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FLORIDA BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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**Cover: James McDonald began preaching in Florida in 1834. He was one of five Baptist preachers in an area that was 300 miles by 200 miles.**

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## INTRODUCTION

***Jerry M. Windsor***

*Secretary-Treasurer  
Florida Baptist Historical Society*

### **Welcome to the Ninth Issue of *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage***

Our feature in this volume will be the celebration of 300 years of Baptist Associations in the United States.

I can hear his footsteps now... Austin, Minnesota was our work place and Jerry Mae and I were summer missionaries preparing for a Vacation Bible School in the hometown of the Hormel Meat Packing Company. It was 1965 and Jerry Mae and I were students at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans. We had volunteered for summer missions and we were assigned in succession to three Minnesota-Wisconsin churches to organize and assist in leading Vacation Bible Schools. We were introduced to rhubarb, Lake Sacajawea, the Minnesota Twins, Cargill, Tyrone Guthrie, and 14 hour work days in the land of the midnight sun. We visited door to door and prayed.

In Austin, Minnesota we were able to locate a place to have the Bible School. A bar owner rented one half of a building for his bar and he happily rented us the other half for Bible School. We found Trish who was a teenage Church of Christ member who was willing to serve as pianist (go figure) in our two week school. The bar noise that came from the juke box came through the dry wall but Trish pounded away and the children just sang louder.

Jerry Mae and I stayed in one room on the second floor of a five-

dollar a day wooden “hotel” with a bath on the hall. Some church attenders refused to work in the Bible School because it was “next door to a bar”. Supplies were limited and transportation to our downtown Bible School was by foot. One teacher got sick and everyone was frazzled by the end of week one. We were discouraged and not sure what to do. The church had no pastor and only twelve members attending. The twelve said we must press on. We cannot quit. We must keep reaching out to the children. On Friday night Jerry Mae and I were in our hotel room worked down, discouraged and leaderless.

And we heard his footsteps....Personally I was expecting him. Actually I knew who it was and Jerry Mae did too before he even knocked on the door. It was Frank Burris, the Director of Missions for the work in Wisconsin. He and Warren Littleford, the director of the mission work in Minnesota were like brothers and encouraged everybody in every task done in Jesus’ name. The work in Minnesota and Wisconsin was jump started by Texas Baptists and they and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board put Warren and Frank in place to be encouragers, catalysts and workaholics. Those two men guided pastors, churches, staff, student missionaries and fellow Baptists to plant their lives in the beautiful land of Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Frank came to us and probably stayed less than 15 minutes. He heard our hearts, counseled with us and prayed with us and then was on his way. On Sunday we found out that while he was in Austin he visited every family in that church on Friday night.

This year many will be celebrating 300 years of Baptist Association work in America. Not me. I will be celebrating Jennings Baggett, Dennis Conniff, John Chafin, Oley Kidd, J. F. Kelley, James Ponder, Jack Wright, Frank Burris, Warren Littleford and scores of associational missionaries who have touched my life for the sake of the gospel. May their tribe increase.

Our writers in this edition know what they are talking about. Bill Hinds worked on the front line of mission work. Cliff Matthews plants churches and plants churches again and again. Don Hepburn has

researched Florida Baptists and knows more about our history than anyone else. David Cunningham saw Sunday School work explode in growth in Florida. Joel Breidenbaugh has just been a part of a DOM search and my part was to give some chronological overview of associational history in Florida.

Enjoy the volume and thank our Lord again for brothers and sisters in Christ who live near each of us and associate with us in fellowship, worship and the building up of the kingdom.

Honoring those who honor Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry M. Windsor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "W".

Jerry M. Windsor

# THE BAPTIST ASSOCIATION: ROLE AND PURPOSE

***Donald S. Hepburn***

*Director, Public Relations Division  
Florida Baptist Convention*



By the time Baptists in Florida and parts of South Georgia determined in 1835 to form their own association of Baptist churches, the association movement in America was already 128 years old. Yet the Floridians' desire to organize an assembly of churches seemed to embrace the same fundamental need for fellowship which propelled the colonial American association movement begun on July 27, 1707. It was in that year, exactly 300 years ago this year, at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, that the Pennsylvania Baptist Association was organized. This organization was likely patterned after one of several early Baptist associations organized by Particular Baptists in England between 1653 (in Somersetshire) and 1655 (Midland), and later organizations in 1692 at Bristol and Frome.<sup>1</sup>

The stated purpose for the planned Philadelphia gathering was, “to meet at the yearly meeting to consult about such things as were wanting [lacking] in the churches, and to set them in order . . .”<sup>2</sup> Responding to that invitation to meet were representatives from five churches: Lower Dublin (Pennepeck), the First Baptist Church in Pennsylvania; three in New Jersey: Piscataqua (Piscataway), Middletown, and Cohansie; and the Welsh Tract Church, Delaware. Curiously, the Philadelphia congregation, though lending its name to the association, was not represented as a constituting member, because it was regarded as a mission of the Lower Dublin Church.<sup>3</sup>

### **Early Purposes of a Baptist Association**

In an exhaustive analysis, Walter B. Shurden, one of the leading contemporary authorities on the Baptist association, identified four objectives of Baptist associations prior to 1814. These were to: “(1) promote fellowship among the churches, (2) maintain uniformity in faith and practice among the churches, (3) give counsel and assistance to the churches, and (4) provide an organizational structure through which churches could cooperate in their broader ministries.”<sup>4</sup>

Shurden pointed out that, “If an eighteenth century Baptist had been asked upon what basis his denomination justified associations, he likely would have answered with a verse of Scripture, a brief statement about the Baptist concept of the church, and an enumeration of practical benefits accruing from interchurch cooperation.”<sup>5</sup>

Gary Long in his polity assessment of the Philadelphia Association noted that it, “was loose in structure, without power or authority” and was “regarded simply as an advisory council.”<sup>6</sup> Initially, that first American association of Baptist churches provided advice in response to inquiries from churches and even mediated disputes between churches.

### **Rational for the Baptist Association**

Certainly there were pragmatic benefits to the interchurch cooperation that the association organization provided. But what also is clear from the past 300 years of Baptist history, are the Biblical and theological rationales that complement the practical aspects for the Baptist association.

***Biblical Basis:*** “The most frequently quoted passage of Scripture given in support of associations - both in colonial American and in England - was Acts 15. It was not claimed that the Jerusalem Council was an association or even a prototype, but that it was an example of the propriety of interchurch cooperation and counsel,” explained Baptist historian Jack Keep.<sup>7</sup> This assessment also was affirmed by Shurden who stressed that those colonial Baptists were not, “so ecclesiological naïve and hermeneutically unskilled to regard Acts 15 as the prototype of Baptist associations.”<sup>8</sup> Citing other scriptural foundations that provide parallels to the modern Baptist association, Keep observed that, “Several

aspects of the Jerusalem Council were noted as worthy of imitation. One of these aspects was the inter-relationship, the care of churches for one another. At Jerusalem, doctrinal issues were discussed, debated and decided. A circular letter was sent out advising the churches of the result of the council,” Keep explained.<sup>9</sup> Scripture also provides guidance on the cooperative efforts by an association of churches. As an example the sending of aid to Jerusalem from Macedonia and Achaia is highlighted in Romans 15:25-28 and 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. Other biblical examples that highlight the role and purpose of an association of churches can be found in Matthew 23:8, Romans 12:5 and I Corinthians 1:10.<sup>10</sup>

It is noteworthy that Baptist stalwart Charles O. Screven used as his text Ephesians 4:4-6 as he presided over the 1802 organization of the Savannah Baptist Association. “Screven believed that the Apostle Paul’s emphasis on one body, one spirit, and one faith was applicable to the founding of a new association,” Shurden observed.<sup>11</sup> And although colonial Baptists, “saw Biblical justification for associations, they did not claim to be restoring some ancient ecclesiastical organization. Interchurch cooperation is Biblical; an advisory council is Biblical; but any organization having power over a local church is not Biblical,” Keep declared.<sup>12</sup>

***Theological Basis:*** “From a doctrinal perspective, the Baptist concept of the church provides the theological basis for Associationalism,” explained Keep. He defined two principles that provide the theological foundation for the Baptist association. “The first was the Baptist idea of the mystical church; the second was the Baptist emphasis on the local church.”<sup>13</sup> Shurden clarified this duality by noting, that the mystical or universal church was comprised of persons who professed faith in Jesus Christ and obeyed God. In contrast, the local (visible) church was comprised of Christians who “voluntarily agreed in [the] doctrine and practice” of a given Baptist church.<sup>14</sup> Shurden concluded, “The sense of Christian unity articulated in the concept of the universal church and the doctrinal restrictions placed upon membership in the local church provided the theological footing for Baptist associations.”<sup>15</sup>

***Practical Basis:*** Looking to the Philadelphia Association and all

other Baptist associations that have since formed, it is evident that practical considerations brought Baptists together by the formation of associations. As previously noted, the first meeting of the Philadelphia Baptist Association was held to discuss things that “were wanting [lacking] in the churches.” One of those concerns must have centered upon the integrity of pastoral leadership. As a consequence, one of the association's first actions was the approval of a policy of caution concerning newly arrived preachers. Churches were warned, “that a person that is a stranger, that has neither a letter of recommendation, nor is known to be a person gifted, and of a good conversation, shall not be admitted to preach. . .”<sup>16</sup> Apart from that specific issue, certainly the most obvious need was fellowship, given the geographical distances that existed between early Baptist churches. An associational annual meeting provided a time and place for fellowship with other like-minded Christians.

