

How Southern Baptists Cooperate

Southern Baptists have developed a system of voluntary cooperation in which their churches work together to carry the Great Commission into all the world. The Southern Baptist Denomination is a fellowship of over 16 million members in approximately 42,000 churches covering all the 50 states of America. Southern Baptists are bound together in cooperation by their basic beliefs. "The Baptist Faith and Message" contains an overall doctrinal statement as to Southern Baptists basic beliefs.

Southern Baptist work together in churches, associations, state conventions, and nationally in the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Local Church.

Each church is accountable only to God. It calls its own pastor, determines its own membership, leadership, worship, programs and budget. Each member has a voice and a vote in decision-making. The Bible is the basis for the faith and practice among Southern Baptists. Its main functions are worship, evangelism, discipleship, fellowship and ministry. Recognizing that churches can do more together than one church can do alone, Southern Baptists have developed a system of cooperation which preserves each church's individual freedom and at the same time makes possible a coordinated effort on a worldwide scope.

The Local Baptist Association.

The association is the Baptist body closest to the churches and is uniquely positioned to: (1) be a relationship/network builder between its diverse family of churches; (2) be in regular, personal contact with each congregation and proactive in discovering and servicing their needs; (3) be aware of its unique geographical context and strive to focus its member churches on doing together in their community what no one church can do alone. The Local Baptist Association provides a general organization that can facilitate each of these emphases of Christian community, church development, and mission strategy.

The State Baptist Convention.

The state convention provides a way for churches to cooperate on a larger scale than the association. By joining resources, you help support a college, children's homes, a retirement center, a state newspaper, and regional conference centers. This support also provides coordination to do a variety of evangelistic, educational, and benevolent work. Like the Local Baptist Association, the State Baptist Convention is a service organization to the local churches. The State Convention also works closely with Baptist Association to partner with us in significant ways that help strengthen existing churches and establish new churches in our Association.

The Southern Baptist Convention.

The Southern Baptist Convention is a national body in which Southern Baptists work together. As Southern Baptists, we have agencies for publishing curriculum and resource materials, and national and international missions. Additional boards and agencies of the SBC cooperative effort include six Theological Seminaries to train Baptist ministers, an Annuity Board to manage the retirement programs for SBC church and school employees, and an Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission to assist churches in understanding the moral and social problems in today's culture, as well as promoting religious liberty in America.

Southern Baptist Cooperation in Missions

Each local church gives a percentage of their undesignated income to missions. *Southern Baptist churches have two basic channels for support of missions outside their church's ministry...*

1. *Local missions is supported through the Local Baptist Association (this is separate from what the Cooperative Program. The Association does not receive funds from the Cooperate Program).*

Each church determines its level of support to the association and then those funds are typically sent monthly to support its on-going work. Messengers from each of the churches approve an annual budget at the Annual Associational Meeting that determines how those funds will be used in local missions.

2. *State, National, and International missions are supported through the Cooperative Program.*

Each church also determines its level of support to the Cooperative Program and those funds are typically sent monthly to support these three levels of missions. The funds are sent to the church's state convention and messengers from each church approve a state budget at the Annual State Convention. This budget determines how much remains in the state for state missions and how much is sent on for national and international missions.

Your gifts to the Cooperative Program budget in your state convention were divided:
_____ % State Missions, _____ % to National and International Missions