 2.1 Association Size in Tennessee Baptist Convention

- 11 associations with 20 churches or less.
- 24 associations with 21-40 churches.

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ *Tennessee Baptist Convention 2010 Journal*, CD-ROM (Brentwood, TN: Tennessee Baptist Convention, 2010), 494-495.

- 22 associations with 41-60 churches.
- 6 associations with 61-80 churches.
- 5 associations with more than 80 churches.

The focus of this chapter is on the cooperation among churches within the New Salem Baptist Association which is made up of ten churches and one mission in Smith County, Tennessee. Careful examination will be given to cooperation among the local pastors and the level to which the churches serve as “the church in a city/county” as opposed to a city of churches.⁹ Benefits, drawbacks, and specific examples of cooperation will be related from the survey given to pastors and denominational leaders.

History of the New Salem Baptist Association

The New Salem Baptist Association was formed on October 30, 1888 with nineteen churches from the Salem Association. In those early days, the association and its annual meeting were very important in the lives of the churches. A history of the association describes those early days:

“In the early 1900’s, an associational annual meeting was a very special occasion. The meeting lasted for three days and evenings with hundreds of people attending, many from other associations. The people stayed in the homes of people in the area, Baptist or not. Many of the travelers camped out in tents. The lack of fellowship halls did not discourage them from feeding the hundreds of people who attended. They stretched fencing horizontal and very tightly between trees and spread the food on these long “tables.” It was routine for ladies to cook as many as twenty-five pies for these occasions. It was quite likely this was the only time in the year that many of these Christian friends met.”¹⁰

⁹ Easum and Travis, 70.

¹⁰ Carpenter, 5.

Through the course of the next 120 years, the association and its practices have changed. Today, only three of the original churches are still members of the association and the three-hour annual meeting is attended by only fifty to seventy messengers and guests.

The New Salem Baptist Association is led by Rev. Marty Dodge who has served as the Associational Director of Missions since November 1, 2008. He serves bi-vocationally, working a full-time job in the community. The New Salem Baptist Association also has a part-time secretary.

The purpose statement, as stated on the association website says, “The New Salem Baptist Association exists because Southern Baptist Churches have chosen to join together in fellowship and mission. Therefore, the purpose of the Association is to equip, resource, and encourage one another to be Kingdom Servants in obedience to our Lord’s Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8).”¹¹

During the 2009-2010 church year, the churches of the New Salem Baptist Association reported a total membership of 2,656. That year there were 59 baptisms reported in the churches for a member to baptism ratio of 45:1, one baptism for every 45 members. Through the state of Tennessee, that ratio of church membership to baptisms ranges from a low of 18.39:1 in Judson Association to a high of 79.66:1 in Watauga Association.¹²

Churches of the New Salem Baptist Association

The churches of the New Salem Baptist Association are as follows:

¹¹ Marty Dodge, *New Salem Baptist Association*, “About Us, Our Purpose,” <http://www.newsalemassociation.org/653963> (accessed April 19, 2012).

¹² *Tennessee Baptist Convention 2010 Journal*, 494-495.

- The Brush Creek Baptist Church is the oldest church in the New Salem Baptist Association. It was constituted on May 29, 1802 and is located in Brush Creek, Tennessee. They have a full-time pastor, a membership of 241 persons, and an average Sunday School attendance of 50.¹³ The 2009-2010 annual church profile showed they had 1 baptism.
- The Carthage Road Baptist Church is located approximately five miles outside of Carthage, Tennessee. Their first service as a mission congregation was in June 1987. They were organized as a church and joined the association on September 30, 1990. The membership was 28 with an average Sunday School attendance of 17 in the 2009-2010 year and that year the church did not report any baptisms. Their pastor is bi-vocational, working a full-time job while serving as pastor of the church.
- The First Baptist Church in Carthage, Tennessee was started by the Peyton's Creek Baptist Church and organized on July 16, 1881. They have a total membership of 762 with an average Sunday School attendance of 164 and during 2009-2010, the church baptized 17 people. The church has a full-time pastor and a full-time associate pastor.
- The First Baptist Church in Gordonsville, Tennessee was started as a Sunday night service in a storefront. In the spring of 1955 they became a mission of New Middleton Baptist Church and on April 15, 1956 the church was organized as the Gordonsville Baptist Church. They have a full-time pastor, a total membership of 463, and a Sunday School average attendance of 142. During the 2009-2010 year, the church had the highest baptisms in the association with 18.

¹³ Sunday School attendance figures are given to provide a clearer picture of the church and its relative size.

- The Hickman Baptist Church was started as a mission of the Brush Creek Baptist Church in July 1805 and constituted in July 1806. This church is located in the small community of Hickman, Tennessee. The church has a total membership of 229 and a Sunday School average attendance of 64. During 2009-2010, the church was without a pastor and reported no baptisms. Since that time they have called a full-time pastor.
- The Lancaster Baptist Church was established in 1897 in the community of Lancaster, which is four miles east of Gordonsville, Tennessee. The church has been without a pastor for several years. In 2009-2010 they had a membership of 56 and an average Sunday School attendance of 15.
- The New Middleton Baptist Church, which traces its roots back to 1830, is located in the New Middleton community, four miles west of Gordonsville, Tennessee. They are presently without a pastor. During the 2009-2010 year, they had 6 baptisms, 165 total members, and a Sunday School average attendance of 51.
- The Peyton's Creek Baptist Church was organized as a church on the third Sunday of July in 1812. They were admitted into the association in 1915. The church is located in the community of Monoville, which is three miles west of Carthage. They have 165 members with a Sunday School average attendance of 51. Their pastor is bi-vocational and in 2009-2010 they baptized 1 person.
- The Riddleton Baptist Church was organized on January 2, 1888 and is in a very small community of Riddleton which is five miles west of Carthage, Tennessee. The church has a full-time pastor. In 2009-2012, their membership was 59 with an average Sunday School attendance of 10 and they baptized 7 people.

- The Rome Baptist Church was constituted on the first Sunday of December in 1854. The church is located in the Rome community, 8 miles west of Carthage, Tennessee. They have a full-time pastor and total membership of 265. In 2009-2010 they reported 100 as the average attendance in Sunday School and 8 baptisms.
- The newest member of the association is the Iglesia Hispana de Carthage which began in 2007. It was started as a Spanish-speaking mission to reach the growing Hispanic population. They presently have an average attendance of 25 in their weekly services.

Organization of the New Salem Baptist Association

The organization of the association can be described in four areas:

- The Annual Meeting is the official meeting of the association in October of each year to transact business, adopt the budget, and approve leadership and officers. Each church within the association elects and sends messengers to conduct the business, elect the officers, and hear reports from the various ministry areas and committees. This meeting rotates among the churches and includes an annual sermon by one of the pastors.
- The Executive Board is made up of the Director of Missions, associational officers, pastors and representative members from each church. This group meets every other month to hear reports and transact the business of the association between annual meetings.
- The association has several standing committees which plan and organize the work of the association. These committees include the Missions Committee, Evangelism Committee, Budget and Finance Committee, and Youth Committee.

- The basic church program organizations have leaders who plan and promote training events for the churches. These include the Sunday School Director and Woman's Missionary Director.

Work of the New Salem Baptist Association

The work of the association can be divided into the following four areas:

- Fellowship among the churches is one of the main functions of the association. Each week the pastors have a weekly fellowship breakfast meeting which includes a devotional, prayer, and promotion of upcoming events. The youth committee coordinates association-wide fellowship activities each quarter. A senior adult fellowship is held each year, as well as an annual Fourth of July picnic.
- Community or local missions is a main function of the association. The churches of the association serve together in various mission events which include a weekly Sunday service at the Defeated Creek Campground, summer backyard Bible clubs in four housing areas, ReFuel youth local missions week in the summer, a ministry booth at the Smith County Fair, and a We Love Smith County Day in February. Every three years, the association holds a county-wide revival at the local community center. The association also supports the Iglesia Hispana de Carthage which meets each week at one of the churches.
- World-wide mission efforts are a constant focus of the association through the Woman's Missionary Union which holds quarterly meetings to study and support mission causes. During the past two years, the association has conducted mission trips to Waimae, Hawaii and Rogersville, Tennessee. An On Mission Celebration is held every five to

seven years with visiting missionaries from the International Mission Board, North American Mission Board, and Tennessee Baptist Convention. The Ray B. McCall Mission Fund is an endowment fund for missions, named in honor and memory of a former Director of Missions. Through this fund, over \$12,000 was distributed in 2011 to churches and individuals of the association involved in mission projects around the world.

- The final area of associational work is in conducting annual church-related events. These events include a Pastor and Deacon Training Dinner, a Vacation Bible School Clinic for the workers of the churches, and an associational Children's and Youth Bible Drill and Speaker's Tournament.

The churches participate in the association through providing leadership within the organization, support and participation in the events, and financially through voluntary contributions. In addition to the official associational mission efforts, local churches join together in local ministry opportunities and mission trips.

Statistical Analysis of Smith County, Tennessee

Smith County is a small, rural county in the central section of Tennessee. The 2010 Census information¹⁴ reports a population of 19,166, which is an 8.2 % increase from the 2000 Census population of 17,712. The median age for Smith County is 39.8 and the age divisions of the population are divided as follows:

¹⁴ *2010 Census Summary Profile for Smith County, Tennessee* (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2012).

Children and Students in Smith County, Tennessee

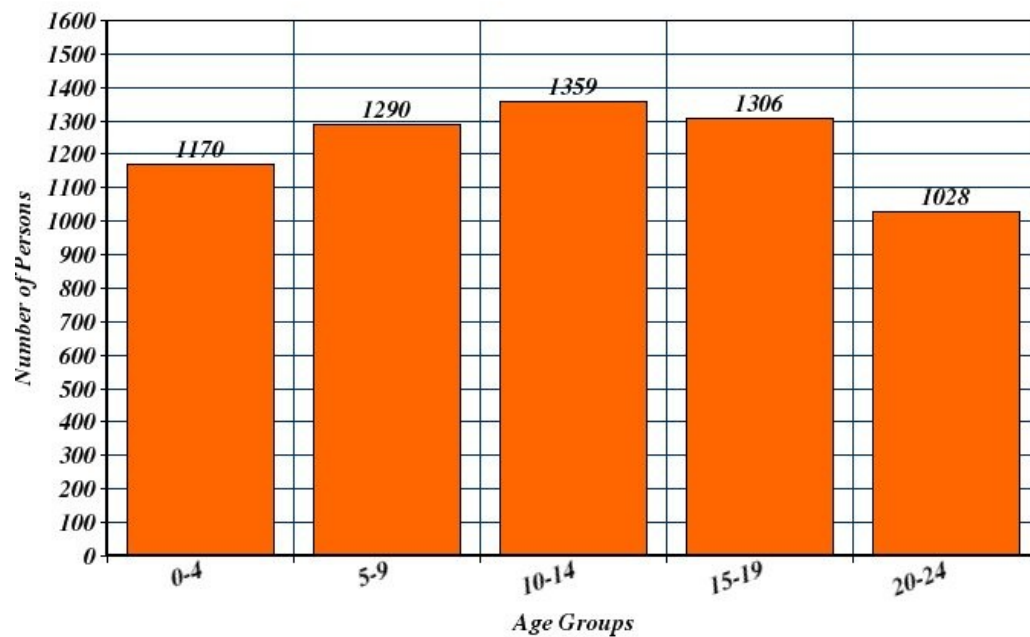


Figure 2.2 Children and Students in Smith County, Tennessee

Ages	0-4	1,170	Preschool
	5-9	1,290	Kindergarten – 4 th Grade (Elementary)
	10-14	1,359	5 th – 8 th Grade (Middle School)
	15-19	1,306	9 th -12 th Grade (High School)
	20-24	1,028	College and Young Career

Adult Age Groups in Smith County, Tennessee

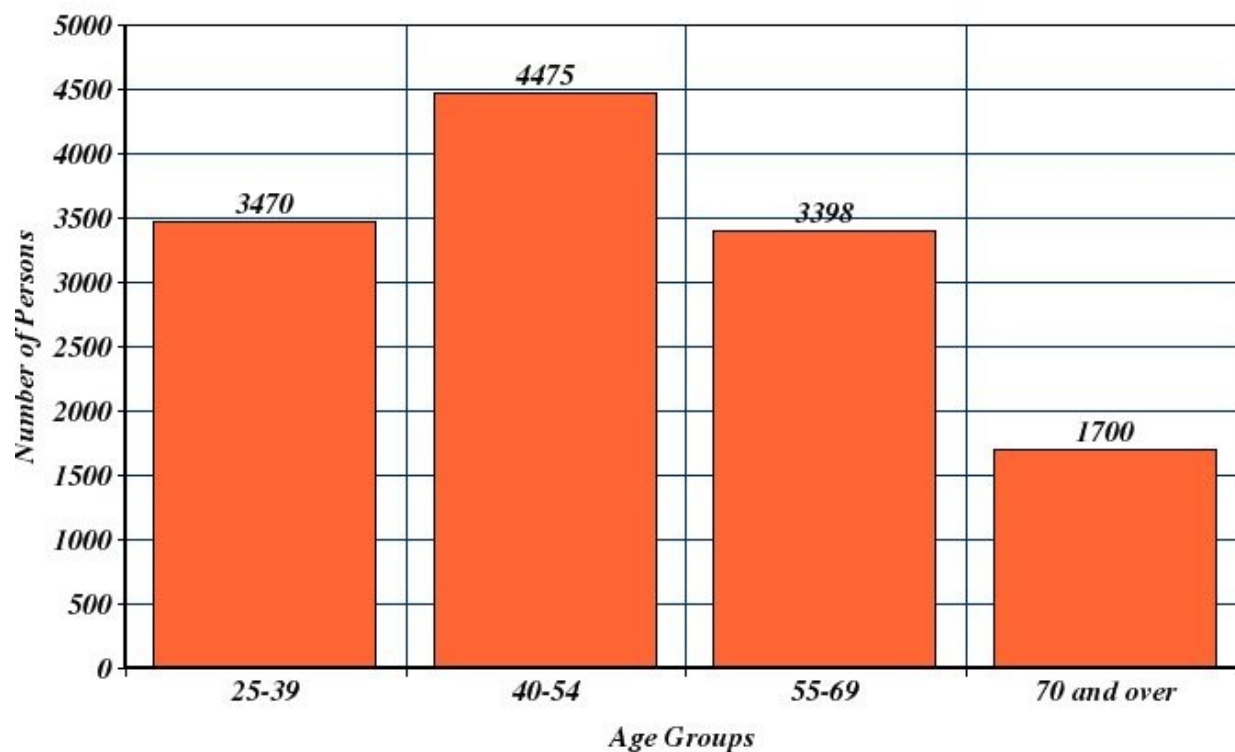


Figure 2.3 Adult Age Groups in Smith County

Ages	25-39	3,470	Young Families
	40-54	4,475	Families with School-Age Children
	55-69	3,398	Empty Nesters
	70+	1,700	Senior Adults

The population of Smith County can also be given by:

Gender

Males	9,439	49.2%
Females	9,727	50.8%

Race

White	18,179	94.9%
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Black	410	2.1%
Hispanic	417	2.2%
Other	160	0.8%

Households

1 Person	1,816
2 Persons+	5,594
Total	7,410
w/ Children	2,531
Avg. Size	2.57

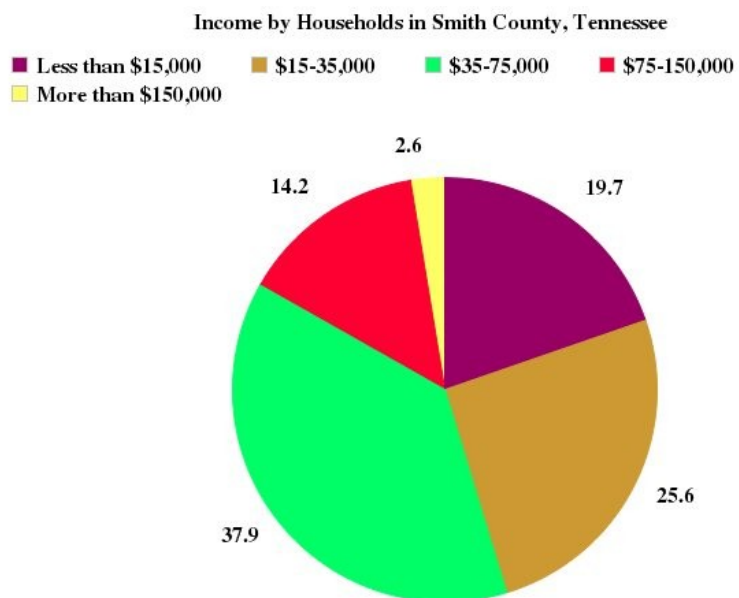


Figure 2.4 Income by Households

< \$15,000	1,462	19.7%
\$15-35,000	1,895	25.6%
\$35-75,000	2,814	37.9%

\$75-150,000	1,056	14.2%
\$150,000 +	193	2.6%
Average Household Income		\$47,912
Per Capita Income		\$18,757

There are three incorporated cities in Smith County: Carthage, South Carthage, and Gordonsville. Carthage, the largest of the three, is the county seat and has a population of 2,251 in the 2010 Census. South Carthage, separated from Carthage by the Cumberland River, has a population of 1,302. Both cities send their children to the same elementary, middle and high schools. Gordonsville is the fastest growing town in Smith County with a population of 1,248 which is an increase of 17% over the 2000 Census. Gordonsville has its own elementary, middle and high schools. There are four additional K-8 elementary/middle schools throughout Smith County: New Middleton, Union Heights, Forks River, and Defeated.

Analysis of Opportunities and Threats

A county is more than a breakdown of numbers and statistical information. A county is made up of people with lives that are filled with differing schedules, priorities, and values. For a church and/or an association to seek to reach into those lives, there must be an examination of the opportunities that exist and, at the same time, the threats that stand in the way.

In evaluating the opportunities and threats in Smith County, it is interesting that the opportunities and positive aspects of the county can also be the threats and negative aspects of the county. For example, the communities within the county are very close, friendly, and connected with the people within their community. People wave as they pass by, and it is not uncommon to be delayed at the grocery, or Wal-Mart, by multiple conversations with friends and family. This is a very positive aspect of the community. On the other hand, this closeness and

family atmosphere makes it difficult for new people in the community to feel accepted. A person may live in this community for a decade or more and still be seen as an “outsider” and not “from here.”

This closeness within the communities of the county is also a threat in that the people of one community are very cliquish toward the people of the other. The main towns within the county are Carthage and Gordonsville. The two high schools in these communities are long time rivals, especially in sports. Often in conversations, reference is made to people “on the other side of the river.” Rivalry is good to the extent that it provides a community spirit. When it comes to having a shared vision of God’s Kingdom work in the county, rivalry can become a great hindrance.

Another opportunity that is also a threat is the abundance of churches. There are over one hundred churches in this county of 19,000 people. There is openness to Christianity and a freedom to speak freely of your faith. Christian t-shirts and bumper stickers are prevalent. Most people are associated with a church by family ties or attendance on special occasions and as children. However, there are still many people who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and do not regularly attend any of the churches. Many of the churches are very closed and critical of the other churches. The spirit of cooperation and the practice of working together among the churches are almost non-existent. There is a sense of “turf” and outreach efforts are often seen as trying to take/steal people from other churches.

In this small community, the public high schools are the center of the community. It seems like the “whole town” turns out to attend to the Friday night football games in the fall. Basketball teams, soccer teams, softball, baseball, etc. are offered for all ages, children through adults. Sports give a past-time to the many families and offer the opportunities to spend time

together. However, this pre-occupation with sports also creates a threat and competition for the local church. Time, resources, and volunteer opportunities are shared with the ball teams. Big events are scheduled around football practice and games. Churches often are forced to take a second place when it comes to participation in the sports.

Hobbies and recreational pursuits are also an opportunity and a threat in this area. The opportunity exists for individuals and families to go to one of the five area lakes, multiple camping areas, or many other outdoor areas for enjoyment. There are many great family memories made in the outdoors. These outdoor trips also create competition for people's time and Sunday is the only "open day" many have to enjoy. It is not unusual for an active family in the church to buy a boat or camper and then feel "obligated" to spend weekends at the campground or lake and quickly become less regular in church attendance.