By the time the first pro-missionary association organized in Florida the practical tasks of the association had become much broader. Jack Dalton in his exhaustively researched history of Florida Baptists explained that the Florida Baptist Association saw its role as more than fellowship. He noted that the association also sought, “to promote acquaintance and fellowship among neighboring churches, to give advice to perplexing problems of doctrine and discipline, to aid in erecting houses of worship, to point out impostors, and finally, to counsel in all matters pertaining to keeping orderliness in the churches. Later, the associations sought to encourage Sunday schools and to aid ministers in securing education. Associations became the theological instructors of the churches, through answers to queries and the sending out of annual letters. Missionary work beyond associational boundaries was encouraged and promoted,” Dalton wrote.<sup>17</sup>

### **Theological Contributions to Baptist Faith and Practice**

Probably one of the most significant contributions made by the Philadelphia Baptist Association was the development of a confession of faith in 1742. That confession of faith served as a model not only for other Baptist associations, but for newly started Baptist churches in the colonies, many of which were established by the association's own

itinerant missionaries. More importantly, this statement provided the theological framework for defining what constituted a Baptist church. The Philadelphia statement was basically a re-statement of an earlier defense of doctrine known as the Second London Confession of 1689. The Philadelphia Confession reflected the same Calvinistic emphasis that had been defined in the Second London Confession. Both confessions set forth a clear doctrine on the authority of the scriptures, as well as a doctrine on the general or invisible church, and re-affirmed the validity of baptism by immersion.

The confession's unyielding position on scripture's authority harkened back to Balthasar Hubmaier's "apology" that had challenged Catholic dogma. The first article of the Philadelphia Confession affirmed: "The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule of all-saving knowledge, faith, and obedience; although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and his will which is necessary unto salvation."<sup>18</sup>

As previously noted, a second significant doctrine set forth in the Philadelphia Confession was to clarify that the "invisible" church was comprised of all Christians who are gathered under Christ's authority. The Philadelphia Confession added two more provisions to the London Confession model. One dealt with the laying of hands upon baptized believers. A second addition encouraged the singing of hymns in worship, which had been a cause for disagreement between Particular and Separate Baptists.<sup>19</sup>

Baptist theologians, according to William Estep, generally agree that the Philadelphia statement of faith had a significant influence upon churches, associations and even the Southern Baptist Convention when it was organized in 1845. Many of these entities were later constituted on the basis of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith.<sup>20</sup>

### **An Autonomous Baptist Body**

As a uniquely Baptist concept, the Baptist association did not retain hierarchical powers over local churches. As noted in the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, the independent sovereignty of Baptist churches

was affirmed by specifying its sole authority with respect to the church's doctrines, organization, officers, members, discipline, worship and ministry. However, as an autonomous Baptist body, the association did possess certain legitimate powers. Shurden broadly defined these as: (1) the right of determining membership, (2) the right of investigating membership, (3) the right of excluding from membership, (4) the right of working on behalf of membership, and (5) the right of regulating annual meetings.<sup>21</sup>

In exercising these rights, associations took on the role of monitor for theological soundness and mediator of disputes. "Doctrinal heresy, polity disorder, and division within a church constituted the majority of the problems investigated by associations," at least up until 1814, Shurden wrote.<sup>22</sup>

Yet the positions or actions taken by the local association were not binding upon their cooperating churches. A church could accept or reject an association's decisions. However, the Philadelphia Association sought to clarify its own role as the theological guardian of Baptist life. Benjamin Griffith in 1749 set forth an abiding principle on the association's doctrinal authority in his "Essay on the Power and Duty of an Association of Churches." Griffith defended the authority of an association to "declare any person or party in a church, who are defective in principle or disorderly in practice, to be censurable."<sup>23</sup> As a consequence of that essay, the Philadelphia Association adopted a principle that became the established norm for future Baptist associations. That monitory role sought to ensure the doctrinal integrity - encompassing theology, faith, practice and polity - of the association's cooperating churches.<sup>24</sup> Subsequently, in rare cases, that guiding principle was used by associations to exercise its sole weapon against a church for deviations from Baptist doctrine or practice.<sup>25</sup> The separation procedure has been characterized in several ways, including: "excluding" churches; "dropping" churches from the association's records; and "withdrawing fellowship" with churches.<sup>26</sup>

### **Association Development in Florida**

The first association organized within the Florida Territory (before statehood was granted in 1845) was convened on September 26, 1835,

at Providence Baptist Church, in Columbia County, and was called Suwannee Baptist Association.<sup>27</sup> Within a short time the association encompassed much of the entire territory of Florida's Panhandle and a portion of South Georgia.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, an anti-missionary sentiment and movement was growing throughout Georgia's wiregrass country. It eventually embroiled the Suwannee Association's churches in an on-going debate over the merits of being missionary. After nearly ten years of debating the issue, "some of the missionary churches withdrew in 1842 to take part in the creation of the Florida Association."<sup>29</sup> And within three years the anti-missionary forces managed to take control of the Suwannee Association and rid itself of all affiliation with the remaining pro-missionary churches.

The anti-missionary sentiments that had gained a foothold in Suwannee also surfaced in Georgia's Ocklocknee and Piedmont Baptist Associations which at the time had member churches from Florida's Panhandle. Those Florida Baptist churches, that were supportive of the missionary cause, withdrew their affiliation with the Georgia-based associations and set about the task of creating a pro-missions association of churches.

Representatives from the Florida churches agreed to meet at Leon County's Shiloh Baptist Church on October 22, 1842.<sup>30</sup> At that meeting it was agreed to write a letter to all the churches along Florida's Panhandle and invite them to participate in the organization of a new pro-missionary association. The organizational meeting was set for Thursday, March 2, 1843, to be held at Leon County's Indian Springs Baptist Church. Seventeen churches were represented at that first annual meeting of the Florida Baptist Association.<sup>31</sup>

The Florida Association clearly defined its role and purpose to assist churches and not provide oversight. "The Association thus organized shall have no power to lord it over God's heritage, nor infringe upon the internal rights of any church," stated the Association's Constitution. As reflected in that governing document, the recently organized Florida Association sought to emphasize fellowship among the churches, while still providing advice to churches, and appropriating money for mission causes. But equally important, it reserved the right to

withdraw all relationship with any church which, “shall deviate from the orthodox principles of the revealed word of God.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Evolving Changes to Role and Purpose**

Although fellowship among the churches had been a founding premise, Baptist scholar Shurden noted that by the early 1800s, the association's purpose began to change. The new emphasis was upon cooperative endeavors and the promotion of denominational interests.<sup>33</sup> According to J. C. Bradley, a specialist on the Baptist association, “The first half of the nineteenth century was a period of organizational experimentation for Baptists as they sought new structural forms to meet new and greatly increased mission challenges.” He further pointed out that, “Although associations had been the basic unit of Baptist interchurch relationship for almost a century in this country, the early years of the nineteenth century provided societies, a national convention and state conventions.” Citing a study by Glynn Ford, Bradley noted that the role of the association shifted, “from a doctrinally-based fellowship of churches to an implementing agency of the denomination.”<sup>34</sup> This implementing role included the promotion of missions and missions education, promotion of Sunday school and other educational programs, and fund raising for missionary and benevolent causes. The value and importance of the local association's promotional role was not lost upon Southern Baptist Convention (S.B.C.) leadership at the Sunday School Board at the dawning of the twentieth century. Baptist Sunday School Board (B.S.S.B.) leader J. N. Barnette championed the belief that, “The district association makes it possible to make a direct, sympathetic and constant contact with every church.”<sup>35</sup> This philosophical perspective led to the implementation of two back-to-back five-year programs (1936-40 and 1940-44) of the B.S.S.B. working through local associations to increase involvement and enrollment in local church Sunday schools. The resulting training campaign involved over 850 associations with over 50,000 Baptists being trained. “The net number of Sunday Schools increased by over 1,800 and enrollment increased by nearly 433,000,” Bradley noted, citing statistics the B.S.S.B. reported to the 1940 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>36</sup>

During the mid-1950s the role of each component of organized Baptist life - from the local church, the association, the state convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention - underwent a period of critical appraisal. "Two of the most important factors contributing to this reappraisal were the theological interest in the nature of the church and the denomination's efforts at correlation and coordination," Bradley explained.<sup>37</sup> As a result of those appraisals, the association came to be understood as a vital missions' partner in Baptist life. A subsequent outcome was the 1966 S.B.C. approval of a first-ever program statement for "associational administration services" assigned to the Home Mission Board. The newly defined assignment was expected to assist "associations in developing as associations."<sup>38</sup> However, it was not until 1971 when the staff at the Home Mission Board, crafted a definition that affirmed, "an association as a fellowship of churches on mission in their setting."<sup>39</sup>

Ten years after its initial action, the S.B.C. continued its effort to enhance the role and purpose of the association in Baptist life. The Convention adopted a 1976 "Missions' Challenge" report that said in part: "The association should be broadened and strengthened as a missionary organization. It should understand that it is churches on mission for Christ. It should not attempt to duplicate the churches, rather to serve them as they carry on the work."<sup>40</sup> This action affirmed Baptists' commitment, not only to missions, but the recognition that the association plays a vital role in helping the church fulfill its missionary purpose.

