[DO STATE CONVENTIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS HAVE A FUTURE IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION?](http://www.ronniefloyd.com/blog/10125/southern-baptist-convention/do-state-conventions-and-associations-have-a-future-in-the-southern-baptist-convention/)

[Join the Movement](http://www.ronniefloyd.com/blog/category/join-the-movement/), [Southern Baptist Convention](http://www.ronniefloyd.com/blog/category/southern-baptist-convention/)

The present generation of Southern Baptists will have to answer many difficult, unavoidable questions in relationship to the future. Being proactive in dealing with difficult questions such as these is wise.

One of these difficult questions is: Do state conventions and associations have a future in Southern Baptist life?

Boots on the Ground

Does this structural model still serve us effectively? I believe that if we were starting from scratch in 2016 with a mission to reach America with the Gospel, we would need a way to have local “boots on the ground” in order to assist our churches in reaching their mission. If we were starting with a clean slate today, state conventions and associations might look somewhat different, but the key reality for the future would place *more importance on function than on structure.*

In fact, while these bodies today are more geographically-related, I believe if we were starting all over again, I could see not only the geographic alignment we have now, but also affinity alignment. Some of this may be occurring already.

A Personal Testimony

In 2009-2010, I served as the Chairman of the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force of the Southern Baptist Convention. In leading this overwhelming task, it was imperative that I was able to relate to both state conventions and associations.

As a bit of background, I had been very involved for quite some time in Southern Baptist life prior to this assignment. I had already had the privilege of serving on the seven-member Program and Structure Committee that had the role of studying and recommending the needed restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention. We moved the 19 entities of the convention to 11 entities plus the Executive Committee. Additionally, I had served on the Executive Committee for 10 years, serving as chairman two of those years, and served as a trustee of GuideStone.

When I began leading the Great Commission Resurgence, I had serious concerns about associations and state conventions. Yet, I became a firm believer in their role in Southern Baptist life. Somehow, some way, we must have ministry bodies as close to our churches as possible.

Four Things Are Imperative for State Conventions and Associations to Have Viability in the Future of Southern Baptist Work

1. Clarify their mission.

State conventions and associations exist for one purpose alone: To serve our churches in reaching their God-assigned responsibility of going, baptizing, and making disciples of all the nations. These ministry bodies do not exist for themselves or their structures, but for the churches.

2. Simplify their responsibilities.

State conventions and associations must do *only* the things that align with the mission of the churches. Otherwise, they do not need to be doing it. It is not a matter of good versus evil, but a matter of what is good versus best.

Additionally, state conventions and associations do not need to duplicate and triplicate one another, nor do our national entities. We must find a way to cease duplication and triplication locally, statewide, and nationally.

3. Agile in their response to the churches.

Weighty, needless structure prohibits immediate response to the churches. We need to rid anything in our state conventions, associations, and even our national entities that slows responsiveness to our churches. This is why these bodies must be lean structurally, excellent at what they believe God wants them to do, and able to respond quickly to the churches.

4. Sustain their work financially.

If a ministry cannot sustain itself financially, serious questions have to be asked concerning the ministry. While an initial investment may be necessary in the creation phase of the ministry, perhaps up to five years, beyond that, serious questions should be asked and answered. Perhaps the ministry of assisting our churches in going, baptizing, and making disciples of all the nations can be best served by some associations merging together and some state conventions merging together for the greater cause of helping our churches more effectively.

Of course, these groups would have to make these decisions themselves. No one else can make them on their behalf.

What Best Serves the Churches

There are times when greater personalization is needed, regionalization is realized, and decentralization is imperative for the greater good of assisting our churches in going, baptizing, and making disciples of all the nations. Each association, state convention, and even national entity has to address these matters honestly and boldly. Our goal should never be to preserve any of our old wineskins, but exist for our churches to help them advance the gospel in the best way. Yes, it comes down to one thing: What best serves the churches!

Robust with Gospel Cooperation

Our culture is not always friendly to working together. Therefore, our commitment to cooperating for gospel advancement must be chiseled into our character and practices or our future together will be limited. I respectfully request that each of us refuse to be held hostage by our present, but be freed into a future that is robust with gospel cooperation.

The Best Jobs in the Future

After all of my years in Southern Baptist life, I am now convinced that leading one of our robust state conventions that serves and assists our churches in the Great Commission has to be one of the great ministry opportunities for the future in Southern Baptist life.

Let’s pray for one another. Now is the time for each of us in our churches, associations, state conventions, and national entities to be freed into a future that is robust with gospel cooperation.

Now is the Time to Lead,

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Dr. Ronnie Floyd is currently serving as the President of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Southern Baptist Convention is America’s largest Protestant denomination with more than 15.7 million members in over 51,094 churches nationwide.