One other opportunity/threat combination is the community-wide events and activities in a small county. These events provide time to connect to the people of the community and build relationships. There are picnics, fund raisers, community committees, and other good things that call for one's time, effort and energy. The threat comes as people begin to feel pulled in many different directions and then pull back for commitments and leadership positions within the church. Many are burned-out and exhausted with over-commitments. In larger cities, it seems easier to pick and choose the activities in which you are involved. In the small town, everything seems to have a sense of urgency and need for one's personal attention, participation and leadership.

Conclusion

The New Salem Baptist Association operates as a separate, autonomous entity from the churches which make up its membership. The leaders of the association are the pastors and lay leaders from the churches; however, the work and ministry of the association stands alone. Its budget, events, and mission efforts are provided for the churches to participate with the desire to be helpful to the overall work that is accomplished. As with many organizations, the association is finding fewer and fewer people who participate in “its” events. As the events are less attended, both the value and the future of the association are brought into question.

This is not the time, however, to forsake the association and consider its future as useless and unimportant. No, it is an opportunity to remake the association into a strategic partner with the local Baptist churches in reaching the community for Jesus Christ. The association stands in a very important place in uniting the churches in a sense of cooperation and joint mission. The new generation of pastors and church leaders in the church today have little interest in supporting an organization they see as irrelevant and as producing little results. This is the time of decision. This is the time to make the necessary adjustments and changes which will lead the churches into a cooperative movement to impact their community, their county, and the world for Jesus Christ.

The local Baptist association, instead of being obsolete and irrelevant, is the organization best suited to bring churches together and make an impact on the community. The leader of the association is generally referred to as the Director of Missions which portrays a person in an administrative position within an organization. The title which was previously given to the position was that of Associational Missionary, which gives the image of a person of vision, passion, and mission. The association, lead by the Associational Missionary, takes on a whole new role as the catalyst of mission effort and awareness within a geographical area. No longer is

the association's purpose linked to programs, organization, or the status quo. The association is now charged with the task of reaching the area for Jesus Christ. The focus is not even on the individual churches but on the mission. The churches work together to accomplish their shared vision and overarching mission which is to make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, baptizing them, and teaching them all the things He taught His disciples.¹⁵

¹⁵ Matt. 28:18-20

CHAPTER 3

A SURVEY OF CHURCH LEADERS' UNDERSTANDING OF COOPERATION

In the course of research for this thesis, a questionnaire was sent to over fifty pastors, Association Directors of Missions, Baptist Convention personnel, and local community leaders. The purpose was to gain an understanding of commitment which these leaders have toward cooperation among churches in general and through the local association. The following chapter explores the responses of these leaders to the questionnaire. Respondents were not required to give their name so the responses will be shared anonymously. A complete listing of questions and responses is printed in Appendix A.

In addition, this chapter also contains the information gained through a series of interviews with association Directors of Missions. These interviews were designed to gain insight into the various strategies and structures used as models for the local association. From these examples, a model for cooperation among churches within a local Baptist association will be presented in the following chapter.

Cooperation Defined

In the questionnaire given to pastors and church leaders, the definition and basic understanding of cooperation among churches was the leading question explored. The purpose of this lead question was to allow the respondents to share their working definition of cooperation. The responses ranged from the simple definition of one leader who shared that cooperation is simply “two or two hundred, agreed in purpose or mission, working toward

changing a tire or a culture.”¹ A more formal definition of cooperation was shared as “two or more people or groups, uniting for a common goal and a common good; combining their energy, strength, and resources to accomplish those goals. For churches, it is when two or more churches find koinonia, unite, and give of themselves and their resources (time, building, people, finances, gifts, talents, faith, and prayers) for the accomplishment of the Great Commission, the fulfilling of the Great Commandment, and the calling of their great Lord.” The consensus of respondents was that cooperation stresses the shared mission of the churches and diminishes the selfish competition between the churches.

This emphasis of working together for a shared mission, ministry, or endeavor was seen as a particular helpful aspect of cooperation among smaller churches. The churches working together in such a way was seen as to be beneficial to the individual church, while at the same time, building the kingdom of God. This type of cooperation is seen as more than a joint service, a shared event, or a combined activity. There is the sense of working together toward a set goal, purpose, and objective. Cooperation is strategic when it is done for the purpose of accomplishing a set purpose which has community-wide/area-wide impact. One person stated, “Neither of the churches in cooperation care who gets the credit, as long as the Lord Jesus is exalted.”

A Scriptural Basis for Cooperation

An examination of the Bible will quickly reveal that there were no Baptist associations or any other association as we know them, in the Old Testament or in the New Testament.

Although the word association does not occur in the scriptures, a case could be made of the

¹ The questionnaire was distributed to over fifty pastors, Association Directors of Missions, Baptist Convention personnel, and local community leaders. The questionnaire was given anonymously to allow the respondents full freedom to express their feelings and beliefs.

twelve tribes of Israel and their divisions by families and clans as an early example of people in association, however, that would be a stretch to use as a Biblical support or example of the present-day association.

In the New International Version of the Bible, the word associate is used 44 times, 35 of these in the Old Testament. In Joshua 23:7 and 17, the people of Israel were instructed not to associate with the people of the nations around them because they would lead them into immorality and idolatry. The majority of the passages speak of an associate as a close friend. In the New Testament there are four specific verses that give instructions for the Christian and those with whom he associates. Romans 12:16 says to “live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.” The Apostle Paul gives instructions for the believer in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 not to associate with another believer who lives an immoral lifestyle. 2 Thessalonians 3:14 is similar as it says, “Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed.”

Even though the formal organization known as an association is not found in the scriptures, there are many passages that speak of cooperation, unity, and working together as Christians. The New Testament scriptures are filled with passages which emphasize the importance of loving one another, caring for one another, and working with one another for the good of all and the glory of God. These passages, as stated in chapter 1 of this thesis, provide a strong biblical foundation for the importance of unity among believers and cooperation among churches.

The second question on the survey asked the pastors and leaders which scriptural passages they refer to when sharing on the subject of cooperation among churches. Several left

the question blank and one confessed he had never even considered the Bible's stand on the subject of cooperation.

The Biblical passage referenced multiple times by the respondents is perhaps one of the most important scriptures in realizing the importance of cooperation and the purpose of an association of churches. That passage, Matthew 28:19-20, is referred to as the Great Commission and it gives the final words of Jesus to believers prior to His ascension into heaven. These final words which have such importance to Christians state, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Christians consider these verses as the marching orders of the church. Every believer in Jesus Christ and every New Testament church are to make disciples, baptize them as a sign of their faith in Christ, and teach them all that Jesus has commanded. In other words, these verses provide a shared purpose and task for all believers and for every church. Cooperation unites believers together for the shared purpose of carrying out this Great Commission and reaching all the nations for Christ.

Acts 1:8 also shares the believer's purpose as it gives these final words of Jesus, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Following this passage, Luke, the accepted writer of Acts, relates that Jesus was taken into Heaven and the promise given that He will return again in similar manner.

Acts 15 relates the importance of churches coming together to resolve doctrinal questions. As the gospel of Christ spread through the Roman world, churches were started and pastor/elders were appointed. Many of these churches were filled with new believers who had

little or no understanding of doctrinal issues. Many of the pastors were also very limited in their basic understanding which provided the opportunity for false teachers to come into the churches and teach incorrect doctrine.

One of the greatest challenges for the early church was from a group known as the Judiazers who taught that believers in Jesus must first become Jews, observe the Jewish law, and keep the Jewish traditions and regulations.² When this issue became widespread, the church in Jerusalem had the pastors from other churches gather together and settle this doctrinal issue. Peter shared of his experiences as an eyewitness of God's salvation of Gentile peoples. Paul and Barnabas also told of God's work among the Gentiles. Finally, Acts 15:13 records James, the half-brother of Jesus and the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, as he gives the biblical text from Amos 19:11-12 as evidence that God has accepted the Gentiles who are called by His name. The apostles and elders/pastors agreed together on the decision not to burden the Gentiles who were turning to God by having them keep Jewish laws and customs. A letter was written by the Jerusalem Council and sent to the churches, sharing the decision given.

Although the Jerusalem Council was not referred to as an association, their actions and deliberation are a pattern for local associations in dealing with matters of conduct and doctrine. That pattern would be for the leadership of the churches to come together, share freely, and make a joint decision on important matters. This model is still practiced today in local associations as they address theological, cultural, and practical issues.

The scriptures also mention a cooperative offering which was received from the churches during the early years of the Christianity. This cooperative offering was collected from the churches in Macedonia for the needs of believers in Jerusalem. In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul writes

² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 1786.

to the church in Corinth to encourage them to complete the giving they began. He mentions that other churches in Macedonia had already given and the joint offering was a ministry to the believers in Jerusalem. This is an example of cooperation of the churches in meeting the physical needs of others.

Throughout the New Testament, the scripture writers speak of “one another” and beneficial actions Christians are to carry out with others. Although not specifically aimed at achieving a cooperative purpose or objective, these passages call believers in Christ into a growing relationship of love and care for other Christians. Many of these passages are from letters written to individual churches; however, they are not restricted to those churches nor are they intended to be interpreted as exclusive instructions for Christians within a particular church, past or present. Here are several of those instructions:

“Love one another.” (John 13:34-35; 15:12,17; Romans 13:8; John 3:11; 23; 4:7, 11, 12)

“Honor one another above yourselves.” (Romans 12:10)

“Live in harmony with one another.” (Romans 12:16)

“...Stop passing judgment on one another.” (Romans 14:13)

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you.” (Romans 15:7)

“...Have equal concern for each other.” (1 Corinthians 12:25)

“...Serve one another in love.” (2 Corinthians 13:12)

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another.” (Ephesians 4:32)

“Encourage one another.” (1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11)

“Don’t grumble against each other.” (James 5:9)

“Pray for each other.” (James 5:16)

“Live in harmony with one another.” (1 Peter 3:8)

The Benefits of Cooperation

Every person responding to the questionnaire gave positive benefits of churches cooperating together. Perhaps a bit cliché, but one respondent said, “We can do more together than we can by ourselves.” Cooperation is seen as opening a person’s view to a purpose larger than himself.

Cooperation can be “fun”, wrote one of the respondents to the survey. The fun comes as churches work together toward a shared goal. Seeing a joint project accomplished brings a sense of joy and satisfaction to all the believers involved. When that cooperation is flowing among churches it is viewed as “pleasing the heart of the Father.” God receives the glory when Christians humble themselves, lay aside their selfish motives, and serve Him.

Cooperation helps build a sense of family and gives an understanding of the Body of Christ. A respondent stated that working together helps “build relationships and tears down old mindsets that divide and separate the body of Christ.”

The church’s witness in the community is strengthened as Christians work together. There is a strengthened impact of churches as they work together in a united front. Just as there is strength in numbers, there is also effectiveness in reaching people for the kingdom of God when the church is united. There is a visual testimony that Christ is not divided. There is one body of Christ, one Bride of Christ, one church. Cooperation among churches helps combat what one respondent stated as “the most common argument against Christianity, that Christians cannot get along within their own church, let alone with other congregations, so how can they represent a loving God if they are arguing with each other.” Another person said, “It is good for a lost world to see us (Christians) getting along.”

The Drawbacks of Cooperation

The number of positive benefits of cooperation which were shared makes one wonder why churches are so hesitant to work together. Perhaps the answer is revealed in the responses to the question, “What are the drawbacks to cooperation?”

In Southern Baptist life, there is a fine line between cooperation and autonomy. Both are distinctive of Baptist heritage and, left to themselves, can tend to pull against each other. Autonomy is the understanding that each church, association, and convention operates as a separate unit with no control being exerted from the other. For churches and associations to cooperate, there is a concern that one will usurp authority over the other. The understanding of who takes the leadership in cooperation makes a huge difference. Many churches tend to operate as independent churches with a suspicion of cooperation with any outside entity. This can be a major hindrance to cooperation.

Other drawbacks which were shared include no agreed upon mission and a lack of leadership in working together. Cooperation is more than doing events together. There must be vision, mission, and a purpose. These three elements require leadership and a long term commitment of time and effort. One leader shared “that kind of commitment is on short supply.” In many settings there is also a challenge of defending partnerships and areas of commitment to those who do not understand nor agree with the principles of cooperation.

Churches can be very self-centered and question cooperative work for the value it has for them personally. The question that is often implied by church leaders is, “What’s in it for me?” Larger churches can come to the faulty conclusion that they do not need anyone to help them accomplish the work. Smaller churches may feel they will get lost in the process.

Another observation on the drawbacks of cooperation is the tendency that “everybody’s business is nobody’s business.” In other words, if the project is not “our” project, we have little concern or involvement. If everyone has this approach, cooperation is doomed from the beginning.

Examples of Cooperation

The most common example of cooperation shared by those responding to the questionnaire was the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention. Granted, with most of the persons who were sent a questionnaire being Southern Baptist, this may not be surprising. The Cooperative Program is the funding vehicle used by the almost 50,000 Southern Baptist churches to cooperate in funding over 10,000 missionaries in the United States, Canada, and around the world. Ministerial students in six seminaries have a large portion of their tuition paid through the Cooperative Program. State conventions are funded almost entirely through this funding vehicle. Baptist Collegiate Ministries on hundreds of college campus are made possible, children’s homes are operated, Baptist hospitals are in place, and state Baptist colleges and universities receive funding through the Cooperative Program. Associations across the United States receive financial assistance through the Cooperative Program in the form of ministry assistance and/or salary assistance for their Director of Missions.

The backbone of the Cooperative Program is the almost 50,000 Southern Baptist churches, large and small, who give a portion of their undesignated offerings each month through this funding process. The church chooses the percentage which it contributes and sends that amount each month to its respective state Baptist convention. The state Baptist convention then uses a portion for the work within the state while sending a percentage which the individual state

convention has determined to the Southern Baptist Convention. The Cooperative Program requires a massive amount of cooperation between churches for the purpose of carrying out the work and mission of both the state conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention.

The remaining responses of those surveyed to the specific examples of cooperation among churches can be summed up in one word: events. These events range from a feeding ministry to disaster relief teams. Prayer groups and local revivals/crusades are also mentioned as examples of cooperation. These events bring churches together to accomplish a mutually agreed-upon goal. Some examples are ongoing programs such as a food pantry or a food distribution that is staffed by volunteers from several churches. Other examples include events that may happen once, such as a Billy Graham crusade in the area or a mission trip to another part of the country.

Two of the respondents cited examples of churches in cooperation which begins to lean toward the focus of this paper. The first example is when several churches target an area in the community and design methods to reach out to that area collectively. The focus is not just on the churches working together or the event that is accomplished. The focus is on the churches and church leaders strategically combining their resources and efforts to move in a specific direction. There is a long-term commitment to the cooperative effort.

The second example of strategic cooperation shared is when churches work together to begin a new church or mission in an area. Again, this type of cooperation demands a sustained level of commitment, relationship, and communication between the churches involved. It is not just cooperation for the sake of cooperation. It is cooperation for the purpose of seeing a long-term goal accomplished.

Each of the examples of cooperation demonstrates the working together of churches for the good of the kingdom of God. They demand a level of communication and mutual effort. The strategic focus of cooperation, however, is the aspect which seems to be missing among the churches. As referenced later in this chapter, churches and associations across the United States are making that transformation from a traditional program-focused organization to focus on the importance of strategic cooperation.

Steps a Church Can Take to Strengthen Cooperation

The questionnaire asked for suggestions to strengthen cooperation among the churches. Those suggestions are listed and arranged below in an order which moves toward a more strategic understanding of cooperation.

1. Make a commitment to build cooperation among pastors and churches.
2. Teach that all born again believers are brothers and sisters in the Lord and should love and care for one another.
3. Pastors gather to pray together on a consistent basis for the Spirit of God to establish a unified church.
4. Develop a close relationship among the pastors. They must lead by example with a servant's heart that does not have to be seen and is genuinely joyous when others succeed.
5. Have a laser sharp focus of the Great Commission and who we are serving, the Lord Jesus Christ.
6. Develop times of fellowship to get to know believers from other churches and build relationships.

7. Cooperate locally with other churches in mutually important events that have a high probability of success.
8. Participate in joint mission trips, ministry to the poor, and other spiritual endeavors. Serve the Lord together, with each church making positive contributions toward the leadership and work.
9. Ideally, cooperate and function as one church making an eternal impact on the physical and spiritual needs of the community.

Examples of Cooperation through the Local Association

In addition to the questionnaire, individual Baptist associations were researched throughout the United States to identify patterns and models of strategic planning among churches on an associational level. These associations were studied through their Internet web sites and through personal interviews with the Director of Missions by phone or in person. The associations provide an understanding of the strategic planning process and the benefits of the process to the churches as well as to the association. The associations cited do not comprise an exhaustive list nor are they in any way presented as being better or more strategic than other associations that could be shared as examples.

Stone Association of Southern Baptists in Putnam County, Tennessee

The Stone Association of Southern Baptists is made up of 43 churches in Putnam County, Tennessee. The Director of Missions has been active in the association for many years, but has assumed the Director's role in the past year. Stone Association is in the transition of moving from a very traditional associational model to a strategic model. In the past year, the association

has joined in with the mission and ministry efforts of several of the churches and has helped facilitate those churches working together. Mission trips led by one church are opened up to members from other churches. As members participate and learn the logistics of a mission trip, they are then able to lead their church in a mission trip the following year.

The largest local ministry effort in the Stone Association is “Feeding of the Multitude”, a mass feeding effort during Thanksgiving Week. Before the association’s involvement, there were 5 churches feeding approximately 7,000 people a hot meal on the Tuesday prior to Thanksgiving. This past year, 26 churches joined together in the effort and feed over 14,000 people.

The three year plan in the Stone Association is to begin the strategic planning process by continuing to link churches together with mission events and projects for the coming year. The following year, the goal is to have churches join together in coordinated planning with the association. During the third year, the direction is to have a definite strategic process in place which joins the churches along with the association leadership in planning the work of the association.

Cumberland Baptist Association in Clarksville, Tennessee

The Cumberland Baptist Association is located in the Clarksville, Tennessee area and is made up of 49 churches. In 2006, the Director of Missions led the association to revisit the basic structure and work of the association. Through the process, an Associational Strategy Planning Team was formed which studied the 203-year-old association, interviewed pastors, and reorganized the association under a new mission statement: “The mission of the Cumberland

Baptist Association is to promote cooperative kingdom work among her churches and to help resource those churches to fulfill The Great Commission.”³

The Cumberland Baptist Association moved from the traditional program and committee structure to a team structure. The Development of Church Leadership Team works with strengthening and training both church staff and volunteers. The Evangelism and Missions Team helps churches in conducting area-wide events that reach out to the community, the surrounding area, and around the world. The Strengthening the Ministries of the Local Church Team has as its purpose the ministries and organizations of the local churches. The Administrative Team helps to transact the operational business of the association. Each team works with the churches of the association as a resourcing entity to help them be all God has called them to be. For example, the teams have a process in which the churches can submit requests for funding, up to \$1000, for community-wide and area-wide events and projects. In addition, the association has also purchased ministry and mission resources such as a Block Party Trailer to be used by the churches. The emphasis of the association is to keep the local church central and to be a resource to the churches.

Green Mountain Baptist Association in Barre, Vermont

The Green Mountain Baptist Association is located in Barre, Vermont. This association is made up of smaller churches that serve the rural villages and towns of the area. For several years, the association “did a lot of things for the churches that the churches should have been

³ Cumberland Baptist Association, “Home”, <http://cumberlandba.org/> (accessed June 12, 2012).

doing for themselves.”⁴ In 1999, the association leadership began exploring more effective models for association work and in 2001 they discontinued promoting the specific programs and focused on helping the churches develop individual strategies. Three key priorities emerged from the process: Encouraging Visionary Leadership, Engaging the Culture with the Gospel, and Igniting Spiritual Passion.

Today, the Green Mountain Baptist Association is organized around those three areas through ministry teams. No longer tied to programs, these teams work with the churches in supporting the vision and ministries which arise from the churches. The churches drive the ideas which make up the ministry of the association. Membership and baptisms within the churches of the association have doubled during the past ten years, while the attendance figures in Sunday School and Sunday morning worship have increased almost threefold. The focus of the Green Mountain Baptist Association has moved from programs to strategy.