As a result of those evolving expectations on the association's revitalized role and purpose, Bradley identified four underlying principles which define the contemporary association. That role and purpose is to be: (1) a "doctrinally-based fellowships of churches on mission together;" (2) a "self-governing Baptist" body "created by the churches, not the denomination;" (3) active participation by associations is the key to local church involvement in denominational emphases and projects; and (4) "While self-governance is an indisputable right of every Baptist body, it is tempered by the necessity for, the spirit of, and the duty to practice interdependence and cooperation."<sup>41</sup>

Now after 300 years of existence, the Baptist association has experienced what Tom Roote has called “a revival of associational awareness.” He concluded in 1980 that, “Strong associations are the results of combined efforts of churches, state conventions, and the Southern Baptist Convention agencies. Likewise, strong churches and healthy support for state and convention purposes are the results of strong local associations where church leadership is informed and involved in the primary missionary task of the church.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William Cathcart, editor, "The Baptist Association," *The Baptist Encyclopedia, Vol. I*, (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts Press, 1883), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup>A.D. Gillette, editor, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1707 to 1807*, (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>William Cathcart, editor, "The Philadelphia Baptist Association," *The Baptist Encyclopedia, Vol. II*, (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts Press, 1883), p. 916; cf. Cathcart, Vol. I, pp. 46-47.

<sup>4</sup>Walter B. Shurden, *Associationalism Among Baptists in America: 1707 - 1824*, (New York: Arno Press, 1980), p. 103.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>6</sup>Gary W. Long, "The Philadelphia Baptist Association," posted on the website: <http://www.pbpress.org/articles>, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup>Jack Keep, *What is a Baptist Association?*, (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1989), p.20.

<sup>8</sup>Shurden, p.75.

<sup>9</sup>Keep, pp. 20-21.s

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>11</sup>Shurden, pp. 77-78.

<sup>12</sup>Keep, p. 21.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>Shurden, p. 88.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>Gillette, p. 29.

<sup>17</sup>Jack P. Dalton, "A History of Florida Baptists," a doctor of philosophy dissertation for the University of Florida, February, 1952, p. 51.

<sup>18</sup>William Cathcart, Vol. II, "The Philadelphia Confession of Faith," p. 1349.

<sup>19</sup>Gillette, p. 53.

<sup>20</sup>William R. Estep, *The Lord's Free People in a Free Land*, (Fort Worth, Texas: Evans Press, 1976), p. 59.

<sup>21</sup>Shurden, p. 128.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>23</sup>Benjamin Griffin, "Essay," in *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association 1707-1807*, Gillette, p. 72.

<sup>24</sup>Norman W. Cox, *We Southern Baptists*, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1961), pp. 68-70.

<sup>25</sup>E. C. Routh, "The District Association." *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, Vol. I*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), p. 87.

<sup>26</sup>Shurden, p. 130.

<sup>27</sup>*Minutes*, New River Church, September 26, 1835, np.

<sup>28</sup>Dalton, pp. 53-54.

<sup>29</sup>*Minutes*, New River Church, September 10, 1845, np.

<sup>30</sup>*Christian Index*, December 13, 1844, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup>James C. Bryant, *Indian Springs, The Story of a Pioneer Church in Leon County Florida*, (Tallahassee: Florida State University, 1971), p. 40.

<sup>32</sup>*Constitution*, Florida Baptist Association (1850), Articles 6 and 11, pp. 12-13; cf. Dalton, *A History of Florida Baptists*, p. 51.

<sup>33</sup>Shurden, pp. 108-109.

<sup>34</sup>J.C. Bradley, "Trends in Associational Life in the Twentieth Century," *Baptist History and Heritage*, Vol. 17, No. 2, April 1982, p. 11. Bradley for many years directed the Associational Administration Department of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board (now known as the North American Mission Board).

<sup>35</sup>J. N. Barnette, *Associational Sunday School Work*, (Nashville: Sunday School Board, SBC, 1933), p. 77.

<sup>36</sup>Bradley, p. 16.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>39</sup>F. Russell Bennett, "The Nature of the Baptist Association," *Review and Expositor*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 2, Spring, 1980, p. 179.

<sup>40</sup>Bradley, p. 20.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>42</sup>Tom Roote, "The Association on Mission in its Own Area and Beyond," *Review and Expositor*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 2, Spring, 1980, p. 222.

**Table 1**

**America's 15 Oldest Baptist Associations:**

- 1707 - Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) Association
- 1751 - Charleston (South Carolina) Association
- 1758 - Sandy Creek (North Carolina) Association
- 1765 - Kehukee (North Carolina) Association
- 1766 - Kettocton (Virginia) Association
- 1767 - Warren (Rhode Island) Association
- 1772 - Stonington (Connecticut) Association
- 1776 - Red Stone (Pennsylvania) Association
- 1776 - New Hampshire Association
- 1781 - Shaftesbury (Vermont) Association
- 1783 - Woodstock (Vermont) Association
- 1784 - Georgia Association
- 1786 - Holston (Tennessee) Association
- 1787 - Bowdoinham (Maine) Association
- 1787 - Vermont Association

Source: William Cathcart, The Baptist Encyclopedia, Vol. I,  
(Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts Publishers, 1883), p. 47.

# IN THE EYE OF THE STORM: MEMOIRS OF A DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

***William L. Hinds***

*Administrative Pastor of  
First Baptist Church Marianna, FL*



I was elected Executive Director of Missions for Gulf Stream Baptist Association in May 1992. There were three predecessors: Al Dawson, 1953-1979; Peyton M. Moore, 1980-1985; and Dr. Joe Courson, 1986-1991. The association was born April 29, 1948, a temporary structure created by messengers from Broward County Baptist churches. At the time of its creation, it was pointed out that the Broward (and Palm Beach) County churches were smaller and more rural in nature than the churches of Miami and West Palm Beach. The organization structure didn't "gel" until 1953. From the mid-1950's until my time with the association, which began in 1987 with my election as Associate Director to Joe Courson, the county and churches grew slowly but steadily.

Early in its history, ethnic diversity became a part of Baptist culture in Gulf Stream Baptist Association. Genus and Carolyn Crenshaw's work with the Native Americans, gave rise to First Seminole Indian Baptist Church. Al Dawson's era gave rise to a Russian/Ukrainian congregation, a Haitian Ministry, and a Korean Sunday School. Star of Bethlehem Baptist Church became the first African-American Congregation to affiliate with the association in 1974.

Peyton and Celia Moore had been missionaries to Vietnam. Under his leadership the association reached out to the “ethnics” at a time when Broward County was becoming “home” to people from many nations. Joe Courson gave birth to the phrase, “This is a World Class Mission Field,” and the churches responded to the challenge of evangelism and church planting. Favorable conditions of good economic growth, high employment, good schools, medical care and an appealing quality of life led people from many nations to continue to make Broward County their home.

Outside the providence of God there is no way to understand how I ever came to be a Director of Missions. My call to ministry led me into a military career with involvement in church planting wherever my military assignments took me. That was as much of my calling as I could see, until April 1987. From 1982-1987 I had served as a member of the Florida Baptist State Board of Missions. In April, Bill Coffman, serving that year as President of the Florida Baptist Convention came to Palatka (St. Johns River Baptist Association) for our Semi-annual meeting). At the time I was active in the Association as Sunday School Director. Bill and I had worked very closely on an ad hoc committee for almost a year. He greeted me with, “I want a copy of your resume before I leave.” I asked him why, and he said, “I want to send it to some people down south.” I told him I didn't have one, but I would put one together and mail it to him. In mid-June Joe Courson called me. He told me he had my resume from Bill Coffman and wanted to meet and discuss with me the possibility of our working together. We agreed on the date, July 5, 1987, and the place, a restaurant in Sanford. We would meet for lunch at 11:30 a.m. We did, and then we renewed our lease on the booth by ordering a snack at 4:15 p.m. as we bonded in our joint quest for souls in evangelism and church planting.

Our initial meeting was followed by Frances and I making a trip to Plantation, Florida, where we met with the Personnel Committee at Joe and Anne's home in Plantation. A few weeks later we met with the Executive Committee of the Association at their August meeting. From the day I met Joe Courson until the August meeting there was never any question in my mind that, if called, I would accept. God had shown me

the greatest challenge of my life. This was where all the preparation had been pointing. I began my work with Gulf Stream on Sept. 12, 1987, as I recall. Joe kept me busy. He also kept me informed. We worked together as a team, each asking advice of the other.

Joe was a visionary. He was also very much a people person. Ironically, he was frequently perceived as the taskmaster and I as the people person. Our personality inventories administered the same day at the Home Mission Board in Atlanta indicated he was strongly disposed towards being a people person, while I was portrayed as “the job comes first.”

Joe deserves a great deal of credit for whatever I became during the time we worked together. If he was invited to a denominational event, training week, or whatever, he saw to it that I was also invited. Together we attended many conferences regarding association work, church growth, Sunday School work, and evangelism at the Home Mission Board; Baptist Sunday School Board; Ridgecrest, Glorietta, Lake Yale and Blue Springs Baptist Assemblies; and the national D.O.M. fellowship meetings.

Working together we identified specific places where new churches were needed, what type of churches would best fit the “demographics,” which church could be asked to sponsor the new work. The association was already involved in direct sponsorship of new church starts, especially ethnic work, going back to the days of Peyton Moore.

One of my early tasks was to find a way to bring on board someone to work with church development. As time progressed, I found myself burdened with work helping new churches organize and grow. At first we sought the solution by recruiting and using Mission Service Corps ministers of Education. We were blessed by some of God's finest servants who had reached retirement age and volunteered to come live in a house which the association provided and volunteer their services to help churches, especially ethnic churches - Haitian, Hispanic, Brazilian, African American, Korean, Chinese, Russian, etc. That plan worked for about six years. Associations, like churches, have always needed vast numbers of volunteers to do the tasks of ministry, missions and evangelism that needs to be done. All we did differently is look

further and bring volunteers from elsewhere to Gulf Stream to live and work.

Joe Courson was elected Director of the Church Annuity Promotion Department, Florida Baptist Convention in November 1991. I was named Interim Director of Missions a few days later.

My time as Director of Missions literally began with a hurricane, Hurricane Andrew, which made land fall on Monday morning, August 24, 1992. The week before I had shown Stewart and Clara Louise (C. L.) Pickle around the association as people in Dade (now called Miami-Dade) and Broward County made hurricane preparations. I rushed them out of the area on Saturday morning, somewhat against their will. Being true missionaries they wanted to “stay and help.” I insisted, “No, this is not yet your battle. You need to go home and make preparations to move here. We need you on a full time basis much more than I'm going to need you for the next couple of weeks.” Doyle Wetherington, the Executive Director of Missions for Miami Baptist Association had called me on Friday to tell me of his plans. It appeared that Homestead, where Doyle lived, would be hit. He was going to Orlando until the storm passed. Then he planned to pick up a motor home and return to the area. As it turned out his house was hit, he did pick up a motor home and he found it quite useful.

On Sunday I received a call from Dr. Jim Goodson and Dr. Larry Elliott, Missions Division, Florida Baptist Convention. They told me to keep them apprised, they were ready to move and one disaster feeding unit was ready to roll.

Within two hours after the all clear was given in Broward County, Beth Allen (Gulf Stream Director of Church and Community Ministry) and I were in my car and driving through the devastated area. I drove as best I could while Beth used the cell phone to see how many Miami churches and leaders she could contact. Thirty-four Southern Baptist Church buildings were damaged; some appeared to be total losses. Near the end of the afternoon, Jim Goodson called and asked me to find a place for he and Larry to bunk. I said, “Come to my house, everything that is habitable is full up.” They were our house guests for two nights. During that time it was decided that the gymnasium at Pembroke Road

Baptist Church would be the coordination center for Florida Baptist (and Southern Baptist) Disaster Assistance. The gracious pastor, Bob Adams, said, “For as long as you need it.” The church had three phone lines; he gave us two of them. Then Jim and Larry returned to Jacksonville to organize the effort, Frances changed the sheets and Dr. John Sullivan got one of their beds.

Dr. Sullivan had been in revival in Pensacola, which closed out a day early. He drove hard all day Wednesday. The next day he and I were driving through the disaster area, reviewing damage, talking with and reassuring pastors. We found Doyle and Harriet Wetherington, who had just returned, to find their home heavily damaged by both wind and water. I am a veteran of both Korea and Vietnam. South Dade County smelled and looked like a war zone. Maps were of little value. Street signs were gone, all man-made landmarks were dramatically altered. It was devastation and suffering wherever we looked. I slept little for the first two weeks after Andrew hit.

Florida Baptist's feeding unit rolled into Fort Lauderdale on Monday, the day Andrew hit, from First Baptist Church it was diverted further south, where the need was greater. Other first responders came in the following day, with large feeding units from Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Southern Baptists were responding even as the American Red Cross struggled with disorganization. The locals who were trying to respond had been severely impacted both organizationally and at their homes. Fortunately, the early responders included about a dozen Florida Baptist Directors of Missions. It also included the key early responders from the Florida Baptist Convention and the Directors of Southern Baptist Brotherhood for the states of Tennessee and Kentucky. One is especially worthy of note. Cameron Byler of Tennessee was very helpful to the Red Cross and all of us. Hurricane Andrew was his 49<sup>th</sup> disaster. He had literally “written the book” on how Southern Baptists would interface with the Red Cross in managing the response efforts to large scale disasters.

Feeding units were strategically located on Southern Baptist Church campuses in South Dade County. Within days Southern Baptists feeding units were serving 50,000 meals a day, then 100,000, and finally

reached a peak of 130,000 meals a day. The hasty responding feeding units continued operation for several weeks. The center at Pembroke Road Baptist Church continued their operation for more than three months. Baptist rebuilding efforts would continue for many months.

Saturday and Sunday before Hurricane Andrew hit most church members throughout Dade and Broward Counties, as well as the Keys, were busy making preparations for the approaching storm. After the storm passed, churches throughout the region poured into the disaster area to help during the week. As I recall, all Gulf Stream churches were able to resume services the following Sunday, although several of their members were highly involved in serving meals, water, ice and other items to thousands of people in South Dade who had lost everything and were living in makeshift accommodations. People opened their arms and pockets to support those in need.

In October 1992 my report at the annual meeting included these words: "In the coming years, I am certain, this will be remembered as the year Hurricane Andrew came....Southern Baptist response has been great; never have I been more proud to be one! Tons of food, water, ice and relief supplies have flooded Miami from day one. Over a dozen feeding vans were sent into Miami. Over two million hot meals have already been served, Thousands of volunteers have helped distribute food and supplies, shared their faith in witnessing to others, and helped in so many ways. It really does look like a war zone in south Dade County, but what many of you have help do has made a tremendous difference in the lives of thousands of people."

Throughout relief efforts the message was often repeated, "The greatest need is for salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." After the first week, the two phone lines graciously shared by Pembroke Road Baptist Church were replaced by ten new lines installed for the relief center which would remain in their gymnasium for about three months. These were augmented by cell phones and an entire central telephone system donated by local businesses. There was an urgent need for ministry and worship to respond to the increased sensitivity of people throughout the area.

At that same October meeting Gulf Stream Baptist Association

elected Elroy Barber, an African-American, Pastor of Brethren Help, as Association Moderator. There were now 78 churches plus dozens of missions in the association. I really don't like the term, "African-American" or the term "ethnic." We are all Americans and we are all ethnic. It's just a matter of how far back one chooses to go. Gulf Stream was on its way to becoming an association for all nationalities. Within two years we were able to use Dr. Barber on a part time basis as a part of our associational church starting program. In six years Dr. Barber would go on to be elected First Vice President and then President of the Florida Baptist Convention. Through his efforts more than a dozen congregations were started to reach "African-Americans" and to birth additional churches.

In August 1993 Gulf Stream Baptist Association, called Bob Adams, the Pastor of Pembroke Road Baptist Church to join the association staff as Director of Church Growth. It is always a sensitive issue when an association taps a local pastor to move from a congregation to serve in the same association, but this was a gracious and loving move in which the people of a church that had shared so much of themselves during Hurricane Andrew agreed to continue sharing and commissioned their pastor as a missionary to the other churches of the association so that he could be available to minister on a wider scale. Bob Adams became a cherished companion as we labored together with Stewart Pickle (Church Extension), Elroy Barber (African American Ministries), Milton Leach (Hispanic Church Consultant), and Beth Allen (Church and Community Ministries). Other key leaders at the time were Howard & Martha Botts (Seafarers Ministry), Cliff Holsema and Tanna Dawson (National Racetrack Chaplaincy birthed in Gulf Stream), Emanuel Cesar (Haitian Church Planter), and Dr. Ron Mensinger, (Broward Correctional Institute). Gulf Stream also had a strong support staff of four secretarial and ministry assistants, plus half a dozen Mission Service Corps volunteers who worked together so well and so diligently to equip and assist the Baptist churches in a county that was growing at the rate of 700 people a week and becoming more and more diverse each day. In 1994 my message to the association included these lines: "There are roughly 3 million Muslims in America

today. Their target is our universities. At their present rate of growth the Muslims will be the second largest religion in America by 2015, overtaking Judaism, which is now in second place. In Broward County the Muslims are the only group making inroads into the black community today.... For the next 20 years the issue we face will be establishing Christianity as the one true religion....My vision...is that every individual who lives in or visits our county, regardless of race, country of origin, or culture, would have an opportunity to become a part of a growing, healthy church....We must pray daily to discover what God wants to do in our midst.”