Fannin Baptist Association in Bonham, Texas

The Fannin Baptist Association in Bonham, Texas is another example of a traditional, program-based association that has reorganized the way it is structured and moved to a strategy-based format. The association leadership chose to set the example for the churches within the association by being willing to reorganize and change to better meet the needs of the churches. Again, this association focused on the churches and saw its purpose as serving the churches by helping them achieve their individual strategy and goals. Thus, the association worked with the churches to develop the strategy for their church and then the churches' strategies, in turn, drive

⁴ Terry W. Dorsett, *Next Generation Evangelistic Network*, “Implementing Strategy Based Ministry,” <http://thoughtsfromdrt.blogspot.com/2011/11/implementing-strategy-based-ministry.html> (accessed June 8, 2012).

the strategy for the association. The guiding principle is based on the question, “How can the association assist the churches to do what God is leading them to do?”⁵

The stated purpose for the Fannin Baptist Association is “Fannin Baptist Association is a network of churches that seeks to start, empower, and equip churches for Kingdom growth.”⁶ Their vision statement “envision[s] FBA churches and its leaders to be healthy, proactive and visionary in their service to God and outreach to people resulting in impact on our communities, the lost, all population segments and all people groups for Christ.”⁷ The structure of the association centers around three teams which are the Church Health and Leadership Development Team, the Relevant Ministries in Missions and Evangelism Team, and the Focusing on Family Issues Team.

The Church Health and Leadership Development Team works with the churches to offer assistance in leading the churches through a long-range/ strategic planning process. This team also helps churches develop healthy practices and conducts church health assessments. Working with church Sunday School, discipleship, deacon ministry, and other church programs falls under this team’s area of ministry.

The Relevant Ministries in Missions and Evangelism Team focuses on evangelism training, mission education and partnership mission efforts. In addition, this team assists churches in mission trips and promotes involvement in mission efforts in the local area.

⁵ *Fannin Baptist Association, Strategy Development*, <http://www.fanninbaptistassociation.com/message.php?messageID=2425&> (accessed June 14, 2012).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

The Focusing on Family Issues Team assists churches in the association with age-group ministry areas such as children, youth, and senior adults. Part of the age-group ministry also includes Vacation Bible School, marriage retreats, benevolence needs and family counseling.

Recently, the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention began working with Fannin Baptist Association in its efforts toward strategic development of the churches. The emphasis is called the Associational Strategic Preparation Process, and it involves the local church pastors and leaders in developing strategic plans for their church. From those plans, the association forms its strategy to assist the churches in moving toward their strategy. In other words, the association strategy is centered on the work and ministry of the local churches within the association. A copy of the information sent to pastors of the association can be found in Appendix B. The pastors are encouraged to share their churches' strategic plans with the Director of Missions, who then takes those strategic plans, goals, and objectives and begins to formulate the association organization and strategy to help the churches accomplish their strategic plans.

Central New York Baptist Association in Candor, New York

The Central New York Baptist Association in Candor, New York serves 45 churches across 15 counties.⁸ The association has organized its strategy around three teams: the Church Strengthening Team, the Cooperative Ministry Team, and the Church Planting Team. The Church Strengthening Team works with the churches in the areas of joint events, training, and fellowship. Many of the traditional association events are coordinated through this team in

⁸ *Central New York Baptist Association Strategy*, http://cnyba.org/userFiles/921/cnyba_strategy.pdf (accessed June 14, 2012).

specific areas of the association which they refer to as “clusters.” This minimizes travel and encourages local church ownership of the events. The Cooperative Ministry Team leads the association to focus on mission trips, ministry centers, campus ministry, camps, youth events, and prison ministry. The Church Planting Team helps raise awareness for church planting as well as assisting in the church planting efforts within the association. The strategy of the association has moved from operating like a church to assisting the churches in fulfilling their mission and purpose.

Nashville Baptist Association in Nashville, Tennessee

The Nashville Baptist Association is the largest association in the Tennessee Baptist Convention with 196 churches.⁹ Prior to the year 2000, the association was organized in a traditional format with the church program organizations and 48 committees. The structure was a mirror image of a local church and the association itself functioned in many ways like a local church. In 2000, the Director of Missions led the association to a team structure which centered around eight teams. This organizational format served as the transitional phase for the association to move into a strategic development plan in 2006.

The move to the strategic development plan was lead by a new Director of Missions who has led the association to work with the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in strategic planning. All of the pastors of the churches within the association were invited to a one-hour personal interview. Ninety of the 196 pastors accepted the invitation and over the course of several days were interviewed by specially trained consultants from the North American Mission Board. These pastors shared their dreams for their churches, as well as

⁹ *Tennessee Baptist Convention 2010 Journal*, 495.

strategy, plans, struggles, and needs. During the interviews, the pastors were also asked for their visions for the future work of the association.

After the interviews, the consultants from the North American Mission Board scored each church on its strengths and weaknesses, assessing the needs of each church. These needs were compiled to begin developing a strategic plan for the association which would better serve the needs and visions of the churches. The focus of the association was shifting from the churches supporting the association's work to the association serving as a resource and ministry partner to help meet the needs of the churches.

The association organized itself, its ministry, and even its budget around four teams: the Church Development Team, the Missions Team, the Leadership Development Team, and the Administrative Team. Each team is comprised of eight members with the leadership of a pastor or church staff minister from one of the churches. The Church Development Team relates to the church program organizations, such as the Sunday School, Discipleship Training, Youth Ministry, etc. The Missions Team works with church planting, mission partnerships, and local mission opportunities. The Leadership Development focuses on fellowship, training, and encouragement of the pastors and church staff ministers within the association. The Administrative Team carries on the operational work of the association and provides resources in areas not covered by the other three teams.

In addition to assisting the churches in the specific areas, each team is given a sum of money, \$10,000 in the 2011 budget year, to be resourced directly back to the churches for projects, events, and mission efforts. Each church has the opportunity to complete an application for the resource funds and submit those requests to the appropriate team. The teams then have the authority to fulfill or reject the requests as they prayerfully discern the needs requested.

In 2011, the association's leadership felt the strategic plan established in 2006 had reached its maximum effectiveness and needed to be re-examined. The pastors of the association were again invited to a one-hour personal interview to share their church's plans, strategies, struggles, and needs. Although only 60 of the pastors participated in the interviews, their input provided a great help in re-directing the existing teams in their assistance and resourcing of the churches.

At the time of the interview, plans were being made for a first-ever leadership retreat with the Director of Missions, association staff, and the team leaders from the four teams. This leadership retreat was being structured to provide an opportunity to continue fine-tuning the strategy and better serve the needs of the churches.

CHAPTER 4

A MODEL FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING AND COOPERATION AMONG THE CHURCHES IN A LOCAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

The study of cooperation among churches has revealed an overwhelming predominance of joint projects and events, especially on the local level where a Baptist association or group of churches will join together in cooperation to conduct an area-wide event. For example, a group of eight churches in Cookeville, Tennessee joined together for three years, rented out the local university gym, and held a joint Easter service which was attended by several thousand people. Another example would be members from several churches in Smith County, Tennessee formed a mission team and traveled to Montana to conduct Vacation Bible School on a Native American reservation. These cooperative endeavors have several churches working together, joint funding, and a sense of cooperation. However, after the event or project there is little continued cooperation or planning for additional endeavors.

As believers in Jesus Christ, members of His body, and the Bride of Christ there should be a greater sense of connectedness and cooperation among churches and Christians within those churches. Instead of learning to tolerate one another and accept each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, the church needs a unified mission, a common theme, and a shared urgency of reaching the community, the region, and the world for Jesus Christ. Much effort is expended with few results when churches duplicate effort, swap members, and compete for limited resources.

In studying the cooperation among churches within a local Baptist association, it is apparent that many of the churches have some type of planning, goal, and sense of mission. For the most part, these plans, goals, and mission are set by the pastor and leaders of the individual

church, independent from the other churches of the association. At the same time, the local association is making its own strategic plan which may have little to do with the plans of the churches. Therefore, in an association of forty churches, for example, there would be many levels of planning in the churches, but conceivably all forty churches would have a plan to some degree, written or unwritten. These forty plans would be made completely independent and with little or no thought of the other churches. In addition, the association to which these forty churches belong would also have its own strategic plan that may or may not have been made with a consideration of the plans of the churches. This system leads to each church focusing on itself and its plans to the exclusion of the sister churches. The overall effect is a breakdown of cooperation and a division of resources and strategy which could be better used together to reach a city, a county for Christ. Each church operates in an almost unspoken sense of secrecy, much like businesses that keep their business plans locked in a safe. The association may come alongside the churches in helping them accomplish their goals, but what about a unified, strategic plan that would join them together to reach the mutually agreed upon goals?

What if instead of independent strategic planning:

- The churches in a local Baptist association thought of their shared “Jerusalem” as one unit to be reached collectively?
- The churches saw themselves as “The Church of the Region”, like the epistles are written to “the Church at Corinth” or “the Church of Ephesus?”
- The local association considered part of its strategic plan the coordination, communication, cooperation, and collaboration of the churches within the association toward shared vision and goals?

- The association saw itself as a strategic ally with the churches to reach the city/county/region for Christ and not as an independent entity with its own plans, strategies, and agenda?
- The association functioned as an association of churches and the Director of Missions saw himself in the role of coach, encourager, equipper, and co-laborer in the development of a strategic plan for the entire area?

The Baptist cry may be, “What about the autonomy of the local churches and the association?” The issue is not autonomy but cooperation and co-laboring. Autonomy has become the Baptist equivalent of “independent.” We have created autonomous entities that have become castles, fortresses, and silos. It is time to breach the walls and see that while the church is independently protecting its “turf”, the majority of the people around us are lost, unreached, and unchurched.

How do we begin to form an area-wide strategic plan that honors each church’s unique make-up while at the same time focuses our attention on reaching the lost in our area? The answer is in opening lines of communication between the churches and the association and beginning to work on the strategic planning process separately and together. Each church needs to develop its own strategic plan in cooperation and conjunction with the other churches in the association. The association needs to develop its strategic plan in response and joint venture with the churches that make up the association. Neither the churches nor the association should work independently of the others, nor should one entity determine or dictate the strategic plan of the others. Autonomy of the churches and the association is preserved while at the same time cooperation is maximized.

Still the need remains for a unified, coordinated, strategic process to reach the whole area. Multiple churches may focus on the same demographic or section; that is ok. This model does not lead in a backward direction to a delineation of turf or “church field”. The aim is to develop the strategy among all the partners involved. The churches must see themselves as partners on the same team. The individual church will have preferences, gifted areas, and callings which will make it unique. That uniqueness, however, is the quality that makes the individual parts function as a unit.

The following model is presented to work toward the development of a process for bringing the churches and association together in a strategic planning process. *Set the Journey: A Strategic Development Process for Associations*¹ has an excellent model which could be expanded to work alongside the churches as they develop their own strategic plans. It can also be used as a format for the strategic planning process within the churches as well as the association.

As the model is developed for the churches within the association, it is important to establish a covenant of agreements between the churches which will allow them to work together in a spirit of cooperation. The agreement statements presented below are given as examples from which the churches and the association can tailor-make their own covenant agreement.

1. We agree to treat all churches as members of the same team rather than competitors.

This is accomplished as:

- We recognize the unique contributions and ministry of each church.
- We focus on unity of mission, not uniformity of style or organization.

¹ Hugh Townsend, *Set the Journey: A Strategy Development Process for Associations* (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2001), 35. The booklet is available as a free download from the North American Mission Board at <http://www.namb.net/associational-strategy/>.

- We accept various styles of worship as unique within each church.
2. We agree to maintain basic doctrinal beliefs and unity in biblical truths.
 - The Baptist Faith and Message 2000² will serve as the accepted statement of faith.
 3. We commit to actively participate in this cooperative, strategic partnership on an indefinite basis.

This is accomplished as we:

- Lead our church in a strategic planning process to establish the vision, mission, core beliefs, and strategic plan for our church.
 - Participate in the association strategic planning process to coordinate and communicate our church's strategic plan and work with others in a sense of unity.
 - Support the Association Implementation Leadership Team through pastoral and lay involvement.
 - Establish the ultimate goal and outcome of this strategic planning process as exalting Jesus Christ, impacting lostness, and sharing the gospel.
4. We agree to move forward with those who choose to participate in the strategic planning process and allow the other churches within the association to join in cooperative efforts as they choose.

This is accomplished as we:

- Acknowledge this process is not an issue of fellowship, morality or a test of unity.

² The Southern Baptist Convention, "The Baptist Faith and Message 2000," <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp> (accessed December 7, 2012). The Baptist Faith and Message 2000 is a statement of faith adopted by the messengers of the 2000 Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting. It is the accepted statement of faith and represents the generally agreed upon doctrines within Southern Baptist churches and convention entities.

- Begin the process after a reasonable time for invitation and information with the churches who will participate.
5. We agree to lead the members of each church to have a kingdom focus with a willingness to deny self, take up the cross daily, and follow Jesus.

This is accomplished as we:

- Focus on multiplication of ministry sites, congregations, and churches.
- View church membership as a resource which is shared among churches, with no loss of allegiance.
- Allow members to move to a new place of ministry and service as it benefits the overall kingdom of God.
- Welcome members from other churches to participate in mission, ministry, training, and spiritual growth opportunities.
- Work to share physical resources, when possible, among the churches.

The Strategic Planning Process in the Local Church

The strategic planning process in the local church is a journey which the pastor and church take together to determine where the church is, where they feel the Lord Jesus Christ is leading, and what is needed to get there. It is not a solo work by the pastor alone, nor is it a secretive work by a committee or group in the church. It is not to be reflective of anyone's personal agenda. It is a joint effort to seek the mind and direction of Christ for a specific church to carry out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Great Commandment is given in Matthew 22:37-39, "Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first

and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ The Great Commission is found in Matthew 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The author Aubrey Malphurs in his book *Advanced Strategic Planning* defines the process for a church as “the envisioning process that a leader uses with a team of leaders on a regular basis to think and act so as to design and redesign a specific model that accomplishes the Great Commission in their unique ministry context.”³ In his workbook, *Mapping Your Church Strategy*, Mark Marshall uses an analogy of sailing to picture the strategic planning process. He writes, “Strategic planning is a journey; the vision God gives you becomes your church’s future destination.”⁴ Another author, Ed Stetzer writes in *Comeback Churches*, “People only ‘get on board’ when they see the boat.”⁵

For many pastors in local churches, beginning to develop a strategic plan can seem overwhelming and the details too daunting to even consider. For other pastors, there is an understanding for the need to develop a strategic plan, but the timing and priority never coincide to move the process forward. The pastor, however, is the key person in the success of the strategic planning process. “For any strategic plan to work, the entire process must be led by the

³ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 26.

⁴ Mark Marshall, *Mapping Your Church Strategy* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2003), 5.

⁵ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2007), 46.

pastor. He is the captain of the ship. That does not mean that the pastor makes every decision or attends every meeting. But it does mean the pastor guides the process.”⁶

This is where an association-wide emphasis on strategic planning can be a blessing and resource to the churches and pastors. The Director of Missions (DOM) is in a strategic position to encourage, motivate, and challenge the pastors without overstepping the lines of authority, autonomy or control. The DOM is not the pastor’s boss, his pastor, nor his supervisor. The DOM is a co-laborer who conveys a concern and casts the vision for an entire county or larger area covered by the association. He operates as the local area “missionary” who works alongside the pastors in helping them see the bigger picture.

The DOM may have a weekly or monthly meeting with the pastors of the association in which he can begin to outline and share the importance of the strategic planning process for the churches and the association. Since the strategic plan of the association must take into consideration the strategic plans of the churches, he can take the lead in encouraging the pastors to begin the journey. If the pastor is hesitant in taking the lead, the DOM can also suggest an outside consultant who could come and work with the pastor through the strategic planning process. As in any process that involves multiple groups, someone has to be the catalyst to set the process in motion. The DOM is that catalyst in the local association.

The key to the success of this strategic planning process within the church is to keep it simple, specific and church friendly. For some pastors, the process may seem overwhelming. For other pastors and church leaders, there may be a tendency to get lost in the details and

⁶Marshall, 7.

bogged down with the data. It will be important to keep the church focused and on the development process as outlined in the model.

As mentioned previously, an additional resource for both the church strategic planning process and the association strategic planning process is the booklet *Set the Journey* produced by the North American Mission Board.⁷ This booklet has many helps for the pastor in understanding and communicating the principles of strategic planning in his church. The pastor will greatly benefit from the concise descriptions and information on mission statements, core values, and vision statements.

The church strategic process model presented here centers around 4 two-hour sessions in which the pastor, church leaders, and congregation explore and establish the church's purpose, mission, vision and core values through a series of surveys, questionnaires, and writing exercises. The larger the participation of the church membership, the greater the amount of information with which the church leaders will have to work. These four sessions could be conducted over a four-week period of time on consecutive Sunday or Wednesday nights. They could also be conducted in a week-long "revival" setting or a weekend "retreat" setting. The pastor and leaders will determine which setting and time frame is best for the church. One important factor is to keep the time frame as tight as possible to keep from losing momentum and interest. A once-a-month session for four months, for example, would be discouraged for this reason. The model is based on the "revival" setting of four consecutive nights.

This church strategic process model is made up of four distinct phases: preparation, participation, implementation, and revitalization. During the preparation phase, the pastor enlists

⁷ Townsend, 35.

seven to twelve church leaders to assist him in gathering data and processing the information gained in the participation phase. The participation phase is the four-session setting in which all members are encouraged to be involved in the process. The implementation phase begins immediately after the direction is set and the plan is communicated. The revitalization phase occurs after a period of three to five years as the plan is reviewed and adjustments made to reflect the changing needs of the church.

The Preparation Phase

The preparation phase of the church strategic process begins with the selection of a strategic planning team of seven to twelve persons to work with the pastor to prepare for the planning event. This team may be the church council, the deacons or another established leadership group. It may also be a selected group of members who represent the demographics of the church. This team should be informed from the beginning that the team members will be assigned major responsibilities that must be completed before, during, and after the planning event.

During this preparation phase, the pastor, strategic planning team, and church must set aside time for spiritual preparation. In developing a strategic plan, the pastor and leaders will be prayerfully seeking God's direction and purpose for the future ministry of the church. It is advisable for the church to plan several prayer events to prepare for this endeavor. Perhaps this phase would include a call to forty days of prayer with prayer guides, daily prayer emphases, and a challenge to weekly fasting. There could also be an organized 24-hour prayer vigil leading up to the strategic planning event. The pastor himself may want to take a period of time to go away on his own personal prayer retreat to seek God's direction.

It is important to note that during this process, the devil will not sit idle while the church is seeking to make an impact for the kingdom of God. Increased spiritual warfare and spiritual attacks may be experienced throughout the congregation. Spiritual preparation is vital for all those involved in the process.

In addition to spiritual preparation, there is the need for several types of research to be conducted and statistical information to be gathered. The strategic planning team may want to sub-divide into groups to complete these tasks. This may also be an excellent opportunity to involve others from the congregation in the preparation. The information needed would include:

- A history of the church, noting important milestones and influential leaders.
- A ten-year statistical study of the church programs, attendance patterns, and membership. This information can be obtained through the Annual Church Profile information submitted each year to the associational office.
- A ten-year analysis of the church budget and an audit of the present years giving patterns, including a list of the top twenty giving units (with names excluded for confidentiality).
- A facilities study of the current church buildings, examining the state of the buildings and the current weekly usage.
- A current demographic report of the community within a one, five, and ten mile radius. The North American Mission Board provides this demographic information free of charge to Southern Baptist churches.
- The team may want to conduct a community survey among a random selection of persons within the surrounding neighborhoods. Questions might include:

How long have you been a resident of this community?

What is your impression of the churches in this community?

Do you presently attend one of the churches?

Have you ever been contacted by one of them?

Can you think of ways the churches might improve their relationship with this community?

Why do you think most people do not attend church?⁸

The strategic planning team will need several weeks to prepare this information and assemble it. The team will then share the information it has discovered in this preparation phase. Preliminary strengths and weaknesses may be shared at this time or may be held until the planning event.