In the seven years from 1987 to 1994 Gulf Stream had grown from 54 to 119 congregations. Stewart Pickle's report included 11 churches for 1994. In his report, Bob Adams introduced a new term into the lexicon of Gulf Stream - for the first time we had held a conference for *culturally blended congregations*, a growing trend in our churches. (It took many forms as Second Generation Americans, Baby Boomers, and different national backgrounds sought to experience worship of God with others of varied backgrounds and worship styles.)

In the last half of the nineteenth century, the Southern Baptist Convention sent their first missionary to Brazil. In 1995, Brazilian Baptist President, Nilson do Amaral Fanini challenged the Baptist denominations throughout the world to double the number of Baptist Churches by the year 2000. In his challenge, he mentioned that his Brazilian Baptist had a foreign missionary in America in a place called Pompano Beach. He was referring to Silair Almeida, pastor of First Brazilian Baptist Church of South Florida, a new church in the association sponsored by First Baptist, Pompano Beach. The Cooperative Program had turned full circle. Christians in foreign lands were now sending missionaries back to America, a nation growing more and more pagan.

Milton Leach was a most gifted and resourceful man. The Lord called and he followed the trail of Spanish work from the Rio Grande valley of Texas to Puerto Rico, South Florida, the Home Mission Board in Atlanta, and then back to South Florida. It was my privilege to work with him for almost a decade. He spoke Spanish from his youth, learned

some Haitian Creole, and had such wonderful gifts that he related well to people of any national background. He was well known throughout South Florida, especially by Southern Baptists, from 1952 until his death 50 years later. In late 1994 I asked him to look into what we could do to help our churches fulfill their responsibility to the laws of the land as well as the denomination. His answer was a booklet which Gulf Stream Published the following year, *The Legal and Ethical Responsibilities of the Church Guidebook*. It was targeted to churches in Florida, primarily ethnic. As I recall we initially printed 500 of them. Most were used locally. We did send a few copies to the state convention. It took awhile, but then churches of all sizes from other parts of the state began asking for copies. The book was never intended to answer all the questions; it was intended to raise the questions and direct churches to sources where they might find answers. Milton and Gladys Leach were recognized at our annual meeting for 50 years of service as a home missionary, as well as for his work in writing the guide.

In 1996 I was selected by the Home Mission Board as the “Mega Cities Director of Missions of the Year,” being recognized primarily for our strong success in planting new churches in Broward County. While the focus was on me, as the award was presented, I knew first of all that it had been brought about by God, secondly by conditions, and thirdly by a group of pastors and associational leaders who had a passion for reaching people through starting new congregations. It has been said that my selection caused national attention to be focused on Gulf Stream. Maybe so, but it became evident that other people were definitely involved the following year when: (1) Pastor Bill Billingsley of Sheridan Hills Baptist Church for 35 years received the Home Mission Board's Presidential Award for Sustained Support in sponsoring new church starts. More than 60 churches and missions in Gulf Stream could trace their heritage, as either child, grandchild, or great grandchild to Sheridan Hills Baptist Church. (2) Dr. Elroy Barber was recognized that same year as the outstanding African American Church Starter of the Year. (3) Stewart Pickle was reporting record numbers of Haitian, Hispanic, and other language starts. To God be the glory when His

people work together to reach the lost!

Church starting is not something that appeals to every person or every congregation. Associations need to be involved heavily in ministries. In the past Gulf Stream had given birth to the National Race Track Ministries (to trainers, jockeys, and back side people), a Seafarer's ministry, a beach reach ministry, and helped birth a few food and clothing ministries. A couple of years after Hurricane Andrew, Pastor Bill Billingsley called me and asked my permission to talk with Beth Allen. He was interested in her for a position on his church staff. Beth was leading an excellent ministry for the association, and I was most reluctant to lose her, but I knew that what he was proposing was something she needed to pray about and consider. In the end, Beth joined the staff of Sheridan Hills Baptist Church a few months later, and I began searching for the person God had in mind to lead our Church and Community Ministries at Gulf Stream.

One morning I had an appointment to meet with Marcus Rego, who lived in north Broward, and was serving a small Brazilian mission in Palm Beach County. He wanted to talk with me about starting a mission in Broward. Stewart Pickle had talked with him and asked him to make an appointment to talk with me. At the last moment, Sylna Rego, Marcus' wife, decided to come along with him for our meeting. It was not that unusual; whenever possible I preferred to talk to both husband and wife who were interested in starting a new church type mission.

Several minutes into the conversation Sylna asked if I would be interested in a proposal she had written and brought along with her. She handed me a short document, about four pages as I remember, which was a Proposed Business Plan for a Not For Profit Ministry. As a former banker and Management Consultant I had seen such plans before, and was really not expecting to see something like that at my meeting with the Regos. I forced myself to give close attention as I read the first two paragraphs. Then suddenly her background grabbed my attention. I reached into my desk, pulled out a copy of Beth Allen's Job Description and said, "While I am reading your document, would you please read one of mine?" The end result was Gulf Stream Baptist Association called Sylna Rego as the new director of Church and Community

Missions. The following month both Sylna and Marcus went to Atlanta for formal appointment as Home Missionaries. Afterward, I recall that Marcus remarked, “For me it was a new experience. In the past I've been the appointee and Sylna was the spouse. This time she was the appointee and I was the spouse.” Sylna Rego helped the association become involved in additional ministries - A mentoring program for youth (Jericho Project), a free medical and dental clinic staffed by volunteers, ministries to help the unemployed reenter the work force, and free dental and medical treatment for those without insurance who could not afford treatment. Her tenure with the association extended for eight years after my retirement in 1998.

During my tenure Gulf Stream Baptist Association was a very diverse group of churches located in a very diverse county, and becoming more so each day. As the association approached its Fiftieth Anniversary (1998), 145 congregations strong, I reflected on where we were and where it appeared God was leading. In the words of Rev. Bob Adams, Pastoral Ministries Director, “God has chosen to be present in and work through the congregations of the Gulf Stream Baptist Association. We know this is true because of a) the promise of Scripture, and b) ongoing expressions of His activity in and through the churches.”<sup>1</sup> It was my strong feeling that the association needed to undertake an 18-24 month consultant-led study of the strategy and organization of Gulf Stream Baptist Association to better enable the churches to enter the new millennium equipped and organized to minister to builders, boomers, busters, and millennial kids from 189 different nations, speaking at least 79 different languages. Increasingly we were facing -

1. Older congregations that needed assistance to regain strength and life after declining for several years.
2. The emergence of multi-cultural congregations.
3. Churches were increasingly becoming more innovative and creative.
4. In many congregations there was a strong movement from program-based ministry to mission-based ministry.
5. Almost everywhere there was financial stress. Many

congregations continued to live “on the edge.”

We started without the consultant. Our Executive Committee elected an in-house committee to take a look at our organization and structure that would better fit the needs of ministry and mission in our multi-cultural, multi-language context. They were given until the annual meeting, October 1998 to make their report. I had a decision to make. I believed strongly that the association needed to proceed with additional strategy and leadership planning. I knew that if I led the association into such a study, I would need to stay around for the implementation stage. That would mean delaying my retirement for at least 4 years. An association is very much like a church. Unless the incumbent is able to share his vision with the study committee that formulates the new strategy, and is willing to stay around for the implement of the study results, not much will happen. I was already more than 66 years old, and doubted I could physically stay the course for another four or 5 years. After much prayer and consultation with my wife of over forty years, I announced my retirement in late spring of 1998, to be effective the end of the year. It was time for the association to plan for a new era.

The Fifty year association history, “We Came From Many Nations,” published in 1998, pointed out that my ministry as Director of Missions started with a hurricane. After four years as associate, six months as Interim, and three months following my election as Executive Director, Hurricane Andrew did come ashore. I have used the title, “In the Eye of the Storm,” for these remembrances. As anyone who has ever been through a hurricane knows, the eye of a hurricane is characterized by stillness and calmness. The danger intensifies as the trailing wall of the eye passes by; many times more damaging than the leading winds and rain. In reflection, my time as a director of missions was filled with days when I was expected to be a counselor, a pastor, an evangelist, a banker, a real estate agent, a peacemaker, a parliamentarian, a lawyer, and a prophet who could accurately foretell the future. Some days I was expected to be all of the above. There were times when the pressure was intense, but in reflection, I think the analogy is accurate - most of my days as a director of mission were spent in the eye of the storm. The days were hectic, yet calm and reassuring. When the pressure became

unbearable, God always produced calmness, a reassurance that He was still in charge. It troubled me when an old declining church in a changing neighborhood filled with new but different people closed its doors for the last time, but God reassured me with the call, “I didn't call you to raise the dead; I called you to give birth to new churches.”