The strategic planning team will also be responsible for preparing the various surveys, questionnaires, handouts, and other materials needed for the planning event. These would include a survey of the church members' vision for the church, a questionnaire to lead the members to select the core values of the church, and a listing of mission and vision statements for other churches. A example of a vision survey is attached as APPENDIX C entitled A Church Member Vision Survey. The purpose of this survey is to lead the people to share their thoughts and dreams for the future of the church. In addition to demographic information, the survey asks questions such as: What do you believe our church does best? In what area do you believe the church can improve? Are there new ministries/programs you envision? What do you see as the greatest immediate space and/or building needs? What do you envision to be major challenges the church will face in the next ten years? How do you see the church in the year 2020? Questions such as these move the congregation to consider the years ahead.

⁸ Marshall, 24.

An example of a questionnaire on core values is attached as APPENDIX D entitled A Checklist of Core Values. Each congregation is unique and has a set of biblical core values that reflect who they are as a church. For example, *Set the Journey* presents the core values of Saddleback Community Church in Orange County, California as follows:

- We value the application of Scripture.
- We value excellence.
- We value informality.
- We value people's differences.
- We value continual learning.
- We value innovation.
- We value growth.⁹

Several additional examples of churches' core values are given in *Mapping Your Church Strategy*. Two of those churches and their core values are:

Hope Baptist Church in Las Vegas, Nevada

As we journey from salvation to lordship under the authority of Scripture, we value:

- Every member a believer.
- Every believer a disciple.
- Every disciple a minister.

As we journey together united in Christ, we value:

- Worshiping God.
- Proclaiming His Word.
- Community among believers.
- Witnessing to a world He loves.¹⁰

University Baptist Church in Coral Gables, Florida

- We value the gospel of Jesus Christ as delivered to us through the Bible.
- We value turning to God and growth in Christ-likeness as God's will for every believer.
- We value authentic and loving relationships that build up the community of believers.
- We value effective communication of God's timeless truth in relevant ways.
- We value all believers as ministers, serving according to their giftedness.
- We value measurable advancement toward accomplishing our church's purpose.
- We value the building and supporting of healthy family relationships.¹¹

⁹ Townsend, 16.

¹⁰ Marshall, 31.

These resources are also helpful in providing lists of mission statements from many churches. In addition, Malphurs presents the following statements as examples in *Advance*

Strategy Planning:

Our mission is to make and mature believers at home and abroad.

Anonymous

Our mission is to present Christ as Savior and pursue Christ as Lord.

Ikki Soma

Our mission is to follow and make followers of Christ.

Emmanuel Ralevich

Our mission is to lead ordinary people to extraordinary life in Christ.

Hillcrest Baptist Church

Our mission is to lead all people into a life-changing, ever-growing relationship with Christ.

Mobberly Baptist Church

Our mission is that every man, woman, and child in Greater Austin hear the gospel from the lips of someone at Hill Country Baptist Church.¹²

During the preparation phase, communication and promotion of the strategic planning event within the congregation is most important. Announcements, bulletin reminders, and other avenues of keeping the event before the congregation must be used to build a sense of anticipation, excitement, and expectation. The strategic planning team can be a great help in these avenues of communication. The pastor must also take the opportunity to share his commitment to the process.

One of the most important actions of the preparation phase is for the pastor and Strategic Planning Team to formulate a beginning draft of a Mission/Purpose Statement and a beginning draft of a Vision Statement. This allows the pastor to share on the importance of mission and

¹¹ Ibid., 33.

¹² Malphurs, 140.

vision and move right into the development of a statement for the church. When working with a larger group, like a church congregation, it is more efficient and effective to have a beginning draft which can be adjusted than to begin from a blank slate. The pastor and Strategic Planning Team can take the time to begin the statement process prior to presenting the information to the congregation as a whole.

One last assignment before the Strategic Planning event is to distribute the Core Values Checklist to the entire congregation on the two Sundays prior to the event. This will involve a larger number of people with different attendance patterns. The pastor can instruct the people to complete the checklist and inform them that the completed lists will be collected during or after the service. The number of checklists returned will be significantly higher if the people are given a few moments in the service to record their thoughts and turn in the sheets that day. It will also allow the pastor and Strategic Planning Team time to process the information for the first session.

The Participation Phase

This is the main part of the strategic planning process as the church gathers for a four-session event to formulate the strategic plan for the church's ministry.¹³ These four sessions are designed to be a manageable timeframe for the congregation to be involved. The simple format also makes this process usable in any size congregation. It allows flexibility to best fit the needs and schedule of the congregation. This model presents the strategic planning event in terms of a

¹³ The concept for a four session strategic planning process within the local church was gained while studying a four-session revival format resource by J. William Bargiol entitled *Church Alive: Creating a New Dream*. This workbook and accompanying study guide were printed and distributed by the author in 1996.

one-week time frame; however, it may also be accomplished in a weekend setting or a month long setting.

The Preparation Phase has given the process a great start and the Strategic Planning Team has made the necessary preparations for the event. Promotion to the congregation has communicated the importance of their participation. The needed surveys, questionnaires, and handouts have been printed and are ready for distribution. The Checklist of Core Values (APPENDIX D) has been distributed to the congregation during the Sunday morning service for the past two weeks and collected at the end of those services. For times sake, it may be helpful to have all materials for the night or even the four sessions collated together in a booklet or folder. Also as a help to the participants it is important to have pens available.

Session 1: A People on Mission

The pastor greets the people, welcoming them to one of the most important weeks in the life of the church. A time of prayer would be a good start to the event with several members of the Strategic Planning Team leading in specific prayers or dividing the congregation into smaller groups led by the members of the team. After the prayer time the team can distribute the materials needed for the evening.

The pastor begins this session with an overview of Biblical passages that establish the purpose and mission of the church. The passages listed below are suggested passages which communicate the mission and purpose of the church. The pastor may feel led to refer to other passages and customize the presentation. The basic passages include:

- Matthew 22:35-40 The Great Commandment
- Matthew 28:18-20 The Great Commission

- Matthew 16:13-19 The Foundation of the Church
- Acts 1:8 The Strategy of Missions
- Acts 2:41-47 The Tasks of the Church

The pastor moves from the Biblical foundations into a discussion of the importance of strategic planning. One of the easiest ways to understand strategic planning is to consider the five big questions:

Why are we here?	Purpose and Mission	Session 1
Where are we?	Research and Survey Information	Session 1
Who are we?	Core Values	Session 1
Where are we going?	Vision	Session 2
How will we get there?	Strategic Plan	Session 3

The discussion now moves to purpose and mission by calling attention to several mission statements from other churches as an introduction for developing one for the church. The mission statement is an open-ended summation of the overall purpose of the church. This is not the time for specific goals, objectives, or listing of work to be done.

The pastor shares that in any family, church, or organization there are certain core values that make them who they are and affect what is done. The people have identified the values that are of most importance to them through the Core Values Checklist which was completed during the prior two Sundays. The Strategic Planning Team presents the compilation of the information from the checklist. The goal is to assist the church members in identifying and establishing the three to five major core values of the congregation which are important in establishing a mission.

After a short break, if needed, the pastor distributes copies of the draft mission statement the Strategic Planning Team has prepared and allows time for the people to read it and make

notes. This may be a good time to break into discussion groups with members of the Strategic Planning Team as facilitators. The purpose of these groups is to get feedback from the congregation on the statement and suggestions they may have for consideration. The groups may also begin to brainstorm concepts for a church logo which reflects the spirit of the church and mission statement. When the groups reassemble, the leaders share the thoughts from their groups with the entire congregation. In very large congregations, the leaders can record the suggestions and bring them to the pastor and Strategic Planning Team for discussion and adjustments. The ultimate goal is to formulate a mission statement which gives an accurate picture of why the church exists.

The Strategic Planning Team members share information they have previously discovered about the church. This includes a brief history, the statistical analysis for the past ten years, and a discussion of the community demographics and survey. Handouts of the information which have been printed in the individual booklets or packets prior to the session encourage the congregation to follow the information as it is shared.

Before dismissing this first session, the pastor asks the congregation to complete the Vision Survey/Dream Sheet. Again, it is preferable for the people to complete the questionnaire before they are dismissed from the session. This questionnaire is of help in focusing the people's attention on the future and moving toward a vision of where the church is going.

Session 2: A Vision for the Future

The pastor begins Session 2 with a devotional message on the importance of vision. Biblical passages to include in this devotional would be John 4:35 which states, "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and *then* comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes

and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” Jesus has been talking to the Samaritan woman at the well while the disciples have gone for food in the town. When they return, the woman goes into town and tells all the people about Jesus. As they are coming to meet Him, Jesus is teaching on the need for vision to see the ripe fields of people who are ready for harvest. The emphasis is on vision and not the disciples’ immediate thoughts about eating lunch.

The second key passage for the evening is Proverbs 29:18 which states in the King James Version, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” The application of this passage leads very nicely into the importance of a vision statement for the church. The vision statement gives a mental picture of what success will look like in the church.

After the devotion, it is helpful to explore the life cycle of a person to better understand the life cycle of an organization. This familiar bell-shaped curve begins with birth, moves upward to indicate growth, and finally reaches its height at maturity. From maturity the curve turns downhill which indicates decline and eventually death. Not only do people experience a life cycle, organizations and churches do as well.¹⁴ For a church the life cycle begins with a dream which would give rise to beliefs, goals and structures. Ministry is at the height of the curve as the church maximizes its resources, people, and potential. If no revitalization occurs, the church moves into nostalgia and then downhill to questioning, polarization and finally the dropout stage. This life cycle helps to illustrate the need for a church to keep the vision fresh and before the people. This Strategic Planning Process is a tool to help the church restructure the dream and vision for the future.

¹⁴ Robert Dale, *To Dream Again* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981), 16.

The pastor and Strategic Planning Team share the information gained from the Vision Survey / Dream Sheet completed and collected at the end of the previous session. The pastor discusses the importance of direction and vision for the life and future of the church.

This is a great time to have a brainstorming session with the people. If the congregation is smaller, have everyone participate together. If the congregation is larger, break into smaller groups lead by the Strategic Planning Team members. Brainstorm the following questions:

- What do you sense God is leading this church to do?
- If resources were unlimited, what could the church accomplish?
- Where will the church be in three to five years? What will be its strong ministries?

After a short break, if needed, the pastor compiles the ideas shared from the brainstorming session as well as from the Vision Survey and leads the people in establishing a vision statement that identifies the three to five areas on which to focus its ministry and mission during the coming years. This vision statement forms the basis for the development of strategic plans which will, in turn, serve as the means for accomplishing this vision. This process does not have to be rushed or forced since it is the most important step in the entire Strategic Planning Event.

It may be helpful to break the vision and brainstorming ideas into three lists:

- Immediate Needs: These are items that need attention now. An example would be replacing light bulbs.
- Six-to-Twelve Month Projects: These are areas that need attention within the year. An example would be to start three new Sunday School classes or to paint

the sanctuary. Again, these are project-oriented and do not necessarily reflect the vision for the future of the church.

- Vision: These are the broader visionary ideas which give direction to the church for the coming years.

The development of the vision statement is extended to the third session if necessary; however, the establishing of this vision statement is of great importance. If carried over, the pastor and Strategic Planning Team need to work between the sessions to formulate a statement to submit to the congregation for discussion at the beginning of the next session.

Session 3: A Strategy for Victory

The pastor begins this session by welcoming the people and sharing a short message from Joshua 1:1-9. The emphasis of this message is on moving forward to the future to which God has called the church. Reference can be made to God's word to Joshua to be strong, courageous, and not afraid because of His promise to be with him through the journey. After the short message, two or three of the Strategic Planning Team members can lead in a season of prayer for God's continued leadership in the process.

If the vision statement has not been set, the process begins where it was stopped in the previous session. If the vision statement has been established, the pastor may lead the people to review the vision statement as they prepare to consider the strategy needed to see it accomplished.

Strategy is simply the steps needed to go from where the church is in the present to where it desires to be in the future. The mission statement and core values have established, "Who are we?" The demographical and statistical information have helped the church to see, "Where are

we?” The vision statement has set, “Where are we going?” Strategy answers the final question, “How do we get there?” The strategy is how the church accomplishes its vision and provides an understanding of why certain actions and practices are necessary. Once the congregation establishes a vision, it is more likely to implement the steps necessary to see that reached. Simply restated, the steps needed to accomplish the vision are the church’s strategic plan.

Strategy begins with an understanding of the present state of the church and community. For this presentation, it is important for the pastor and strategic planning team to have established a listing of strengths and weaknesses of the major programs and ministries of the church. An example of this listing is found in APPENDIX E. The pastor and team also share a description of the opportunities and threats of the surrounding community as it relates to the church and its strategy. An example of these community opportunities and threats is included in APPENDIX F.

Any discussion of vision and strategy often builds within people the uneasy feeling that changes are about to be made. In the church, changes are often resisted unless the people have a clear vision of the future and an understanding of the changes. This presentation of strategy needs to stay focused on the future and the church’s vision for that future.

In the vision statement, the church identified three to five areas of focus for the ministry and mission of the church. This vision implies the church’s goal is beyond status quo and continuing to do what has always been done. Many churches are organized by programs, many of which have long lost their usefulness and effectiveness. However, because of a resistance to change, these programs continue to be administered. The church’s vision calls for a strategy that leads to the accomplishment of the vision, not the continuation of programs. Therefore, all programs and ministries of the church must be examined to see if they aid in the accomplishment

of the vision. If yes, they are re-organized under the strategic plan. If not, they are allowed to be discontinued.

This strategic examination must be conducted in four areas in the life of the church:

- Policy – Churches are notorious for establishing policies, guidelines, constitutions, and by-laws that are set in stone and allowed to control the church for decades. These policies must be brought in line with the church mission, vision, and strategy. The importance is that the policy and practice are together. In developing a strategic plan, the vision of the church shapes the policy and the practices.
- Personnel – Ministerial, support, and volunteer staff needs are a major part of a church's strategic plan. Ministries which are started require leadership. There may be a realignment of staff responsibilities and expectations with some positions, paid and/or volunteer, which no longer exist. This realignment may be a move away from a committee structure to a team approach to ministry centered on the three to five elements of the vision statement.
- Programs – As mentioned above, new programs and organization will be needed in accomplishing the vision. There may also be those programs that are no longer a part of the church's ministry.
- Partnerships – Over the years, churches form partnerships, formal and informal, with outside groups. Most, if not all, of these partnerships are good, wholesome, and meet a specific need. However, they may or may not be strategic in the accomplishment of the church's vision. Resources of time, money, and

leadership which have previously been given to these partnerships may be more effectively utilized to meet the needs of the church and its vision.

A church must realize that to say “Yes” to a new vision for the future, it must also say “No” to some of the parts of its past. That transition does not have to be harsh or mean-spirited. There may be the need for some time of transition, especially if paid staff members are involved. During this time of change and transition, there need to be opportunities to celebrate the ministries of the past and thank the Lord for the lives that have been touched. At the same time, there will be the opportunity to celebrate the “birth” of a new day of ministry and mission.

Session 4: Go Forward in Cooperation

This final session serves as a conclusion to the Participation Phase. Through this phase the pastor and Strategic Planning Team have led the congregation to formulate a mission statement, establish core values, write a vision statement, and develop a strategic plan. This final session focuses on the Implementation Phase and the incorporation the strategic plan into the life of the church. The session also allows for the discussion of the need for the church to work in cooperation with the other churches within the association to reach their shared goals.

The pastor begins this session with a short Biblical message and prayer. Several passages are appropriate and may be used for this final session. Joshua 1:8-9 emphasizes the need to move forward and cross the “Jordan”, those obstacles that stand between the church and all God has planned. The focus is on God’s call to Joshua to be strong and very courageous. The church will need strength and courage to move forward.

Another passage which the pastor may use for this final session would be Mark 2:1-12 which shares the account of four men working together to bring their paralytic friend to Jesus.

The emphasis is on overcoming obstacles through teamwork and cooperation to get the needy to Jesus.

A final passage which could be shared as an opening devotional or as a concluding thought for the session would be Jesus' words in Matthew 16:13-19. The disciples have shared the current speculations on Jesus' identity and Peter has confessed Him as the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus shares in Matthew 16:18, "And I say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." The focus is that Jesus will build His church, singular. Each individual church congregation is a part of a combined church of the Lord Jesus Christ. In a city or region, the individual congregations are part of the church of that city and region. The gates of Hades may stand against a small attack; but, as the church works as a unit, those gates will fall and souls will be rescued. The picture is of a city with high walls and thick gates, and the invading force, the Christian church, is carrying a battering ram with which it breaks down the gates of the enemy's stronghold. Everyone is needed to join together, pick up the battering ram, and see the breakthrough and victory.

The pastor relates the details of the second step in the strategic process as the churches within the association join together in a strategic planning process, much like the one just completed by the church. He shares how the churches of the association will communicate their strategic plans together. The associational Director of Mission and perhaps leaders from the state convention and/or North American Mission Board are the facilitators of this cooperative process. The purpose is for the churches to identify the common vision they share and work together to achieve that vision. Instead of working to build up an individual church, the

emphasis is to join together to build up the kingdom of God in the city, the region, and literally around the world.

The pastor and strategic planning team use this final session to complete any remaining portions of the church's strategic plan and then officially present the mission statement, core values, vision statement, and strategic plan to the church congregation for church approval and adoption. Following the adoption, the pastor and strategic planning team lead the church in a time of prayer and dedication of themselves to the Lord's plan for the church.

The last part of this session includes time to brainstorm the actions needed to begin the implementation of the church's strategic plan. The danger is to have a great plan and never get around to implementation. This brainstorming time is designed to get the process started. A separate Implementation Team may be established to see the strategic plan completed. This may be the responsibility of the Strategic Planning Team and/or church council. It may be wise to ask the Strategic Planning Team to lead in the implementation because of its personal investment in the plan.

Following the brainstorming session, the pastor thanks the Strategic Planning Team for its leadership and commissions the Implementation Team to the work of putting the plan into motion. The pastor also thanks the congregation for its participation in this process and the event is closed in a time of prayer for the future of the church.

The Implementation Phase

As stated above, this is the critical portion of the process. Many churches have developed fabulous strategic plans, only to have them sit on a shelf and never be implemented.

Aubrey Malphurs lists the following reasons for this implementation phase:¹⁵

- Accomplishes the strategic plan
- Maintains ministry momentum
- Wards off complacency
- Addresses the problem of time
- Keeps the team on track
- Nourishes faith in the process
- Heightens optimism

The pastor is the key to this phase as he was in the previous two. The pastor serves as the leader of the Implementation Team and keeps the progress before the entire congregation. There are goals to set, actions to complete, an organization to restructure, and personal matters to address. The pastor needs to assign many of the specific tasks to the members of the Implementation Team, but he must stay connected to the overall process. Periodic reports to the congregation help to keep the process before the people. The pastor is also the best person to represent the congregation on the association's Strategic Planning Team.

The church's Implementation Team will need to have regular meetings to plan, implement, and evaluate the strategic plan. It will be imperative for the team to be diligent in

¹⁵ Malphurs, 282-284.

seeing the strategic plan put into action. Malphurs recommends this team meet monthly¹⁶ and gives the following steps for the implementation process:¹⁷

Step 1: Formulate Implementation Goals

Step 2: Determine Specific Priorities

Step 3: Communicate the Goals to the Congregation

Step 4: Articulate Specific Measurable Actions

Step 5: Decide on Deadlines

Step 6: Assign Responsible Persons

Step 7: Provide the Necessary Resources

Step 8: Establish Monthly Implementation Review Meetings

The Revitalization Phase

A church's strategic plan is a living document and will need regular review, evaluation and adjustment to stay current with the church's changing needs. This will be an ongoing task of the Implementation Team.

In addition to this regular review and adjustment, the entire strategic planning process will need to be repeated every two to three years. This process is similar to the original strategic planning process with the Preparation, Participation, and Implementation Phases. There may not need to be as much new detail given, and a one session revitalization session may be sufficient.

From time to time, a complete strategic planning process will need to be experienced to address the changing needs and demographics of the church. It may be necessary as the church experiences a change in pastor or a significant growth in membership, ministries, or staff.

¹⁶ Ibid., 292.

¹⁷ Ibid., 287.

However, it seems major strategy changes made too often could be counterproductive to the effectiveness of the church.

The Associational Planning Strategy

The local Baptist association is made up of a number of churches within a geographical area. That area may be as small as an individual county or as large as a region of an entire state. These associations serve as the focal point of cooperative fellowship, ministry, and mission for the Baptist churches in the area. However, as noted previously in this paper, the surveys conducted by church and associational leaders reveal that the cooperative experiences of most churches and associations are single events which promote joint activity and fellowship but do little to present a unified ministry and mission in the area.