William L. Hinds  
Graceville, Florida  
June 2007

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<sup>1</sup>Hillhouse, John C., “*We Came From Many Nations*,” Hargrave Press, Graceville, Florida, copyright 1998, page 128.



## THE BAPTIST ASSOCIATION: ORGANIZED AND FUNCTIONING

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When the phrase “Baptist association” is used there are several possible meanings. According to F. Russell Bennett, “It can refer to a geographic area, an annual meeting, a community of churches, an assembly of messengers, [and] a denominational organization.”<sup>1</sup> As associations have sought to define their unique identity and role during the past 300 years, all the aforementioned definitions have been applicable as the association has organized and functioned. The Baptist association of the twenty-first century, in some ways, mirrors its historic predecessor of three centuries ago. Yet it functions in several different ways today. And these functions have changed as the needs of local churches have changed.

“Throughout its history, the association has made a major contribution by providing fellowship, mutual support and encouragement to participating Baptists,” Allen Graves reminds us.<sup>2</sup> However, as noted in a companion article elsewhere in this publication, the first Baptist association in America established 1707 in Philadelphia also assumed the role as the theological guardian of Baptist life. That monitory role sought to ensure the doctrinal integrity - encompassing theology, faith, practice and polity - of the association's cooperating churches.<sup>3</sup>

As the roles and functions of this denominational entity have changed over the past 300 years, a contemporary definition of the

Baptist association places greater emphasis upon its corporate missionary purpose. The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in 1971 determined that an association is “a fellowship of churches on mission in their setting.”<sup>4</sup> That definition underscored the cooperative endeavors of churches working together to carry out the Great Commission.

### **Organized to Function**

As a community or fellowship of churches, associations from their inception have defined their qualifications for affiliation. Historically an association specified in its constitution the procedure by which churches could become members. A church was expected to present, “by their delegates, a written petition stating their desire for membership, their doctrinal beliefs, and their willingness to comply with associational policies.”<sup>5</sup> As Florida's first missionary Baptist association, the Florida Baptist Association's membership requirement stated: “Newly constituted churches may be admitted into this union upon application by letter and delegates; and if upon examination found to be orthodox, shall be received by the Association . . .” Generally the meaning of “orthodox” required the church to be committed to articles of faith that reflected the association's doctrinal position. In many instances these doctrinal statements affirmed or mirrored either the Philadelphia Confession of Faith (1742) or the New Hampshire Confession of Faith (1833). And as noted in a companion article appearing elsewhere in this publication, a church whose faith and practice became less than “orthodox” could find its fellowship with the association terminated.

In its infancy, the primary function of the association was as an annual meeting that existed for several days out of the year. Today's practice, with shorter annual meetings, is for committees and employees to carry out the work of the association. Depending upon the authority assigned by the association's governing documents, the director of missions working through an executive committee and/or other designated committees - “composed of representatives from each member church” - typically handle all the day-to-day financial, personnel, strategic planning and polity matters of the association.<sup>7</sup> What follows is a summary of an organized and functioning association then and now.

### **The Annual Meeting**

Typically held in the fall of the year, the annual association meeting during the first two hundred years often began on either Thursday or Friday and concluded on Sunday. Because of its importance and value, pastors and laity would travel great distances to participate in what has been characterized as “the biggest religious event of the year.”<sup>8</sup> The fellowship role of the association was underscored as preachers and church members from far and wide renewed old acquaintances and new friends were made. Additionally, “A major part of every annual meeting would be taken up with reports on the state of the churches,” explained seminary professor John Steely.<sup>9</sup> Baptist historian Walter Shurden further clarified that these “church letters reported the numerical status and spiritual condition of the local churches.” The letters included the number of members, deaths, removals, additions, and persons excommunicated.<sup>10</sup>

Those letters also reflected concern over the spiritual health of churches that was highlighted in different ways by Florida's association. The West Florida Baptist Association's 1855 annual report contained a brief assessment on 12 of its 19 cooperating churches. A committee reported, “Apalachicola is nearly dead. Her white members are confused and scattered like sheep on the mountains without a shepherd, while her colored membership, struggling under intestine troubles, and almost starving for lack of spiritual guidance, calls loudly in our ears for help.” Another entry noted, “Salem and Sardis, are afflicted with a deep chilliness, and the power of darkness seem almost ready to prevail over them.” The committee concluded that the “deplorable state of the churches” was due in part to poverty, isolation and the scarcity of ministers.<sup>11</sup> Another example, drawn from the Alachua Baptist Association's 1897 annual report noted, “We are sorry to note that so few of our churches have reported revivals this year, and are letting the Master's cause suffer without an effort on their part. We are sorry to find that no prayer meetings are reported by any of the church letters.”<sup>12</sup>

Although the aforementioned reports may have been depressing, much inspiration was derived from the association's annual gathering. Typically featured was the daily preaching of as many as five or six

sermons intermingled with the handling of business. Some Baptist historians have noted the sermons, generally delivered by guest preachers, provided the motivation, joy and enthusiasm for the association's preachers and church members which enabled them to return to their church field with renewed energy and zeal.<sup>13</sup> In some instances, "the intensely religious atmosphere often produced revivals which spread to neighboring areas," Shurden observed.<sup>14</sup>

In the twenty-first century, time has become a valuable commodity. Today's annual meetings [and some semi-annual meetings] are most likely held in the evening to accommodate the availability of pastors and laity who have busy work, family and social commitments. It is rare to find an association that conducts an annual meeting lasting longer than two days. And that "two-day" gathering has come to represent convening on the evening of the first day and concluding with a morning or evening session on the second day. With this streamlined approach, time only permits the delivery of one or two sermons and an expedited business session. The business may include the election of association officers and the hearing of reports or recommendations from the director of missions, the association's executive committee or other select committees. There are typically no detailed verbal reports from the churches other than the collective statistical report - gleaned from the annual church profile (ACP) reports - that appears in the printed association annual. Additionally, if there are concerns expressed from churches, disputes to mediate, or doctrinal issues to be considered, these are typically handled by a committee which may or may not report their findings to the annual gathering.

Another former dimension of the annual meeting involved consideration of topical inquiries - ranging from theology to polity - sent in by churches. This role is reviewed later in this narrative.

#### **Association Delegates**

Since the inception of the association annual meeting member Baptist churches have sent delegates (as they were then called and now known as messengers) to these gatherings. Those messengers were not representatives who possessed delegated authority to vote, "according to prior instructions from their church". Rather, those church

representatives “were to vote their convictions under the leadership of the Holy Spirit as various issues arose.”<sup>15</sup> To further broaden the bonds of fellowship, associations would designate several individuals to visit other associations' annual meetings. To be appointed a church messenger to the annual meeting or to attend another association's meeting was considered a honor.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps more importantly, these delegate/messengers were expected to bring back information about what other Baptists were doing. Today, while churches still send messengers to their association's annual meeting, the practice of sending representatives to neighbor associations is limited if done at all.

In addition to the messenger exchange, associations previously shared copies of their annual meeting minutes with other associations and churches. Those exchanges of information -- personal interaction and the printed word as well as -- served as significant mediums for maintaining harmony and unity while nurturing a far-reaching network of like-minded Baptists.<sup>17</sup>

### **Circular Letters of Doctrine**

Another source of inspiration and doctrinal teaching formerly a standard practice by associations was the preparation and sending of circular letters to its member churches. Addressing timely issues - doctrine, church polity, church and home life, missions and evangelism, ministerial education - the circular letters were sent to sister Baptist associations as well. These letters served to provide instruction, guidance and encouragement to the members and leaders of the geographically scattered congregations within the association's sphere of influence. Such letters can be credited with under girding orthodoxy of the Baptist faith and practice for the geographically scattered churches. The circulating of doctrinal letters were patterned after the New Testament example established by the Jerusalem council of the early Christian church.<sup>18</sup>

Initially written by a selected pastor during the days of the annual meeting, these circular letters often carried, “an exhortation for greater achievement in the coming year, plus a resume of associational happenings,” Shurden explained.<sup>19</sup> In later years the topics were selected by the association's gathering of delegates and assigned to a

leading pastor to prepare for presentation the next year. Ranging in length from two to fourteen pages, the narrative style of the circular letter was often flowery, and enhanced with extensive use of Biblical terms and referenced scriptural quotations. With few, if any, Baptist periodicals available in most states until the late nineteenth century, these circular letters served a unique educational, literary and news purpose. In time the circular letter has all but disappeared from Baptist life, although in some associations it was replaced by the doctrinal sermon preached at the annual meeting.

### **Ensuring Theological Integrity**

From its inception, Baptist associations in America took on the role of ensuring doctrinal integrity and providing theological stability for the Baptist movement. This was evidenced by the development of doctrinal faith statements - such as the Philadelphia Confession and the New Hampshire Confession - which were adopted by churches and associations. [See companion article elsewhere in this publication.]