For several years, the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention has been leading associations in a transformational process in which the association redefines itself and creates an entirely new organization to more effectively engage the churches in ministry and missions. This process is known as an Associational Strategic Preparation Process. This process is similar to the reorganizational process used in the transformation of the associations described in Chapter 3. Each of these associations have worked through this Associational Strategic Preparation Process and identified the three or four main areas of ministry. The associations then reorganized their ministry structure, personnel, and budget around the new ministry strategies.

The model being presented in this thesis would utilize the Associational Strategic Preparation Process and be strengthened by the fact that the participating churches have conducted the strategic planning process for their church. This additional process leads each of

the association's churches to establish its own vision and strategy for the future first. Once the churches of the association have prayed through their visions and strategies, the pastors and/or church leadership will be empowered to assist in the development the association's vision and strategy. The overall purpose would be to maximize the effectiveness of the churches as they work together in achieving their shared visions and strategies. Just as the associations studied in this research share many similarities in vision and strategies, it is projected that the churches in a local association will have similar visions and strategies. The Association Planning Strategy (APS), as the thesis model will be designated, has four distinct phases: Preparation, Participation, Implementation, and Revitalization. The process also follows the Strategy Development Model which is described in the booklet, *Set the Journey: A Strategy Development Process for Associations* which is available as a free online download.¹⁸

Association Planning Strategy: Preparation Phase

The associational Director of Missions is the key person in this entire planning strategy. He functions as the missionary of the association, rallying the churches to join together in reaching the area for Christ and implementing cooperative relationships that maximize the effectiveness of the churches' ministries. The initial step will be within the heart and mind of the Director of Missions as he sees the spiritual needs of the area and the potential for cooperate ministry among the churches in meeting the needs.

The Association Planning Strategy (APS) will utilize the Association Strategic Preparation Process in preparation and participation phases. The APS is not designed to create

¹⁸ Townsend, 35.

an entirely new model for the association planning process. Many associations have been served well through the Associational Strategic Planning Process.

The Director of Missions will contact the North American Mission Board and request assistance in conducting the associational Strategic Planning Process. Information from the association will be sent to NAMB which will set a date and select a consultant.

The Director of Missions will then contact the churches within the association and ask the pastor and church leaders to come to an informational meeting describing the APS. At this initial meeting, the process and anticipated outcome for both the church strategic planning process and the Association Planning Strategy will be discussed. The pastors will then be asked to prayerfully consider leading their churches through the Strategic Planning Process as described in the previous section. A time frame will be set by the pastors to have the strategic planning process conducted and completed in their churches. The church portion could be conducted in the fall months with the association portion being conducted in the winter. This would allow for any possible reorganization of the association to be completed before the new associational year which often begins in October.

During the time set for the churches to conduct their strategic planning process, the Director of Missions will serve as a resource for the pastors and churches. Encouragement through weekly and monthly newsletters, meetings, and phone calls will serve to help the pastors as they lead into new waters. The Director of Missions will also be preparing for enlisting the APS Leadership Team. If the association is small, the team may be made up of all the pastors or a leader from each church. For larger associations, there may be the need for an APS Leadership Team of seven to twelve members representing several of the churches. This team would serve

much like the Strategic Planning Team within the churches to help with gathering data and preparing for the Participation Phase.

Association Planning Strategy: Participation Phase

It may be helpful to the North American Mission Board consultant to have the mission statement, core values, vision statement, and strategic plan from each of the churches beforehand. If so, the Director of Missions and APS Leadership Team would need to collect that information, digitally if possible, to send to the NAMB consultant.

The participation phase begins as the NAMB consultant comes to the association to meet with the Director of Missions and the pastors. Each pastor has a scheduled one-hour interview meeting with the consultant. In this meeting the pastor shares the strategic information about his church, especially the vision and strategic plan.

After these meetings the NAMB consultant, Director of Missions, and APS Leadership Team study the information shared from the churches. The goal is to identify common areas of vision and similar strategic plans among the churches. This will be important in developing an associational vision and strategic plan. This group will also be formulating the mission statement and core values for the association.

The NAMB consultant and Director of Missions will prepare for and invite the pastors and leadership from all the churches in the association to a discussion meeting. It is noted that all pastors and churches may not choose to participate in the preparation phases or in the interviews. It is important, however, to include everyone in this time of discussion and subsequent adoption

of the vision and strategic plans for the association. The preliminary mission statement, core values, vision statement, and strategic plans will be presented and discussed with opportunity for adjustments to be made through the group. Special attention will be given to the areas of common vision among the churches and shared strategic plans. The association strategic plan will seek to incorporate the thought of the churches working together in cooperation to achieve these shared plans.

Strategic development will lead the association and its churches to think and dream beyond the way things have always been done. “Strategy development challenges you to think in a different way.”¹⁹ The consideration is given to the possibilities which can be accomplished as the Lord directs and moves among His churches. This is the time to involve and incorporate the younger pastors and church leaders who have idealistic ideas of what could happen through the churches working together. For some, they have written the association off as living in the past, out-of-touch, and old-fashioned. They may be just the ones to help move the association and its leaders into a bright, new tomorrow. Given the age demographics of many association meetings, its not hard to tell there is a loss of youthful vision and vitality.

Each association will have specific procedures to present the final vision and strategic plans for adoption. This adoption will need be done in conjunction with a revision of the association structure, organization, and budget considerations. Perhaps a formal adoption and reorganization plan would be presented to the messengers at the annual meeting of the association. A preliminary report could be made prior to the official adoption to the associational Executive Board and pastors.

¹⁹ Ibid., 23.

Association Planning Strategy: Implementation Phase

The Director of Missions will play a key role in the implementation of the vision and strategic plan. He will also be influential in helping the pastors continue the vision of working together as a cooperative unit to impact the community and area. At no point does the association become a “super-church,” but it does work in cooperation with the churches as a leader, resource, and co-laborer. The role of the Director of Missions as the missionary also helps keep the focus of the work on the lost, unchurched, and uninvolved.

It is anticipated that the association leadership and ministry structure will be changed to reflect the ministry teams outlined in the vision statement and strategic plan. The leaders of these ministry teams, along with the pastors of the association, will comprise the Association Implementation Leadership Team. If the association has a large number of churches there may need to be a selection process to choose a workable number of the pastors to serve on the team. An effort to involve all the pastors from the churches in the Implementation Phase serves to integrate the churches and association into a unified entity.

The following eight-step implementation process will be utilized by the Association Implementation Leadership Team in carrying out the strategic plan:²⁰

Step 1: Formulate Implementation Goals

Step 2: Determine Specific Priorities

Step 3: Communicate the Goals to the Churches of the Association

Step 4: Articulate Specific Measurable Actions

Step 5: Decide on Deadlines

²⁰ Malphurs, 287.

Step 6: Assign Responsible Persons

Step 7: Provide the Necessary Resources

Step 8: Establish Monthly Implementation Review Meetings

The Association Implementation Leadership Team will need to meet on a monthly basis to plan, implement, and evaluate the association's strategic plan. It will be imperative for the team to be diligent in moving the strategic plan from a printed document into an achievable plan of action. As the action plans are developed, communication among team, pastors, and ministry leaders will be of utmost importance to build trust and cooperation. All pastors in the association must be kept in the communication network as the association seeks to move forward in its strategic plan.

The overarching goal during this phase is to work in cooperation with the churches in achieving the overall vision and strategic plans of both the association and the churches. The association serves as the catalyst as the churches work together for the expansion of the kingdom of God. As the churches focus on their shared vision and mission, they will present a unified body of Christ to the community. Instead of competitors for the limited Christian resources within a community, the churches of the association become co-laborers for the overall good and ultimately for the glory of God.

Association Planning Strategy: Revitalization Phase

The association's strategic plan is a living document which needs regular examination and revitalization. The monthly meetings of the Association Implementation Leadership Team

serve to keep the strategic plan before the pastors and churches so they can stay updated and current with the changing needs of the association, the churches, and the community.

In addition to this regular review and adjustment, the entire strategic planning process needs to be repeated on a regular basis with the Preparation, Participation, and Implementation Phases. During this process, an interview with the pastors of the churches within the association helps to keep the lines of communication open to these important members of the team. The Director of Missions is the one to determine the timing for a complete strategic planning process to address the changing needs and demographics of the area. The main point in this phase is to keep the strategic plan current, effective, and usable in meeting the needs of the churches and facilitating cooperative ministry within the community.

Conclusion

The two-phase strategy development plan outlined in this chapter provides the avenue for pastors, churches, and their associational leadership to begin to minister and serve with a greater sense of cooperation. This cooperation is deeper than a joint event or even a series of coordinated events. The strategy development plan provides the needed opportunities for both churches and the association to evaluate the past, analyze the present, and plan for the future.

CHAPTER 5

A NEW DAY OF COOPERATION:

RECOGNIZING AND ADDRESSING THE SIX LEVELS OF COOPERATION

Cooperation is a concept which is held as a basic belief by many Christian leaders, yet often it fails to be incorporated into the ministry plan of the church. This thesis project has been designed with the intent to develop a process to help churches within a local Baptist association work together in cooperation and strengthen their unified impact on the community for Jesus Christ. The focus has been on the direct cooperation within a Baptist association, specifically the New Salem Baptist Association in Smith County, Tennessee.

Through this thesis, a series of progressive levels of cooperation among churches have been identified. These levels or stages move from non-cooperation and independence to an understanding of the church of the city which is made up of the various congregations within the city. Churches may move from one level of cooperation to another through an understanding of the biblical teachings of cooperation and a sense of unified vision and mission.

The first level of cooperation could actually be termed a level of non-cooperation. This level is found in churches which are totally independent of any other church, association, or denomination. Many of these churches base their independent ways on the theological conviction that the local church is the only accepted entity recognized by Jesus. They do not believe in denominations or any type of organized associations. At this level there is no participation in or cooperation through an organized entity such as an association or convention. “The Holy Scriptures positively know nothing whatsoever of any kind of a general body such as

associations, conventions, or any kind of organized movement of Christianity other than a local congregation known as a church.”¹

To move beyond this first level of cooperation requires a biblical understanding of cooperation which recognizes all believers as part of one universal Body of Christ.² Jesus does not have multiple bodies but one body, the church. The biblical picture of the church as the Bride of Christ³ also reinforces this unity. Instead of multiple wives, Jesus has only one pure bride which serves as the example to Christian couples of the relationship between a husband and wife.⁴ Many scriptures which present the biblical teaching for churches to serve together in a spirit of cooperation have been included in this thesis.

The second level of cooperation is seen as churches join together with other local churches and community groups in responding to shared needs, crises, and concerns. The unifying issue may be an ongoing social need such as feeding the hungry or in response to a local disaster such as a flood, tornado, or hurricane. The cooperation is centered on the relief of physical need and does not require theological agreement. Once the crisis or need has passed, there will often be little cooperation among the churches until the next need arises.

The third level of cooperation is characteristic of churches within the Southern Baptist Convention as they join together in state and national conventions through contributing finances for shared mission and ministry causes. These ministries include national and foreign missions,

¹ M.L. Moser, “The Case for Independent Baptist Churches,” *A Baptist Voice*, December 13, 1977, www.abaptistvoice.com/English/Books/TheCaseForIndependentBaptistChurches.htm (accessed February 24, 2012).

² Eph. 4:4

³ Rev. 21:9

⁴ Eph. 5:21-33

theological education, and children's homes. This level of cooperation involves a limited amount of direct involvement of the churches or believers with others and is centered mainly on the monetary support of the convention or society structure.

The fourth level of cooperation is found as churches gather together in conducting evangelistic, mission, and ministry events. Examples of these local events are an area-wide revival, a regional Bible conference, and a city-wide evangelistic crusade. Another example would be as youth groups of several churches join together in a community project or a joint youth camp. The churches participating in these events would have shared ministry goals, outcomes, and theological beliefs. This is the level at which many traditional Baptist associations operate through their shared beliefs, projects, and community concerns.

The fifth level of cooperation has been the focus of this thesis project as churches join together through the local Baptist association in strategic planning for reaching their shared goals, vision, and mission. These churches work together for the benefit of the individual church as well as for the good of the whole association.

The Strategic Planning Process developed in this thesis establishes a two-part model for churches and the association to plan, develop, and implement a cooperative mission which increases the impact on the community for Jesus Christ. This process establishes a biblical basis for cooperation and achieves the goal of the thesis, as stated on page 4, "to develop a missional model for Baptist churches within a local association to work together in cooperation for the advancement of the overall work of Jesus Christ."

The initial part of the model addresses the need for strategic planning and implementation within the churches individually. The pastors and church leaders commit to and lead the strategic planning process within their churches seeking to establish the churches' unique vision,

core values, mission, and strategic plan. The model presents a simple, four-session format which leads the church through the process and involves the largest number of church members. The key to the success of the strategic plan is the implementation team which follows the plan yet realizes it is a living document which must be regularly reviewed and adjusted as needed to remain a useable document and strategic plan.

The second part of the model involves the pastors and leaders of the local Baptist association as they formulate a joint strategic plan which serves the churches and maximizes their impact on the community. Of the resources available, the consultants of the North American Mission Board are recommended because of their proven track-record of assisting associations through this process. Again, the usefulness of the association's strategic plan is in the implementation and revitalization processes.

The sixth level of cooperation is reached as the churches of the association develop the understanding that there is but one church in the community which is made up of multiple congregations. Churches and leaders at this level view the church not as an entity that meets in a specific building on the corner of Main Street and Fite Avenue but realize the church is made up of all believers in Jesus Christ meeting in multiple congregations throughout the city. The church is more than one congregation or even one denomination. "The scorecard can no longer be about how well our individual congregations are doing. The condition of our communities is the scorecard on how well the church is doing at being the people of God."⁵

This understanding of the church in a city or area is neither a new concept nor a divergence from the Biblical expression of church. In fact, the New Testament references to the

⁵ Eric Swanson and Sam Williams, *To Transform a City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 12.

church in a geographic location are never about an individual congregation, gathering, or group. The references are always to the church in a specific city or region. In cities with hundreds, perhaps thousands of believers, it is this author's opinion there were numerous congregations but all considered as one church. Those early congregations would meet in synagogues⁶, homes⁷, and schools⁸.

The local Baptist association, along with the individual churches, can begin a movement which will result in reuniting the church and reaching the city through service, ministry, and evangelism. The goal would be to impact the city and region in such a way that lives are transformed, churches are renewed, and ultimately the community is impacted by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Cooperation is no longer seen as an event to attend or a time of fellowship for Christians to enjoy but as the necessary ingredient which flows among believers for a specific purpose, reaching the city with the message of Jesus Christ. No longer is the church shackled by the question, "What is in it for me and my church?" The sense of purpose and the shared goal of impacting the city for Christ are the unifying agents which keep the church moving forward together.

Pastors, churches, and associations which reach this sixth level of cooperation have internalized the covenant agreement and begun to serve with greater unity. Listed below are ways in which the covenant agreement is lived out in the lives of the churches:

⁶ Acts 13:5

⁷ Col. 4:13

⁸ Acts 19:9

- They treat each other as members of the same team, recognizing the unique contributions and ministry of each church while keeping the overall focus on the mission of impacting the community.
- The churches have an agreed-upon doctrinal statement, such as the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, which serves to build faith and trust in the members of the association.
- The churches and association have actively participated in the strategic planning process and are implementing the strategic plan in a cooperative way to exalt Jesus Christ, impact lostness, and share the gospel to the entire community.
- Through the process the churches have established working relationships with each other and continue to encourage other churches within the association to become involved in the unified efforts to reach the community.
- The churches have a kingdom mindset as they focus on multiplication of ministry sites, congregations, and churches. There is an open sharing of resources, both personnel and material, for the strengthening of the overall ministry and mission.

One may ask, “What about other evangelical churches in the community? Are they part of the ‘church in the city’ as well?” The answer is that all believers in Jesus Christ are part of the church and the ultimate goal would be to unite all Christian congregations together in a shared sense of purpose, mission, and service to the community. However, it is idealistic to think that every church congregation will choose to join together in the call for cooperation and unity. The key point is that no congregation be excluded and that every Christian congregation has the opportunity to be included in the overall mission of Christ. Believers in Jesus Christ can do more in a community as a unified body rather than splintered groups with individual and often self-serving agendas.

The surveys and interview process used within this thesis give an indication of the understanding and level of cooperation of the pastors, associational workers, and denominational leaders. For the majority, it seems cooperation is centered in level four, churches joining together for shared events and activities. To move to a greater level of cooperation, a church and its leadership must become intentional in their work toward unity and cooperation.

Throughout the process the local Baptist association continues to be seen as the strategic entity which is best equipped to help draw churches together and keep the overall focus centered on the mission and ministry of reaching the community with the love and gospel of Jesus Christ. The association, and particularly the Director of Missions, can be the catalyst of cooperative and missionary vision. The point has been emphasized that the Baptist association is the focal point of direct local cooperation among the churches. The goal is to develop a biblical model of church cooperation through which the churches within a local Baptist association may work together in cooperation and unity for the glory of God.

This thesis has presented a model for a unified Strategic Planning Process within and among the churches of a local Baptist association. The lines of relationship and leadership are already established which gives a place for trust, acceptance, and cooperation to begin. Ministerial alliances, local pastor prayer groups, and others may see the unified stance of the Baptist association and desire to be a part of the mission and purpose. The goal is not to build up an individual congregation, although that prayerfully will happen in the process. The goal is to present a process through which churches can join together to make a transformational impact on the community so that people's lives are touched, and they come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

The challenge is given for a renewed vision in which all believers and congregations within a city, community, and region live with a shared sense of mission and purpose which presents a unified church whose purpose is to reach and minister to the community through shared vision, resources, leadership, and events. The individual church congregations will seek ways to encourage, assist, and support one another in their mission to reach the community and the world. As the congregations within a city work together in a spirit of unity, they minister, witness and serve as the church in the city. This unity of vision, mission, and purpose is the beginning of a new day of cooperation which is in reality a return to the pattern of the early church congregations as they multiplied and expanded in the cities and towns of the known world. It is also a return to the prayer of Jesus Christ as He prayed,

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”⁹

The local Baptist association is the entity which best serves to lead the churches to a greater level of cooperation as it engages the churches, pastors, and leaders to plan strategically and act cooperatively to impact the community. The church works as a unified body to make the greatest impact in the lives of the people in the local area and around the world.

⁹ John 17:20-23

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE AND RESPONSES ON COOPERATION

1. How would you define cooperation?

- When churches realize that the focal point of all Christian ministries is Jesus. Some churches worship with musical instruments, some have no musical instruments, some put their hands up, others don't, some shout out while others are more reverent, etc.; but focusing on the different ways in which people feel led to worship only takes the focus off of Jesus. Trying to force one's own style of worship on others only causes division among churches and church members.
- Working together, not fighting.
- Cooperation is an interaction between churches that is beneficial to each church body and that strengthens and builds the Kingdom of God.
- Doing more together than we could by ourselves.
- Cooperation among churches is when churches with the same beliefs about salvation work together to see the lost saved.
- Cooperation is when two or more people or groups unite for a common good and a common goal and combine their energy, strength, resources to achieve those common goals. For churches it is when two or more churches find koinonia and unite and give of themselves and resources (time, building, people, finances, gifts, talents, faith, and prayers) for the good of the Great Commission and the Great Commandment for the Calling of their Lord.
- Churches working together to tell all people about the love of Jesus.

- I would define it as a church joining with other churches for the purpose of carrying out their mission locally and around the world.
- Churches partnering together across denominational lines to make community-wide impact.
- The body of Christ.
- Cooperation between churches takes place when two or more groups of believers come together to achieve a common goal- whether that goal is to evangelize sinners, edify saints, or promote the teachings of Christ and standards of God in a given place or organization. Such cooperation should be both Spiritually and strategically motivated.
- The depth of a cooperative relationship should be determined by the degree of doctrinal congruency between the associating bodies. It is reasonable that one body who wishes to cooperate with another can do so without giving full endorsement to the others' doctrine, and without considering themselves ecumenists. But the bodies should use caution to determine which issues to be addressed through partnership.
- Once parameters are established for the relationship, plans for working together can be discussed and put into practice. In many cases, far more can be accomplished by two or more churches than by one church working alone. Those involved in the cooperative process are also exposed to the notion of whole-Kingdom involvement which can benefit the churches individually.
- Two or two hundred agreed on a purpose or mission, working together to change a culture.
- We will learn to hang together or we will hang.

- Churches working together on particular and intentional ministry projects or outreach endeavors that could be more effectively and efficiently done together. This is especially helpful for smaller churches to have more help plus the camaraderie between fellow believers serving Christ. It would entail prayer, worship, ministry, and fellowship.
- Cooperation among churches is something that varies from community to community. Cooperation to me is more important in smaller communities, where most people know one another very well. Cooperation is when churches work together to have events, ministries, and other acts of Kingdom work.
- Cooperation as it pertains to the church would, in my mind, be a joining together of churches (pastors and laity) to provide avenues for furthering the gospel (be they evangelistic or charitable) that were neither competitive nor unproductive.
- Cooperation for Kingdom growth is not just about interdenominational churches having a service together or “partnering” up to buy Bibles for the graduating class at the local high school. Cooperation is exactly what it is defined as: It is working together for a certain goal or purpose. In this case, cooperating churches are working together with one goal in mind and that is reaching people for Christ. Cooperation is not competition; it is two or more churches being able to humbly set aside doctrine interpretations and focusing on the goal in which Christ has set for us as His people.

2. What scriptures do you think refer to cooperation among churches?

- I read Romans chapter 10 yesterday. Verses 9 thru 13 come to my mind.

- I don't know that I think any scripture refers directly to this, but I can think of Ephesians 4:2-7 where we read about one body, one faith, one baptism. I also think the Great Commission might be calling churches to join together to reach the world.
- I often use Matthew 9:35-10:1 due to the fact that Jesus calls not to one disciple but to all of them to pray and to go in order to impact the lost world. I have used Acts 2. But when I am in Acts I prefer to use Acts 3-4 because though it was Peter and John that were threatened they went to the whole church and the whole church went into action.
- Leviticus 19:18, John 14:15, Romans 12:1-2, Hebrews 13:1, II Peter 1:5-9. I am sure that there are many more that apply. But, this is all I have off the top of my head.
- The Great Commission, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them ..." Matt. 28:19-20
- Philippians 4:2-4; James 4:1-3; Proverbs 6:16-19
- Ephesians 3:2-16; 4:11-16; 2 Corinthians 5:19-20; 9:6-11
- Acts 11:29-30, 15:22-27
- 2 Corinthians 8:1-7, 16-24
- II John 1-4
- Matthew 16:18-19
- To be honest, until now, I have not even thought of this in reference to Scripture, even though I feel it is something that Scripture would encourage. These passages come to mind: I Corinthians 3:9, Acts 2, Ephesians 4:5 and the over-arching idea that all of us are "the Body of Christ."
- Romans 10:13-15; Matthew 28:19-20; Psalm 78:1-7

- Although there is not one proof text stating that churches should cooperate together, it is obvious the churches understood the necessity of doing so. Acts 15:23 tells us the church leaders at Jerusalem sent letters to the churches of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia urging them to observe some of the Jewish laws and those who received the letters cooperated. Acts 8 tells us the churches of Macedonia cooperated together in an offering to help the disciples at Jerusalem during the famine. But even if we did not have these examples we would know from the example of the church being like a body with many parts that must cooperate together that this same principle would apply to churches working together for the advance of the Gospel.
- Nehemiah 4:6; Psalm 131:1; John 17:23; Acts 1-2; Ephesians 4:3
- John 13:34-35
- Matthew 12:25 Ephesians 4:1-6 Psalms 133:1
- I instantly think of Matthew 18:20 that says, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” Another set of Scriptures would be 2 Timothy 4. Also, Philippians 1:3-5 and 1 Thess. 5:14-22

3. What are the benefits of cooperation between churches?

- Lost people are amazed, my people get a kingdom vision, stereotypes get destroyed, Jesus is lifted up.
- By taking the focus off of our different worship styles, we can then center our focus on reaching others for Jesus.
- Growth, understanding of others.
- Ministry is more fun together.

- Seeing great things accomplished.
- Where one is weak the strong is able to strengthen.
- Where one is blest others are able to be blest.
- It delivers us from self-centeredness and a self-focus.
- The benefit of cooperation between the churches would be that a great deal of the argument for “non-belief” would become groundless. I have an ongoing dialog with a number of unbelievers. One of the most common arguments I get is that “Christians” in general can’t get along within their own church let alone with other congregations so how can they be “representative” of a loving GOD if they are arguing with each other. When you have “church members” behaving in a manner that reflects competition rather than cooperation and judging others rather than charity it colors the view of anyone who is watching us to see if we are genuine.
- It keeps us from becoming Lukewarm, Lukewarm people are generally all about staying satisfied.
- It helps us to see how large the Body of Christ is.
- It makes us family
- We are able to do more together than we can apart.
- God gets the glory instead of one church or one believer.
- Spiritual growth takes place by rubbing shoulders with other believers.
- Impact the community and world for Christ.
- Helps individual churches think outside their walls.
- Gives members opportunities to lead, serve, and grow.
- Cooperation pleases the heart of the Father.

- See we are part of something bigger than ourselves.
- We can learn from one another.
- There is strength when we serve together. A chord of three strands is not easily broken.
- Sweet, lovely fellowship, things get accomplished.
- I think first and foremost, it allows Christ to work through those individual bodies with encouragement and in knowing Christ is being exalted. I also feel that Christians are stronger in numbers. More can be accomplished with more workers; meaning more people can be reached for the Kingdom.
- Expands the kingdom of God, not individual kingdom.
- We can learn to appreciate Christians in other churches. We can meet believers who become friends and prayer partners. It is good for a lost world to see us getting along. Members of smaller churches can participate in events that they would not be able to have in their own churches.
- There is no way that one church or one denomination could teach all nations.
- Cooperation between churches builds relationships between people and tears down old mindsets that divide and separate the body of Christ. Cooperation encourages the body of Christ to unity for a common purpose and that is to build the kingdom of God through evangelism and discipleship.
- When churches cooperate they are able to do more and more effective ministries than one church can do alone. Cooperation also builds fellowship with other believers and brings doctrinal stability among the cooperating churches.
- The benefits are that we model the idea that there is only one Church, those who are the body of Christ, working together for a more Christ-like world.

- Meeting new people, accomplishing something together that would be hard for one church to carry out alone. Witness in the community that churches can work well together.

4. What are the drawbacks of cooperation?

- Messy, difficult to get everyone together and on the same page.
- None
- Have to give up individual preferences for the whole. Individuality can be lost.
- Not always being able to do what your church wants to do. Member leaving the church due to not agreeing with what is being done or not being done.
- Sometimes worship styles are so varied that there might be issues. I guess churches could become competitive about the potential membership of those who are saved.
- Sometimes, it can take away from the passion and momentum a particular congregation may be experiencing. There is also the danger that a particular congregation may lose its identity.
- There can't be any lone rangers.
- The drawbacks to cooperation vary from differences in church doctrine to simple dislike for each other. But, communication is the key to cooperation in my opinion. There is absolutely NO way to find common ground until we establish a dialog that is completely grounded in the love of Christ. Until every Christian is completely willing to put Christ first (before self) and let that color their conversation with ALL people we will not have genuine cooperation. This is the biggest obstacle to the gospel in the free world.
- The time that it often takes to get us united and even started.

- The fact that we are not all the same and even churches of the same denomination aren't the same and some times those surprises slow us down.
- There must be not only a common goal and plan there must be some that can lead us to work together for those. An excellent example of that working well is seen in the leadership of Randy Davis, Executive Director of the Tennessee Baptist Convention.
- The leader or leaders must be trusted by all if cooperation is going to achieve its purposes. The drawback is we are often much slower in trusting others to lead.
- Cooperation requires long term commitment and today that kind of commitment is on short supply. This brings up the issue of loyalty, and in a culture where there is very little loyalty cooperation is going to be lacking.
- Well, with any group of believers there are many personalities and opinions which used in the flesh could be very discouraging and with a larger amount of those personalities and opinions brings a greater chance of people losing focus.
- Missions must be organized, to include the efforts of all people that want to help.
- When there is no agreed upon mission.
- Becoming involved in another church's problems (sin, doctrinal).
- Defending the partnership to those who may not understand.
- Making sure the work is quality, taken seriously, and the collaboration has real value.
- Time.
- A sense of arrogance. Most churches who are independent have a pride and ego problem.
- For churches to cooperate together there must be mutually agreed upon doctrinal standards and practices and many times individual churches will not adhere to these

standards and this creates problems which the cooperating churches must address. This often results in divisions and hurts.

- Each church has its own culture, preferences, beliefs, traditions.
 - Control issues. Who makes the decisions? Baptists pride themselves in being autonomous; no one tells them what to do.
 - Just the logistics of getting more people together.
 - I do not see any drawbacks to do with cooperation between churches.
5. What are specific examples you have seen of cooperation among churches?
- One church a city wide outreach event, Backpack program, Be the church day, Steven Street care center.
 - The largest scale cooperative effort that comes to my mind is the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions.
 - Pastors and other believers joining together for prayer.
 - Ministry centers. Christmas store operated by several churches serving 450 families.
 - Tennessee Baptist Disaster Relief organization.
 - The things that I have seen locally that give me hope for cooperation among the churches is that several of our local church leaders join together as one to give out food to the needy at the Second Harvest food drop; the Smith County Ministerial Alliance and the Revival on the River that joins several ministers from different denominations join together for worship.
 - Churches joining together for a combined revival.
 - Food pantries, crisis pregnancy counseling, Christmas gifts.

- The Golden Offering of the Tennessee Baptist Convention is an excellent example.
- The Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention has proven to be effective for ages.
- Associations and Mission Trips
- Disaster Relief is perhaps one of the best example of cooperation among the SBC today and when you take into consideration the nation and you add the Red Cross, and all of the other denominations working together in times of crisis you have a great example.
- Supporting new or struggling churches.
- Evangelistic and Discipleship efforts.
- This past year our churches were involved in a Thanksgiving meal handout throughout our entire county. It was awesome to see all of the different denominations and different bodies of Christ coming together for one purpose. We also have a mission center in which some of our other brothers in the faith have started helping in ministering to the people of our community without any boundaries.
- Working to together to bring people to Christ. Some times it is easier when more than one church works on an issue/project. They do not get burned out.
- Simultaneous revivals. Billy Graham Crusades. Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention.
- Churches working together in a community crisis pregnancy center.
- Sponsoring events, praying together, revival services, dramas like Heaven's Gates, Hell's Flames, youth events, women's events, Billy Graham crusades, our own associational work, mission trips that involve people from other churches, choirs, offerings for the

roofing project in Poplar, women's conference at Lighthouse! Beth Moore Bible studies and simulcasts, holiday services like the community thanksgiving service,

- The Cooperative Program is a giant cooperation of churches, where local churches contribute to send missionaries anywhere we can to tell others about Christ.
- Stronger churches in the South helping weaker churches in pioneer mission areas of the United States.
- Revival by the River has been an evangelist event that has brought the churches of our community together for worship and a common mission of reaching the unsaved. Through this event I feel people of different denominations have realized that we have more things in common that would unite us than that would divide us.
- Food distribution at Ag-Center brought churches together for a common purpose to feed the hungry.
- Emmanuel House Ministry to women and children.
- Working at the local places that assist the needy, combined worship, Habitat for Humanity, Mission trips, Youth events, ministerial alliance.
- Outreach to target areas in our communities through our association. We also work together in TBC cluster groups—comprised of several associations in our region.

6. What are hindrances you have seen to cooperation among churches?

- Sin, fear, small vision.
- Personal Agendas, Traditions, Cliques in the church
- Disagreements.
- Afraid of what the group is up to.

- People in churches who are not saved.
- Differences of theology, of goals, of philosophies of missions and Christianity
- Territorialism continues to work against new church starts.
- Independent natures of pastors and lay people.
- Christians, as a whole, need to focus on compassion and love more. If we all learned to “bridle the tongue” by thinking of who is listening and how it would affect the listener we could breakdown so many walls that stand between us and the lost.
- The need for the "glory"
- Many larger churches house ministries in themselves.
- People make issues, such as King James Version only, hymns, etc., a test of cooperation.
- Decline in charitable dollars keep churches focused more on survival and less on cooperation with others.
- Doctrinal arguments.
- Socioeconomic differences between congregations.
- Past cooperation that because of poor planning or vision was not considered successful.
- Pride. Fear. Pastor’s ego not wanting to share the limelight. Building their kingdom instead of God’s.
- Lack of clear vision and purpose for getting together.
- Not surrendered to the Lord.
- Too many differences in worship, members of churches not feeling obligated to participate if several churches are involved, sometimes it feels awkward to go into a church building to worship if that is not your home church,
- We still need more people to be willing to share the gospel.

- The greatest hindrance I have seen is the lack of doctrinal standards causing conservative churches to not join with other more liberal churches.
- The main hindrance I feel is that we all bring our theological biases, which can be a problem in achieving unity. We also tend to exhibit our human condition, which promotes sinful selfishness.
- I think sometimes larger churches are so busy with their ministries it's hard to get together with other churches. Also, I believe smaller churches sometimes may resent larger churches because they may perceive them to be better equipped.
- Pastors unwilling to get involved and lead their churches to cooperate and work with other churches. People who are prejudiced toward other denominations.
- Traditional values of each church and narrow-mindedness when trying to worship together.

7. What are steps a church can take to strengthen cooperation with others?

- Don't worry about who gets the credit or the increase, just do what is right.
- Take the focus off of our differences. This must begin in each individual church. How can a church cooperate with another church if some of its own members are expressing dissatisfaction with how other members worship (i.e., not holding hands up, not clapping with the songs, etc).
- Fellowship with believers from other churches builds relationships.
- There is no cooperation without the Spirit of God.
- Praying together on a consistent basis.
- There are several ways to strengthen interdenominational cooperation such as

community worship and service programs. I myself am working on my love walk in the hope of helping a young man who is an atheist to find the LORD. This is very hard when I want to shout the truth at him every time I see him. But, I know you can't beat someone over-the-head with religion and expect them to find the love of Christ. That tactic has never worked.

- They must be willing to have a servant heart. They must be willing to allow others to get the glory. They must have a spirit that does not need to be seen.
- The pastor and leaders must lead by example and not just by exhortation.
- Churches joining together on a mission trip helps them see the bigger picture.
- Celebrate the victories of other congregations. Crucify the flesh.
- Work together. Both sides need to feel as if what they have to say is important and all ideas need to be worked out. One church should not be controlling and working the other church members like slaves.
- Church leaders spending time together intentionally, and in prayer
- Start with small projects that have a high probability of success
- Nominate mature members of the bodies to plan and coordinate projects with oversight from pastors.
- Set clear dates, goals, and steps to accomplish the goals, as well as create a rubric by which to judge success.
- Pray, ask God to lead the efforts, pastors can meet and plan, be focused on evangelism instead of logistics, be open to differences as long as the Gospel is not compromised.

- On the local level, we can support other churches by attending meetings at other churches when we are invited. We should attend revivals at other churches, mission meetings, etc.
- Individual churches should teach that all born again believers are brothers and sisters in the Lord and we should love one another. Getting to know other churches of like faith and practice is essential to building a trust relationship with them. Individual churches must have a world view of our mission to motivate cooperation.
- A laser sharp focus on the Great Commission.
- Develop and maintain a close relationship among the Pastors, who can model what it means to work together for the transformation of the world. Schedule more events in mission work and outreach events for the poor.
- Meet on specific and pertinent projects. Let each church have a special part or task to lead in.
- Get involved with cooperative events: Love one another. Have an open mind.
- I feel the greatest step would be to always remind ourselves of who we are serving (Jesus Christ). Having good leadership within those cooperating churches is also key in bringing churches together either in interdenominational or denominational groups. I also think that in presenting such steps it is important not to dwell so much on advertising those churches coming together. In other words, do not let the main focus be about the churches working together or making statements that involve “See we can come together.” I think that draws too much attention on the cooperating bodies rather than keeping the attention on the reason for cooperating together, which is for Christ’s glory.

8. What do you see as the future of cooperation between churches?

- Increasing across denominational lines, little difference within the denominations.
- Ideally, one Christian church in each city, like the 1st century Christian churches.
Realistically, by joint efforts of churches to give time and resources to spreading the Gospel of Jesus locally and around the world.
- Church growth.
- I am hoping that the present needs of the world will call us and challenge us to cooperate even more so than ever before.
- I see cooperation taking place more on a micro level, between community churches. I believe there are certain contributing factors that will cause cooperative program-style giving (and going) to fall out of favor in the next several years.
- Local church members are realizing more that they are not following Christ unless they are following His Commission and Commandments themselves.
- Also, church members want to hold accountable those they send. I look for local churches to cooperate and send more missionaries over the next few decades, should the Lord tarry.
- As long as our ministers and church leaders continue to set the example and lead us the future of cooperation between the churches will succeed. It is only when we as individuals seek to establish our own agendas that we hinder not only interdenominational cooperation but the kingdom of heaven as well.
- I believe younger church leaders will lead congregations to cooperate across denominations as well. The advent of the information age has brought a better understanding of doctrines, methods, dogma- and some groups once believed to be

enemies are now seen as those which interpret Scripture differently. While we cannot fully endorse those outside our denomination, we can work toward common interests.

- Continued challenge not to drift to our personal agendas.
- Everything, even churches and Christians, move toward selfishness. Churches start with the Spirit then move toward self-centered preferences.
- Focus on a few things that are vitally important.
- The upcoming generation tends to want to see their money used for personal ministry.
- I think it can remain as it is in our area. I think technology makes it easier and easier for churches to work together (using email for planning, advertisement, the capability of a simulcast)
- I think our church, and the churches of our community are doing a better job of cooperating with one another. The play, "Heaven's Gates, and Hell's Fury" was a joint effort of our association that saw many souls saved.
- I have a negative view of the future of cooperation. Larger churches seem to have no need of smaller churches and make no effort to join with them. It seems the "me-ism" of our modern culture has permeated the thinking of big church pastors as they have the resources to be self-sufficient; this is the Laodicea thinking of "I have need of nothing"¹. Smaller churches seem to have no motivation to carry on ministries other than in their own church and it is increasingly more difficult to get them involved in something other than what directly benefits their local church.

¹ Revelation 3:17

- I feel it will be a struggle, because all of us have the tendency of being selfish. This is a part of the human condition, but I know and trust that God will work a miracle in order to enable us to work together in a more effective way.
- I believe it depends on the individual churches that are seeking to work together. Pastors/staff ministers are key in building the relationships with one another and promoting the project/ministry well with their congregations and by encouraging their congregations' involvement.
- I hope to see churches coming together more to fulfill the great commission and to meet the needs of the people in our community.
- I see a future that is really up to how willing each body will be in realizing the importance of the message of Christ. Denomination is man-made. Our future relies upon man's willingness to humble themselves before the Lord and allowing Him to lead and guide each and every church. If we can ever grasp a Kingdom-minded world there is no telling what would happen.

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO PASTORS IN FANNIN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

In our ever changing world your church must continually be on the cutting edge of making an impact in your community. My prayer is that every FBA church will be relevant and effective. To assist you in achieving this ideal, we are partnering with the North American Missions Board by asking you to participate in a church assessment that will aid the FBA in relevancy and in resourcing your ministry and church.

The North American Mission Board has been developing, and continues to develop, processes to assist churches as they reach their communities for Christ. One of these processes has been called the **Associational Strategic Preparation Process**. This process involves many entities such as the North American Mission Board, State Conventions, Life Way, Associations, local churches, and local businesses and organizations of like faith. There is also a large network of churches and individuals across North America joining hands and hearts with the towns and communities engaged in this effort.

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the interest of the North American Mission Board to engage you in the Associational Strategic Preparation Process, and to ask you to prayerfully consider joining with others who have a desire to see God move in their town/community in a mighty way as they enter into a time of preparation.

Enclosed in this letter are two documents we need you to fill out and bring to the interview. First, is the **Key Indicators** sheet and second, is your **Church Ministry Plan/Vision Statement**. A sample ministry plan/vision statement is enclosed as a guide; if you need assistance in composing your plan please call me. In the next few weeks I will be personally contacting you to set a time either on **September 17th or 18th** that would best suit your schedule.