Additionally, as the first American organization of cooperating Baptist churches, the Philadelphia Association sought to provide advice on polity and practice issues by responding to “queries” made by local churches. The association's response would seek to represent the “mind of Christ” to the world at large.<sup>20</sup> Equally important was the belief that the collective wisdom of the church delegates would provide answers or guidance for resolving issues of concern.<sup>21</sup> Those inquiries covered the theological spectrum from baptism, the Lord's Supper, church membership, ordination, the place of women in the church, the propriety of using musical instruments in a worship service, to the cultural issues of the day, specifically gambling and slavery.

However, this doctrinal role began to diminish in the twentieth century. Allen Graves has observed, “With the shift toward more emphasis on promotion and less on doctrinal discussion, many associations no longer include as a standard procedure the preaching of a doctrinal sermon or provide otherwise for doctrinal discussions in the annual sessions of the association. The possible explanation for the disinterest in doctrinal discussions at the associational level may be a desire to avoid any controversial subject that might stimulate conflict or

division within the association.” Graves concluded that this has resulted, “in the effect of giving less and less emphasis to the teaching of what Baptists believe or why they believe it.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Assessing Preachers**

Ensuring doctrinal integrity among its cooperating churches, meant the association would examine the credentials of itinerant preachers, and if necessary, expose imposters.<sup>23</sup> Walter Shurden's study of early American associations found annual meeting minutes filled, “with warnings given to churches regarding questionable ministers or ‘imposters.’ Ministers preaching in disorder were warned that the association would ‘advertise’ them if errors were not corrected. This ‘advertisement’ was tantamount to social ostracism from the Baptist community, and few preachers were such radical individualists as to relish that lonely isolation.”<sup>24</sup>

The contemporary practice - with improved communication mediums and Internet resources to conduct background checks on individuals - makes it easier, but not foolproof, for local church laity leadership to secure the credentials and known personal history of a prospective pastor or staff member.

### **Ministerial Education**

An early need identified by association leadership was a trained clergy. Many Baptist preachers in colonial America had little formal education (grade school or high school equivalent) let alone the opportunity and financial resources to attend a college or seminary. Baptists who felt God's call to preach had as their sole textbook the Bible. Their self-taught Bible knowledge served as the basis for their theological understanding which translated into their sermons. If a young man was fortunate, he was mentored by an older preacher who would share his years of knowledge and wisdom of the scriptures as well as his theology and polity beliefs.

In response to the need for a trained clergy, Bible societies and some Baptist associations initially employed or commissioned individuals to serve as colporteurs. Their task was basically that of Bible and book salesman. The books were typically narratives on practical theology and Bible commentaries, all of which were designed

to help preachers improve their Biblical knowledge and ministerial expertise.

Many associations appointed committees on education to survey the needs and promote the education of ministerial students. The Alachua Association reported in 1898 that its education committee “examined” the annual reports of 23 Florida Baptist associations and found that 14 had appointed committees on education. Summarizing those various committee conclusions the Alachua committee noted, “Some opposing the schooling of men for the ministry, [and] others urging that the association provide more liberally for the education of men for the ministry.”<sup>25</sup>

Some associations went a step further by establishing or supporting schools or colleges that would foster ministerial education and training. As early as 1764, Rhode Island College - later called Brown University - was supported by financial and promotion assistance provided by the Philadelphia Association.<sup>26</sup>

Although there are many other examples of associations fostering schools in colonial America, as recently as the 1940s the South Florida Baptist Association established a preacher training school in Lakeland. At the urging and leading by Association Missionary, Frank Faris, representatives from five associations - South Florida, Tampa Bay, Pinellas, Orange Blossom, and Southwest Florida - met and voted on July 6, 1943 to establish a ministers' institute. “The school gained acceptance when the South Florida Baptist Association provided sponsorship,” Wiley Richards reported. Initially called the Florida Baptist Institute it was envisioned to offer a “high school curriculum infused with theology,” Richards wrote.<sup>27</sup> Subsequently by 1957 the school - then called the Baptist Bible Institute and relocated to Graceville -- came under the auspices of the Florida Baptist State Convention. During the next several decades, transitions in educational objectives and name changes resulted in The Baptist College of Florida.

### **Mediator of Disputes**

As previously noted, an original and longstanding role of the association was that of mediator of disputes within and between Baptist churches. In earlier times, the association also helped define appropriate

discipline for wayward church members. The mediator role was typically assigned to several persons in attendance at the annual association meeting. These councils, as they would be called, either read letters from churches outlining a problem or would travel to the site of the church dispute to conduct a hearing. "Such consultation sometimes required biblical knowledge, or knowledge of Baptist history and precedent," explained seminary professor John Steely. "In other cases, at least a rudimentary sense of diplomacy would be valuable in discovering ways of healing breaches within congregations or between neighboring congregations."<sup>28</sup>

Gradually, associations discontinued the practice of being a mediator of church disputes or making judgments on personal lifestyle issues. Today, if conflict within a church or between two churches arises, the association's director of missions seeks to provide personal consultation or enlists third party mediation. But rarely are such disputes publicly discussed at an annual meeting. Additionally, the association's former role of disciplining church members was conveyed to the local church. In Florida, by the beginning of the twentieth century, less attention to the control of the behavior of church members through church discipline became evident. The custom of reporting the number of people excluded for various disciplinary reasons came to an end in 1925 when the last such report was published in the State Convention's *Annual*. During that year 1,416 persons were expelled from their church and only 305 were restored. Obviously, church discipline was losing its effectiveness. Consequently, in the 1920's church discipline not only largely ceased to be effective; it largely ceased to be.

### **Provider of Training Resources**

Associations, as they have sought to address the changing needs of churches, have developed an expanded program of training resources. In the first one hundred years, association limited their training emphasis to promoting Sunday schools and seeking to educate ministers.<sup>29</sup>

Today, in an effort to help churches fulfill their mission, local associations provide a variety of resources and training events. These resources may be provided by association leadership or specialists from

the state convention or Southern Baptist Convention agencies. The resources are nearly endless, but Allen Graves has suggested that some of the more typical, “may deal with Christian stewardship, church budgets, planning the church calendar, church long-range planning, church growth and enlargement of educational organizations, membership and leadership enlistment and training, evangelism, the improvement of teaching and learning, the vitalizing of corporate worship, the improvement of church administration, pastoral care and counseling, and other such related areas.”<sup>30</sup>

### **The Evolving Role of the Association Missionary**

It was nearly one hundred years after its creation that the association became the motivating force for evangelism and church starting primarily within their respective geographical region. Much of the growth of the Baptist movement can be attributed to the sending of itinerant preachers and missionaries into America's frontier states and territories. However, before the Baptist association fully embraced this missionary responsibility, the task was promoted by missionary societies that had evolved out of the Second Great Awakening. These and other societies were typically organized for a variety of singular purposes, including religious publications distribution, Sunday school development, ministerial education promotion, Bible and tract distribution, as well as foreign and home missions. James L. Sullivan explained in his treatise on Baptist polity that societies, “were operated by devout and dedicated church members and yet were not church-controlled or -managed.”<sup>31</sup> Those societies most often acted at the behest of its financially significant members, who may or may not have accommodated the needs or desires of the Baptist churches.<sup>32</sup>

The sending out of domestic missionaries by associations did not come readily. Forty-five years after its formation, the Philadelphia Association, “sent two teams of itinerants consisting of two men on each team to Virginia.” Their first itinerant preacher was Morgan Edwards. By 1766 the association began the collection of quarterly offerings in the churches for the “support of ministerial traveling on the errand of the churches.”<sup>33</sup> Subsequently, in 1773, John Gano became what some historians have called the South's first association missionary

as a result of his longevity and widely traveled itinerant preaching circuit on behalf of the Philadelphia Association.<sup>34</sup> Although Elliott Smith believed that Gano, “was not the only prototype who engaged in long-distance itinerancy during the eighteenth century.” Other noteworthy itinerant preachers included Benjamin Miller, John Thomas and Isaac Sutton.<sup>35</sup>

Organized itinerant missionary efforts into the Florida Territory (before attaining statehood in 1845) were the result of several associations fulfilling their own mission mandates. The Bethlehem Association of Alabama organized their own domestic missionary society to foster the sending of missionaries into the West Florida Territory, among other places. The Bethlehem Baptist Domestic Missionary Society in 1835 authorized Alexander Travis, Keidar Hawthorne, and J. H. Schroebl at various times to undertake missionary journeys along the Conecuh, Yellow and Escambia Rivers that flowed south into the Florida Territory and Mobile Bay.<sup>36</sup> A similar missionary spirit motivated the Sunbury (Georgia) Baptist Association to send itinerant missionary preacher James McDonald into the East Florida Territory in 1837.<sup>37</sup> And soon after its 1843 formation, the Florida Association employed Ryan Frier (also spelled Friar) as a domestic missionary to East Florida.<sup>38</sup> Within a few years, the association commissioned James McDonald (1845) and Joshua Mercer (1846), who were expected to be a, “discreet and acceptable minister, to travel and preach in the destitute places in this association and adjacent neighborhoods.”<sup>39</sup>

Since the inception of associations employing domestic missionary personnel nearly 255 years ago, that singular association employee has been assigned a variety of monikers and many different tasks. These titles have included colporteur, missionary, general evangelist, itinerant preacher, domestic missionary, associational missionary, superintendent of missions, director of missions. In some metropolitan areas today the position is referred to as executive director. Some associations have grown from a single missionary (whether serving part-time or full-time) to today's large metropolitan associations with multiple persons employed as ministry specialists. These staff specialists include

educational directors, language missionaries, church extension workers, counselors, Christian social ministers, among others.