You will have an opportunity to bring your input to the table in a Diagnosis of your ministry area and the FBA as a whole. This will help us to begin to address the issues that will be the beginning of a great movement of God in your church and the FBA.

Please begin now to pray about your involvement, and when the opportunity presents itself, step forward and accept the challenge of reaching your town/community for Christ. Your participation in this diagnosis assessment process will assist us in being able to more effectively assist, support and resource the unique, God-given vision of your church as it fulfills its God-given purpose. I appreciate you and your ministry.

Dr. Jerry Christopher

Director of Missions

Fannin Baptist Association

Key Indicators

Association: _____

Church: _____

City (location of church): _____

Age of church: _____ Phone #: _____

Pastor: _____

E-mail: _____

Phone #: _____

How long have you pastored this church: _____

Person interviewed (if not pastor): _____

Key Indicators (last full year of information accumulated):

- Baptisms: _____
- Average Weekly Church Attendance: _____
- Undesignated Giving to the Church (annually): \$ _____
 - Association Giving (annually): \$ _____
 - Cooperative Program Giving (annually): \$ _____
- Number of Churches started by your Church: _____

- Partnerships your Church is involved in: _____

“Sample” Church Ministry/Vision Plan

(Pastor will fill in his church’s information and bring to interview session)

I have been the pastor of Sample Baptist Church (SBC) for two years. Our church averages 72 in worship and is in a community of approximately 20,000 people in a five mile radius. The church budget is \$56,000 for a per capita giving of \$15.00 per attendee per week. Our church baptized eight people the first year and seven people last year. We are involved in helping support a mission effort in Romania and have been involved in that project for just over a year now. The population in our church field is fairly diverse, blue collar, and very traditional. The statistics tell us that 52% of the people in the five mile radius do not profess to be Christians and do not attend a church anywhere in the city as far as we know.

The vision I believe God would have us to achieve has several aspects, but all are inter-related.

- First of all, I believe our church should double in attendance in the next five years, and be averaging around 140-150. If we grow 20% over each of the next three years and 10% the next two years, we would be averaging 148 at the end of five years. We realize that we are not going to be able to do that by doing just what we have done over the last two years. In order to reach 14 people next year, we are going to do the following outreach activities:
 - Conduct a community needs assessment. This will involve our church members in better understanding our church field and how they can play a role in reaching this community for Christ.
 - Conduct a series of evangelistic events in the community aimed at addressing the top need as discovered in the community assessment. This will require many in our church to be trained in how to share their faith in the marketplace and during an outreach event.
 - Conduct at least four Backyard Bible Clubs in four key locations that address the diverse people groups living in our church field.

- Preach messages that lead people to come to a place of decision regarding their spiritual life and eternity.
- Secondly we believe that 70% of those added to the church in that five year period should be those who have been led to Christ by our church members. We believe that if we equip our people and get them into our community, then the number of people reached will significantly affect our baptisms over the next five years. We also believe that if we are successful with our first objective, then a significant number of those reached will be of a different people group than what has traditionally been the makeup of our church. For this to be successful we must help our church members understand and embrace the various cultural differences we have, but also recognize that we are one in Christ. This process will require a drastic increase in the number of leaders needed in our church to minister to the new believers and those from other cultures. To achieve this objective we must do the following:
 - Inform and educate our people in the cultural diversity found in our community.
 - Train leaders from those cultures that are reached and give them leadership roles in our church.
 - Prepare for the addition of other staff members that will change the dynamic of the church as people have known it in the past.
 - Begin to address future space and resources needed to achieve our vision.
- For our church to be able to do what we believe God is leading us to do, our budget must also double over the next five years, just to keep pace. We must go beyond that to be as effective as we can be. To accomplish that, we must do the following:
 - Share with our people the biblical teaching and mandate to give as the scripture teaches.
 - Help them to better understand how we work together to address the Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost from a practical way that allows us to be involved in Kingdom things globally.
 - Keep them informed of where our church is regarding the giving, and what the money is being used to accomplish.
 - Always be open and honest with the people regarding finances.

- If our church achieves the objectives laid out thus far, there will, of necessity, need to be consideration given to establishing new congregations among the people groups being reached through our outreach events and other community activities. We would seek to establish two new congregations over the next five years among the people groups in our church field. We realize that we as a congregation cannot possibly accomplish this on our own, but we will seek to do the following to make these congregations a reality:
 - Seek out other pastors of like passion and partner with them to establish these congregations.
 - Seek out the help and support of the local association, state convention, and national entities to assist us in reaching out to the people in our church field.
 - Seek to establish these new congregations with a success mentality, not a survival mentality.
 - Encourage our church members to become involved in helping these new congregations grow and become strong forces for Christ in our neighborhoods.

This brief statement of the vision of our church only takes in the first steps in a five year process and is not by any means exhaustive in the things we will seek to do, but it does give us a picture of a preferred future for our church and some broad strokes as to how we can get there.

This sample gives a basic idea of what a church believes God wants them to accomplish and what the next steps are to the best of their understanding. This is what would be helpful from each church in the association and the city. From these individual vision statements we can get a good idea of what needs to be done next.

GUIDE FOR WRITING YOUR CHURCHES MISSION STATEMENT/VISION PLAN

(Dear DOM, this is a guide you can send to your pastors in lieu of the long version Vision Plan or make up an outline for their use.)

Church: _____

Pastor: _____

Association: _____

Date: _____

I believe the most important goals for our church in the days ahead are:

In order for our church to be in full accordance with God's will we need to:

My greatest concerns for our church in the days ahead are:

APPENDIX C

CHURCH MEMBER VISION SURVEY



Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female Age: _____

Marital Status: ☐ Married ☐ Never-Married
☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed

FBCC Membership: ☐ Not Member ☐ Less than 1 yr
☐ 2-10 Years ☐ Over 10 years

In a typical month, how often do you attend:

☐ Sunday Morning Worship ☐ Sunday School
☐ Sunday Night Worship ☐ Wednesday Night

How long do you travel to church? _____ minutes _____ miles

Prioritize the following (1,2,3,...) which you think should receive more emphasis in the next three years:

<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday Worship	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Ministry
<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday School	<input type="checkbox"/> Children's Ministry
<input type="checkbox"/> Music Ministry	<input type="checkbox"/> Preschool Ministry
<input type="checkbox"/> Discipleship	<input type="checkbox"/> Evangelism
<input type="checkbox"/> Missions Emphasis	

What do you believe our church does best?

In what area do you believe the church can improve?

Are there new ministries/programs you envision?

What do you see as the greatest immediate space and/or building needs?

What do you envision to be major challenges the church will face in the next ten years?

How do you see the church in the year 2020?

APPENDIX D
CORE VALUES SURVEY

Please answer each of these questions.

1. What do people inside the church say about this church?
2. What do people outside the church say about this church?
3. What about this church excites you?
4. What attracts people like you to this church?
5. What do you and others admire most about this church?
6. What do you and others admire least about this church?
7. What do you value most about this church?
8. What is the one value you think is missing but needed in this church?

Core Values List

What values do you think are most important to our church as it moves into the future? Choose eight values from the following list, or write your own. Number them 1 through 8, with 1 being the most important.

___ Biblical preaching and teaching
___ Cultural relevance
___ Missions involvement
___ Accountability
___ Respect for one another
___ Evangelism
___ Creativity and innovation
___ Fellowship
___ Integrity
___ Servant leadership
___ Generosity
___ Prayer
___ Holiness
___ Love

___ Forgiveness
___ Unity
___ Excellence
___ Active lay leadership and ministry teams
___ Fun
___ Status quo
___ Tradition
___ Strong families
___ Growth
___ Grace
___ Spiritual gifts
___ Spiritual transformation
___ Worship

APPENDIX E

ANALYSIS OF CHURCH TO DETERMINE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

As in any journey, one must know where he is before he can begin toward a destination. The same is true of a church in strategic planning. For this purpose we will take a detailed look at the history, membership, programs, finances, facilities, staff, growth, and leadership strengths and weaknesses of FBC Carthage.

HISTORY

First Baptist Church was originally chartered with 18 persons on July 16, 1881 as the Carthage Baptist Church. The majority of the charter members were members of the Peyton Creek Baptist Church. Prior to the charter, a piece of property was purchased for the new church on Main Street in Carthage for \$150. A former missionary to Africa, Rev. A. D. Phillips was very instrumental in the organization of the church, and Rev. W. M. Kuykendall was the first pastor. Carthage Baptist Church was a quarter-time church in those early days, having preaching services only one Sunday each month.

During the 1880's, the history records people being saved most every Sunday and others joining by letter. The church has continued that emphasis on salvation and conversion through the present day. One notable period of time of evangelism and additions was during the pastorate of Bro. John Parrish from 1951-1955. There were 185 additions to the church and 122 of those were from baptism.

The church is not buildings; however, through the years FBC Carthage has had several building additions. By the charter date of July 16, 1881, a building had been built on the Main Street property. This building served the congregation until a fire destroyed the frame church in 1921. In less than two years additional property was bought and the present sanctuary was

constructed. In 1947 the church built an additional sixteen classrooms on the back of the sanctuary. A three-story education building was built in 1966, and a family life center with fellowship hall and gymnasium in 1998.

FBC Carthage began as a mission start from a sister church and in turn has started several churches and missions over these past 129 years. Forty members were sent out in 1928 to begin the South Carthage Baptist Church. In 1928, Carthage Baptist Church began a mission in the Turkey Creek area, in 1947 they began a work in Eastland Heights, and in 1951 they began a mission in Sullivan's Bend. In 1950, the church partnered with the struggling Rawls Creek Baptist Church.

FBC Carthage has had many great days, but it has also had some trying times. The fire in 1921 was a physical trial for the congregation. In 1991 the church went through an even greater trial which has left scars to this day. In 1988, the church called Bro. Ron Ralph as pastor and the church grew and added many people during his pastorate. However, on August 21, 1991, Bro. Ralph resigned to form an independent Baptist church and 71 members left with him, including three deacons. This was definitely one of the low times in the church's history.

During low times, however, the Lord shows Himself faithful and one of the most beloved heroes of the church stepped out of retirement to be the interim Pastor. Bro. Ray McCall had served as a pastor in several churches before his retirement and he and his wife, Helen, had returned to their hometown of Carthage. The testimony of many members is that Bro. Ray "held the church together" during those first several months after the split.

As the church has grown, so have the finances. The first recorded budget was in 1928, and it was \$2,060. By 1980, the operating budget for the church was \$80,000 with 25% going to missions. In 2006, the budget had grown to \$185,172. In 2010, the current budget is \$296,491.

First Baptist Church has had a great history built on the commitment to the Word of God and the commission to make disciples.

History Strengths

- Many people have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior.
- God has been worshipped and praised through the decades.
- The Lord has shown Himself faithful.
- People have been called into the ministry.
- The church has had an impact on the community.

History Weakness

- The church has been on a statistical plateau for many years.
- People are still hurt and bitter from the church split in the 1990's.

MEMBERSHIP

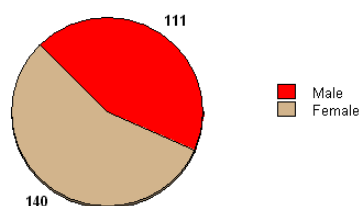
The 2009 Annual Church Profile shows a total membership for First Baptist Church as 756. Of this number, only 383 are resident members and, by my calculations, 251 are active and listed in the current membership directory. One goal in the future will be to reconcile these numbers and try to locate and identify the members of FBC Carthage. The statistical information of the membership will be based on the 251 identifiable active members. For comparison, a ten-year listing of membership statistics is included in Appendix B.

- The gender make-up of the congregation is: (Figure 1)

111 male

140 female

Active Membership of FBC Carthage by Gender



- The age of the congregation is broken down with: (Figure 2)

14 members 11 years old or less

26 members from 12 to 18

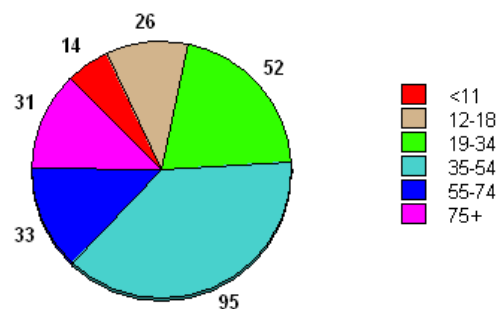
52 members from 19 to 34

95 members from 35 to 54

33 members 55 to 74

31 members 75 years old or more

Active Membership of FBC Carthage by Age



- The marital status of the membership: (Figure 3)

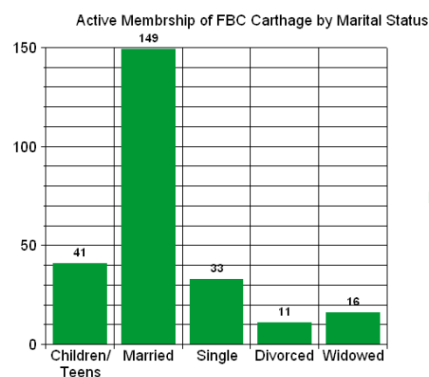
41 members are children and teens

33 members are single

149 members are married

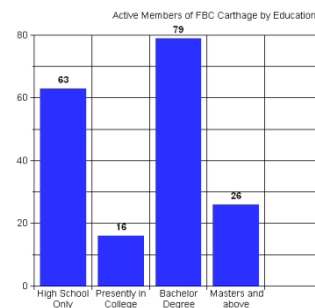
11 members are divorced

16 members are widowed



- The percentage of adult members by education: (Figure 4)

34% are high school graduates only



9% are in college

43% are college graduates

14% have a Masters degree or higher

The percentage of family units: (Figure 5)

21% are one person families

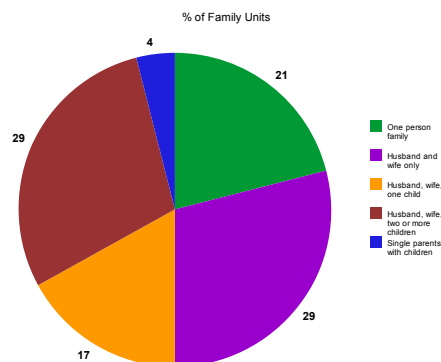
29% are husband and wife only

17% are husband and wife and one child

29% are husband wife and two or more

children

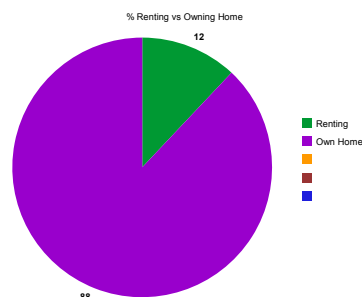
4% are single parents with children



- The estimated percentage of those renting/owning homes: (Figure 6)

12% rent an apartment or house

88% are home owners



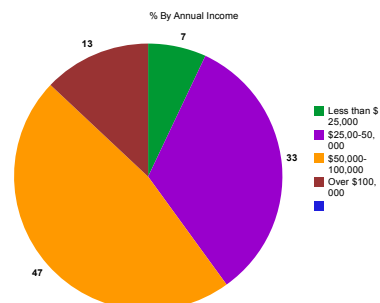
- The estimated percentage of families by income: (Figure 7)

7% have annual income of less than \$25,000

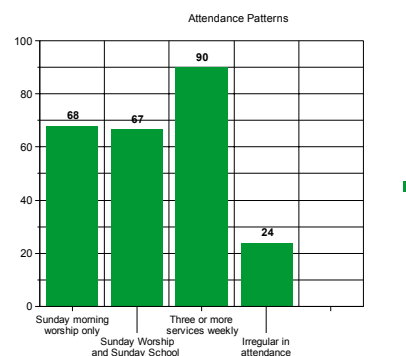
33% have annual income of \$25-50,000

47% have annual income of \$50-100,000

13% have annual income of over \$100,000



- The attendance patterns of active members: (Figure 8)



68 attend Sunday morning worship only

67 attend Sunday morning worship and Sunday School

90 attend three or more services weekly

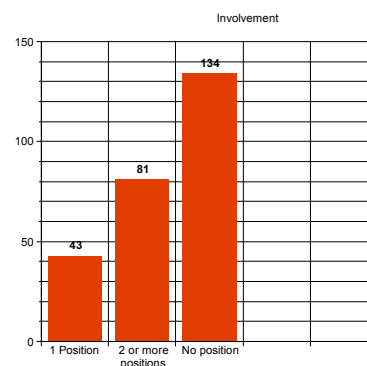
24 attend on a very irregular basis

- The involvement of active members in the work of the church: (Figure 9)

43 have one position of service

81 have two or more positions of service

134 have no position of service



- Percentage families by distance from the church building: (Figure 10)

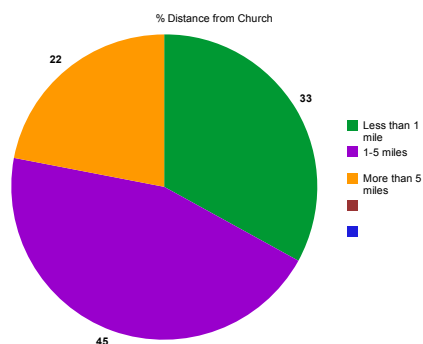
33% live less than one mile from church

building

45% live 1-5 miles from church building

22% live more than 5 miles from church

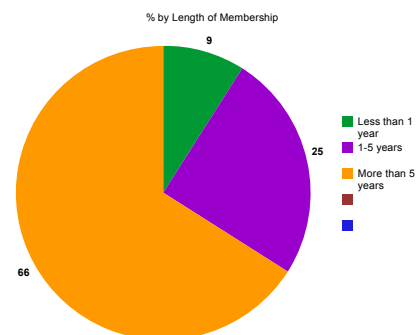
building



- Percentage of active members in length of membership: (Figure 11)

9% have been members less than one year

25% have been members 1-5 years



66% have been members more than 5 years

Membership Strengths

- The active membership is faithful in attendance.
- There is a strong core of median-aged adults.

Membership Weakness

- There are a large number of unaccountable members.
- Many members are not connected in a Sunday School class.
- The uninvolved need a job, a place of service.
- One of the least reached age groups is the young adults, ages 20-30.
- There are many unchurched people living within a mile of the church.
- We are not reaching the single adult and single parents.

PROGRAMS

The First Baptist Church has several program organizations that reach across multi-generations as well as ministry groups for specific ages. The main program organization is the Sunday School which meets Sunday mornings at 9:30 AM and has classes and departments for each age group. There are a total of 242 enrolled in 17 different classes, ranging from babies through senior adults. The adult department has 158 persons enrolled in nine classes offered by age group. Three are gender specific and six are co-educational. The Sunday School is the main fellowship, ministry, discipleship, and outreach organization in the church for the adults. The youth department has 22 persons in grades 7-12 enrolled in two gender specific classes. The children's department has 38 persons enrolled in three classes which are co-educational and

grouped by grade: 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6. The preschool department has 24 persons enrolled in three classes: babies, 1-4, and kindergarten. The average attendance in Sunday School according to the 2009 Annual Church Profile was 135. A ten-year listing of Sunday School and other program statistics is included in Appendix B.

The discipleship program for children is AWANA which meets on Sunday nights during the school year. AWANA has classes for 3-4 year olds called Cubbies, kindergarten – 2nd grade called Sparks, and 3rd-6th grades called TNT. AWANA is much like a weekly Bible club with scripture memory, recreation, and refreshments. In the fall of 2010, the plan is to incorporate a time of worship for the children in AWANA.

The mission education program for school-age children and preschool meet on Wednesday nights in alternating weeks with children's choir. Royal Ambassadors (RAs) for boys grades 1-6, Girls in Action (GAs) for girls grades 1-6 and Mission Friends for preschool children ages 3-kindegarten provide the children with stories and facts about national and international missions. In addition, these mission classes have mission projects that involve the children in local missions to the police and fire stations, nursing homes, and shut-ins.

The music program is presently made up of two choirs and the worship leadership for the weekly services. The children and preschool choir meets every other Wednesday night and present two programs each year in May and December. The sanctuary choir meets each Wednesday night for rehearsal and leads in worship in each of the Sunday morning services. The instrumentalists for the worship services include pianists, organists, guitarists, and a harpist. The Minister of Youth and Music leads and coordinates the music program.

The youth ministry is based around the Wednesday night youth worship service and personal discipleship. Many opportunities are offered for the youth for discipleship, fellowship,

activities, missions, and outreach to their community. The youth activity that has generated the most notoriety is the 5th Quarter fellowship after every home football game with over 100 students coming into the Christian Life Center for fun, food, and a Biblical message.

The Minister of Youth and Music has been on staff less than 6 months and the church is already seeing a growth and renewed excitement in this ministry. For example, in July 2010, 42 youth and leaders attended a Student Life camp in Orange Beach, Alabama. In August 2010, the Wednesday Night Youth Worship Service will move into the Christian Life Center to provide space for continued growth. The emphasis on youth and the community will continue to be a part of the ministry vision for FBC Carthage.

Program Strengths

- Through Sunday School there is a place to connect with each person.
- There are signs of growth and expansion in the youth and children's programs.

Program Weakness

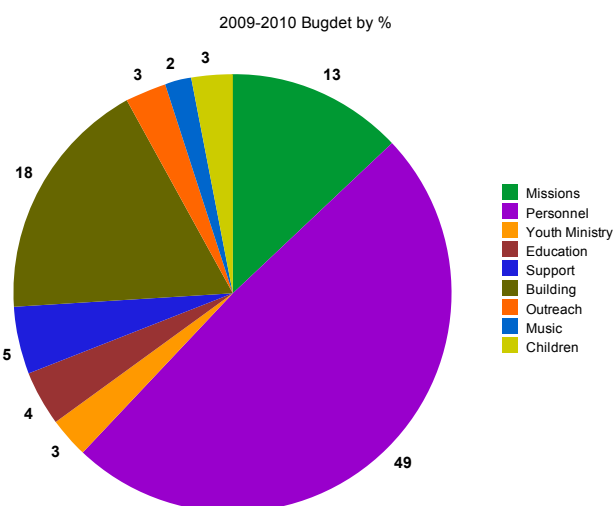
- There is a great need for a discipleship process in the adults.
- There is a lack of Southern Baptist mission awareness in the youth and adults.
- The ministry to women is primarily through events at this time.
- The ministry to men has ceased to function.
- The senior adult ministry is not active at this time.

FINANCES

FBC Carthage is a very generous and giving church. Finances for the ministries and mission endeavors are received almost exclusively through the tithes and offerings given each week by members and attendees. The treasurer and church secretary administer the receiving, counting, distribution, and reporting of the monies given and expended. A complete monthly financial statement is presented to all who attend the regular business meeting on the Wednesday following the first Sunday.

The current budget for 2009-10 is \$296,491 and is broken down as follows:

Missions	\$ 39,400	13%
Personnel	\$145,451	49%
Youth Ministry	\$ 8,750	3%
Education Ministry	\$ 12,450	4%
Support Ministry	\$ 14,200	5%
Building / Property	\$ 53,700	18%
Evangelism/Outreach	\$ 8,240	3%
Music Ministry	\$ 4,800	2%
Children's Ministry	\$ 9,500	3%



As of August 1, 2010, the budget required was \$245,175.25 and the church has received \$247,402.17. The breakdown of the 2009-2010 budget is included as Appendix C. A nine year comparison of the church budget is included as Appendix D. During that period of time the annual budget grew from \$152,852 in 2001-2002 to the present \$296,491 in 2009-2010. In addition to regular budget offerings the church also receives special mission offerings and love

offerings through the year. The church has no outstanding debts or loans and has three savings certificates of deposits totaling \$350,000.

During the past 12 months there have been 85 individuals or family “giving units” over the age of 16. The top giving unit contributed \$22,783 to the work and mission of FBC Carthage. The top five giving units gave a total of \$84,377 and the top twenty giving units gave a total of \$173,559. The average length of membership for the top twenty giving units is 20.4 years and the average distance the top twenty giving units live from the church is 5.89 miles. The decade of the top twenty giving units is divided with 3 units 30-40 years of age, 4 units 40-50, 3 units 50-60, 6 units 60-70, and 4 units above 70. A complete listing of the top twenty giving units is given in Appendix E. On the other side of the giving scale, 11 giving units over the age of 16 gave less \$100 in the past 12 months.

Financial Strengths

- FBC Carthage is a very generous and giving church.
- Present giving is above budget requirements.

Financial Weakness

- There are no written financial policies and procedures at the present time.

FACILITIES

The church building is located at 409 Main Street North in Carthage, Tennessee. This location is just to the north of downtown Carthage and provides the church a central location to minister to the community. The location is a key factor to the church’s ministry and identity.

The first building built on this site was a small frame church building built in 1881. It was destroyed by a fire in 1921 and the present sanctuary, built to replace it, was completed in

1923. In 1947 a 16 room education addition was built on the back of the sanctuary and in 1966 a three-story annex was added. The final building on the church campus was a Family Life Center built in 1998. These three buildings are still being used in the weekly ministry of FBC Carthage.

The current buildings are situated on a small hill with an elevation drop of more than fifteen feet between the Main Street level and the entrance to the Family Life Center. There are six different floor levels in the three buildings which are accessed only through a series of steps. This presents many challenges for the flow of people and the ease of use, especially for the elderly and handicapped. In fact, only four levels are handicap accessible. The church does not have an elevator.

The buildings, though older, are still in acceptable condition but constant repair and replacement of systems are needed. The entire building is in need of a fresh decorating update. Members and regular attendees may have grown accustomed to the conditions of the buildings; however, the first impression for the new comer would be less than impressive.

The sanctuary will comfortably seat 150 people with a maximum of 200. The seating is padded pews attached to a sloping floor. The sanctuary is equipped with piano, organ, sound system, and 3 video projectors.

The educational buildings are build in the department/classrooms style of the early to mid- 1900's. There are 8 larger rooms and 21 smaller rooms. There are 9 small rooms not being used currently which are available for Sunday School.

There are three offices for the church staff: Pastor, Minister to Youth and Music, and Secretary. The offices are located in the church building but are not located in the same area.

The church has one parking lot with 24 parking spaces. In addition, the church has a friendly agreement with the Citizen's Bank, next door, to use its large parking lot of over 50 spaces. There is also parking available on the two streets bordering the facility.

Facility Strengths

- The buildings are paid for, moderately well-kept, and functional.
- The location is ideal for a centralized ministry to Carthage.
- The use of the Citizen's Bank is a great blessing.

Facility Weakness

- The multi-level buildings are very difficult for the elderly and handicapped.
- The seating capacity in the sanctuary is a limiting factor in growth.
- Parking owned by the church is very limited.
- The building needs updating and re-decorating.
- The preschool space is removed from the sanctuary and difficult to find.
- Directional signage is needed throughout the building.
- Property expansion possibilities for future growth are limited.

STAFF

The church staff is comprised of three positions: Pastor, Minister to Youth and Music, and Secretary. Pastor Tim Frank has served FBC Carthage since June 2008. He grew up in this church, made his profession of faith here as a young child, and was baptized in the sanctuary baptistery. In 1977, Bro. Tim was called into the ministry as a high school senior. After 30 years of ministry in other churches, he returned to serve the church as Pastor.

Zeke Tomaselli, the Minister to Youth and Music, is the newest member of the church staff, joining the staff in March 2010. Zeke is the first full-time ministerial staff to serve FBC Carthage in more than twenty years. He brings to the church a youthful excitement, musical talent, and eight years experience, having served previously in a fast growing church in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Deborah Weaver is the full-time church secretary. She served in a part-time capacity for eight years before coming on full-time in 2009. She serves as the financial secretary as well as the general office secretary and receptionist.

In addition, Kathy Reece serves on an hourly basis in the Preschool area during services and helps to coordinate the nursery volunteers. She has served in this position for a number of years.

The custodial work is contracted out at the present time to a commercial cleaning service.

Staff Strengths

- The members of the church staff are dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The members of the church staff are hard working and willing to serve.
- There is a renewed sense of excitement with the addition of Zeke Tomaselli.

Staff Weakness

- There is no written staff policy manual.
- The Pastor is given to becoming over-committed to community activities.

GROWTH

As the church statistics show in Appendix B, First Baptist Church has remained fairly constant over the past twenty years. That is a nice way of saying the church is in a twenty-plus year plateau. In terms of membership, Sunday School enrollment and attendance, and almost

every other indicator, the church is basically the same numerically today as it has been these past twenty years.

During the past twenty-five years the church has baptized 240 persons with the two highest years being 1993 with 24 baptisms and 1989 with 23 baptisms. In addition, 268 people have joined the church by letter or statement in the same period of time. This is a total of 508 new members who have been added to the church in the twenty-five year period. However, the active membership statistics show a net decrease during this same time. The new church started in 1991 and the seventy-one people who transferred their membership from First Baptist to begin that work may account for a portion of the decrease but attention is needed in the assimilation and discipleship process of the church.

Robert Dale, in his book *To Dream Again*, illustrates the fact that “organizations move through a cycle of birth, growth, maturity, decline, and death.”¹ His premise for the book is that churches will decline and die unless they “dream again.” For each church, there is the need for a fresh vision and direction from God.

During our class time, a handout was given describing the stages on the Church Life Cycle Chart. In this model, the stages move from infancy to childhood, adolescence, adult, maturity, retiring and finally death. Reflecting on these two resources, I feel FBC Carthage is in the maturity stage which sounds positive; however, it is the stage just before decline. The characteristics of this stage reflect many of the characteristics of the church:

- Reaping success, but slacking off
- Not aware of losing a clear vision or of being plateaued
- Continue routine activities

¹ Dale, 14.

- Burned out and reluctant volunteers
- Productive/busy yet morale and ministries plateaued
- Ministry shifts to maintenance
- Leadership authority shifts more to committee and boards than the Pastor

In the past year we have seen a slight reversal of several of these characteristics and a desire of the congregation to catch a renewed vision from God for the church.

One exceptional area of growth over the past three years has been in the children's discipleship ministry called AWANA. This ministry program meets on Sunday nights during the school year and has added a spark of new life in the ministry to children. Over thirty adults are involved in the leadership and AWANA has an average of forty-five children attend each week. This growth arose through the creation of a new ministry with a new vision.

The church is also experiencing a growth in ministries to the community. The vision has been cast of impacting the lives of the people of Carthage and Smith County for Jesus Christ. From the children's mission groups taking cookies and cards to the policemen, to a ministry booth at the county fair to a luncheon for public school teachers, FBC Carthage is becoming known as a place that cares for the people of the community.

Another area of growth has been the involvement of the members in short-term mission trips. In 2003, FBC Carthage joined a sister church, Stevens Street Baptist Church in Cookeville, Tennessee, for their first mission trip to work on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in northeastern Montana. Since then the church has had teams travel on mission to New York, Kentucky, within Tennessee, Jamaica, and back to Montana four times. These mission trips have helped create a new vision of living "on mission" for Jesus Christ.

Growth Strengths

- There are areas in the church that are growing and reaching the community.
- New ministry and mission opportunities are being started.
- FBC Carthage is becoming known for its care for the people of the community.
- There is an excitement and good reputation building about FBC Carthage.

Growth Weakness

- It will take a new vision to move the church off a long plateau.
- The building space becomes a limiting factor to growth.

LEADERSHIP

FBC Carthage is growing in the area of leadership. There are several key leadership positions in the church, such as, deacons, Sunday School teachers, and AWANA. Leadership development has been done in the past in a “hands-on”, “learn-as-you-do-it” format. Present leaders also have helped coach new and developing leaders in their roles and responsibilities. Leadership has been more about accomplishing tasks than casting vision.

Decision making is a combination of committee decisions, church decisions, and staff decisions. Decisions of expenditures over \$500 come through the deacons and are recommended to the church for approval in regular monthly business meetings. Decisions for programming, missions, and vision are made primarily through the Pastor and ministerial staff. Calendar dates and changes in schedule come through the Church Leadership Council.

Plans are being made to become more intentional in basic discipleship and leadership development. A two diamond model has been created, but not yet implemented, to intentionally move all members through a discipleship/leader development process. The basic design will be:

- Membership 101 will cover basic information such as salvation and baptism, church membership, purpose/vision, and what is expected of members.
- Membership 201 will be a four-session class for new members of the church. This class will emphasize the three commitments of the church: Exalt Christ, Establish Connections, and Express Compassion. The session titles will be:
 1. Exalting Christ through Worship
 2. Establishing Connections through Small Groups
 3. Expressing Compassion through Ministry and Missions
 4. Your Unique SHAPE for Ministry
- Membership 301 will be a four-session class for members to explore basic doctrines of the faith. The sessions will be:
 1. The Bible – An Overview from Creation to Redemption
 2. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – The Doctrine of God
 3. Our Hope – The Doctrine of Man, Salvation and the Church
 4. The End – The Doctrine of the Second Coming, Heaven, and Last Things
- Membership 401 will be a four-session basic introduction to spiritual leadership. The content will be centered on the personal qualities and disciplines of a Christian believer. The session titles will be:
 1. The Disciplines of the Christian Life

2. How to Share Your Faith
 3. The Mission and Organization of the Church
 4. Qualities of a Christian Leader
- The second diamond will be focused on Leadership Development. Leadership 101 will be the same class as Membership 401 and will be the basic requirements of new teachers and leaders serving in the church.
 - Leadership 201 will be a four-session class on the organization and function of small groups. The sessions for Leadership 201 will be:
 1. The Mission and Tasks of Small Groups
 2. Teaching People the Bible in Small Groups
 3. Enlistment and Training of Class Leaders
 4. Small Group Dynamics
 - Leadership 301 will be participation in a specific leadership training event away from the church.
 - Leadership 401 will be devoted to the importance of starting new churches. Sessions will include the Biblical mandate for starting new churches, core group selection and recruitment, and the necessary preparations for the new church start.

Leadership Strengths

- There are many committed leaders in the church with a heart for ministry.

Leadership Weakness

- The process for leadership development is not been implemented.

SURVEY RESULTS - STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

During the week of the 129th anniversary, two surveys of the congregation were conducted. The first (Appendix F) surveyed the people in attendance on a Wednesday night service. The second (Appendix G) was conducted during the Sunday morning service on the church's 129th anniversary.

Of those surveyed on Wednesday night:

- 80% were satisfied or highly satisfied with the worship services, discipleship programs, and evangelism emphasis.
- 85% were satisfied or highly satisfied with the Sunday School.
- 88% were satisfied or highly satisfied with the missions emphasis.
- 92% were satisfied or highly satisfied with the music and youth ministry.
- 95% were satisfied or highly satisfied with the children and preschool ministry.

When asked on Sunday morning which areas of ministry should receive more emphasis in the coming years, youth ministry received the greatest response. The other ministries, in order of response, were prayer, children's ministry, leadership training, Sunday morning worship, evangelism, community ministry, music, mission involvement, preschool ministry, Sunday School, mission emphasis, recreation, senior adults, and discipleship.

When asked what they thought FBC Carthage does best, the responses were:

- Minister to youth
- Welcome and relate to others
- Focus on ministry with kingdom purpose
- Care for others in the community
- Manage many activities
- Proclaim the gospel, preaching and teaching
- Music and worship

When asked what they felt FBC Carthage could improve, their responses were:

- Prayer / Prayer times during services
- Building access and appearance
- Training and reaching the next generation
- Ministry to the elderly in the community
- Connecting different groups within the church
- Be more flexible and offer variety
- Help to single parents
- Involvement of members in ministry
- Stronger children's ministry and activities
- Leadership development

When asked what ministries they felt FBC Carthage should begin, the responses were:

- Evangelism training
- Ministry for middle adults – 30-60 year olds
- Helps ministry to those in need – cooking meals, mowing lawn, handy-man projects
- Drug and alcohol recovery programs
- Men's ministry
- After-school program for elementary children
- Single adult ministry
- Senior adult ministry
- Music ministry with students (Youth choir)
- Vacation Bible School class for 1-2 year olds

When asked how they see FBC Carthage in 2010, their responses were:

- Growing
- Sending out people all over the world

- Outreach to community
- New location with more space, a larger facility on flat ground
- Proclaiming the gospel

Two weeks later, a survey was given in the Sunday School classes. Two of the questions asked what they liked most and least about the church. Here are the people's responses:

When asked what they like most:

- Biblical preaching and teaching
- Friendliness and open to all
- Youth ministry and Bro. Zeke
- Community involvement
- Christ-centered
- Mission-minded
- Unity, church is like family, love and support

When asked what they like least:

- Building space and condition
- Too uptight and formal in worship
- Two services
- Don't know way around
- Same ole thing each week – tradition
- More welcoming to, and accepting of people
- Lack of commitment in many members
- Need more ministry to members
- Have too many committees
- Borderline too busy
- Need more young couples

APPENDIX F

ANALYSIS OF THE COMMUNITY TO DETERMINE OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

Carthage, Tennessee is a small, rural town in the central region of the state. In July 2009 the town had a population of 2,229 people. The population has had a -1.0% change since the 2000 census. There are 991 males and 1,238 females, and the median age is 41.8 years compared to the Tennessee median age of 35.9 years. The estimated median household income in 2008 was \$28,606, and the estimated median house value was \$127,319. The racial makeup of the city is 90.5% white, 6.5% black and 3.5% Hispanic. (This data provided by www.city-data.com.)

The North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention has provided information and projections on the area by radius rings.

- Within a 2-mile radius of the church:

	2000 census	2010 est.	2015 est.
Population	3,782	3,829	3,824
Households	1,592	1,640	1,646
Families	1,013	1,000	990
Median age	39.8	41.8	41.3
Avg Household Income	\$42,184	\$45,527	\$49,646

- Within a 5-mile radius of the church:

	2000 census	2010 est.	2015 est.
Population	7,184	7,480	7,552
Households	2,921	3,099	3,146
Families	2,011	2,207	2,232

Median age	38.3	40.5	41.0
Avg Household Income	\$44,329	\$48,844	\$52,505

- Within a 10-mile radius of the church:

	2000 census	2010 est.	2015 est.
Population	16,985	18,542	19,046
Households	6,637	7,367	7,601
Families	4,874	5,289	5,389
Median age	37.0	39.7	40.7
Avg Household Income	\$44,377	\$51,012	\$53,976

In evaluating the threats and the opportunities it is interesting that the opportunities and positive aspects of the community can also be the threats and negative aspects of the community. For example, the community is very close, friendly, and connected with one another. People wave as they pass by, and it is not uncommon to be delayed at the grocery, or Wal-Mart, by multiple conversations with friends and family. This is a very positive aspect of the community. On the other hand, this closeness and family atmosphere makes it difficult for new people in the community to feel accepted. A person may live in this community for a decade or more and still be seen as an “outsider” and not “from here.”

Another example is the abundance of churches. There are over one hundred churches in this county of 18,000 people. There is openness to Christianity and a freedom to speak freely of your faith. Christian t-shirts and bumper stickers are prevalent. Most people are associated with a church by family ties or attendance on special occasions and as children. However, there are still many people who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and do not regularly

attend any of the churches. Many of the churches are very closed and critical of the other churches. Cooperation and working together among the churches are almost non-existent. There is a sense of “turf” and trying to take people from other churches.

In this small community, the public high schools are the center of the community. It seems like the “whole town” turns out to attend to the Friday night football games in the fall. Basketball teams, soccer teams, softball, baseball, etc. are offered for all ages, children through adults. Sports give a past-time to the majority of families and offer time to do things together. However, this pre-occupation with sports also creates a threat and competition for the local church. Time, resources, and volunteer opportunities are shared with the ball teams. Big events are scheduled around football practice and games. Churches often are forced to take a second place when it comes to participation in the sports.

Hobbies and recreational pursuits are also both an opportunity and a threat in this area. The opportunity exists for individuals and families to go to one of the five area lakes, one of the multiple camping sites, and/or many other outdoor areas for enjoyment. There are many great family memories made in the outdoors. These outdoor trips also create competition for people’s time and Sunday is the only “open day” many have to enjoy. It is not unusual for an active family in the church to buy a boat or camper and then feel “obligated” to spend weekends at the campground or lake and become irregular in church attendance.

One other opportunity/threat combination is the community-wide events and activities in a small town. These events provide time to connect to the people of the community and build relationships. There are picnics, fund raisers, community committees, and other good things that call for one’s time, effort and energy. The threat comes as people begin to feel pulled in many different directions and then pull back for commitments and leadership positions at church

because they are burned-out and exhausted. In larger cities it seems easier to pick and choose what you are involved. In the small town, everything seems to have a sense of urgency and need for your attention, participation and leadership.

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