As a vocational field, the director of missions' role did not evolve until the mid-twentieth century, according to J. C. Bradley. "Two actions by the [Southern Baptist] Home Mission Board in the early 1940s - the establishment of the program of city missions in 1941 and the program for country churches in 1943 - provided the major catalyst in the rise of the vocation and role of DOM [director of missions]."<sup>40</sup> In the mid-1950s, Merle Mitchell characterized the director of missions' assignment as being, "A representative of all phases of denominational life, a promotional secretary, a pastor at large, an associate to pastors, and a pastor to pastors in the area in which he works, [as] he coordinates the [missions] work among the churches."<sup>41</sup>

Today, the director of missions' job assignments may vary, but often includes the starting of churches, serving as supply preacher for churches without pastoral leadership, and coordinating the efforts of area churches to start and support mission work in their context. Additionally, J. C. Bradley in his book on the work of the Baptist association stressed that, "the associational director of missions has a single, three-dimensional role." He delineated that role to include being a "missions strategist, minister to the churches and church leaders, and general leader of the association."<sup>42</sup> As a missions strategist - which "emphasizes the missionary aspects" - carries the expectation that the director of missions will be "a leader, inspirer, catalyst, activator, challenger, and proclaimer or prophet." Bradley further suggested that a director of missions must not only know the context of his mission field, but he also must have "spiritual vision for what the association can do in addressing its various frontiers." And finally as strategist, the director of missions must lead the churches to make decisions and set priorities that "are faithful to what God is doing in the world."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>F. Russell Bennett, "The Nature of the Baptist Association," *Review and Expositor*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 2, Spring, 1980, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup>Allen W. Graves, "The Present Role of the Baptist Association," *Review and Expositor*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 2, Spring, 1980, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup>Norman W. Cox, *We Southern Baptists*, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1961), pp. 68-70.

<sup>4</sup>Bennett, p. 179.

<sup>5</sup>Walter B. Shurden, *Associationalism Among Baptists in America: 1707 - 1824*, (New York: Arno Press, 1980), p. 48.

<sup>6</sup>*Minutes*, Florida Baptist Association, 1850, Constitution, pp. 12-13.

<sup>7</sup>Tom Roote, "The Association on Mission in its Own Area and Beyond," *Review and Expositor*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 2, Spring, 1980, p. 215.

<sup>8</sup>Shurden, p. 58.

<sup>9</sup>John E. Steely, "Associational Messengers in Baptist History," *Baptist History and Heritage*, Vol. 17, No. 2, April 1982, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup>Shurden, p. 60.

<sup>11</sup>*Minutes*, West Florida Baptist Association, 1855, pp. 11-12.

<sup>12</sup>*Minutes*, Alachua Baptist Association, 1897, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup>James Clark, "Associations Before 1845," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, Vol. I*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), p. 89.

<sup>14</sup>Shurden, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup>J.C. Bradley, *A Baptist Association: Churches on Mission Together*, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1984), p. 77.

<sup>16</sup>Clark, p. 88.

<sup>17</sup>Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), p. 10.

<sup>18</sup>E. C. Routh, "The District Association," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, Vol. I*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), p. 87.

<sup>19</sup>Shurden, p. 62.

<sup>20</sup>Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: The Judson Press, 1963), p. 212.

<sup>21</sup>Clark, p. 89.

<sup>22</sup>Graves, pp. 192-193.

<sup>23</sup>Torbet, pp. 213-214.

<sup>24</sup>Shurden, p. 106.

<sup>25</sup>*Minutes*, Alachua Baptist Association, 1898, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup>Gary W. Long, "The Philadelphia Baptist Association," posted on the website: <http://www.pbpress.org/articles>, pp. 14-15.

<sup>27</sup>Wiley Richards, "The Story of the FBI 1943-2005," *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Vol. 7, Fall, 2005, p. 24-27.

<sup>28</sup>Steely, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup>Jack P. Dalton, "A History of Florida Baptists," a doctor of philosophy dissertation for the University of Florida, February, 1952, p. 51.

<sup>30</sup>Graves, pp. 195-196.

<sup>31</sup>James L. Sullivan, *Baptist Polity As I See It*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1983), p. 36.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>33</sup>Long, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup>Elliot Smith, *The Advance of Baptist Associations Across America*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), p. 164; cf. Gary Long, p. 14.

<sup>35</sup>Smith, p. 165.

<sup>36</sup>Hugh C. Bailey, "History of the Bethlehem Baptist Association, 1826-1976," unpublished manuscript, Special Collections Department, Samford University Library, no date, p. 18.

<sup>37</sup>James C. Bryant, "James McDonald: Missionary to East Florida," unpublished manuscript, presented to the Florida Baptist Historical Society, May 5, 1984, pp. 2-3.

<sup>38</sup>*Minutes*, Florida Baptist Association, 1844, np.

<sup>39</sup>James C. Bryant, *Indian Springs, The Story of a Pioneer Church in Leon County Florida*, (Tallahassee: Florida State University, 1971), pp. 41; 56.

<sup>40</sup>J.C. Bradley, "The Director of Associational Missions," *Review and Expositor*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 2, Spring, 1980, p. 237.

<sup>41</sup>Merle A. Mitchell, "Missouri Associations," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, Vol. II*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), p. 898.]

<sup>42</sup>Bradley, *A Baptist Association*, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 55.



## AN OVERVIEW OF ASSOCIATIONS' SUNDAY SCHOOL WORK

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Commemorating the official beginning of Baptist Associations in America with the organization of Philadelphia's Association in 1707 and the introduction of Sunday schools at nearly the same time, this paper is an attempt to look both forward and backward from that point to examine the synergistic contributions of these two organisms, associations and Sunday schools, working together.

It is rather remarkable how closely these two bodies have developed together since 1707. While the "official" date for the beginning of Sunday schools in the United States is listed as 1785, the Philadelphia Association references the concept of Bible instruction before 1738, and Christ Church Parish, in Savannah, Georgia claims a Sunday school as early as 1737.<sup>1</sup> One could say Baptist Associations, Sunday schools, and the United States of America have grown up and matured together.

"Associations were formed by Baptist churches in England by the mid-1600's as a means of expressing their mutual care. The principle of mutual care of the churches, by the churches, was both the practical and philosophical reason for forming associations. While the functions of associations have changed through the years, the principle and practice of mutual care (or fellowship) among the churches has been fundamental to the very concept of the association."<sup>2</sup> "As early as

1642-43 Baptist “associations” were convening among English Baptists for counsel and correspondence. By 1655, several groups had been formed and the title "association" was well recognized.”<sup>3</sup>

Baptist Associations in America began with the Philadelphia Association. The historian Henry Vedder writes, “The most important and influential of the early Baptist centers was the group of churches in the vicinity of Philadelphia. For their mutual convenience. . . a custom grew up of holding “general meetings” from time to time for the ministry of the word and the gospel ordinances. From being held once a year, these meetings came to be semi-annual, in the months of May and September. In 1707 the meeting was for the first time a delegated body, five churches appointing delegates, and this is the beginning of the Philadelphia Association. As this body increased in age and strength it attracted to itself all the Baptist churches within traveling distance of it, having as members churches in Southern New York and Virginia.”<sup>4</sup> “Prior to that date general meetings had been held for discussion of matters of faith, polity, discipline, and evangelism.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Beginning of Modern Day Sunday Schools**

Robert Raikes of Gloucester, England, is usually credited with beginning Sunday schools. In July, 1780 he “gathered a number of boys into the home of Mr. and Mrs. King and organized them into a school.”<sup>6</sup> Raikes school, while meeting on Sunday was not formed for teaching the Bible. Others credit William Fox, a Baptist layman who “began a school with the Bible as the textbook,” but Fox's school met during the week - not on Sunday. “In May, 1785, at the Baptist monthly meeting, Fox introduced a resolution, asking to unite in the organization of a society for the promotion of Bible study among the children of England. The society was organized September 7, 1785.” This is the date B. W. Spilman calls “the real beginning of the modern Sunday school work as an organized movement.” While at this meeting, Fox heard of Raikes, and his Sunday school. It gave him the idea that he might be able to use Sunday for his plan. So when the Society was organized. . . “Sunday was selected as the day.”<sup>7</sup>

William Brodie Gurney, also in England “watched with interest the Sunday school work as it was promoted by Fox and his associates.

He offered to give his services as a teacher and became the apostle of the voluntary idea in Sunday school work. At his call the London Sunday School Union was organized in July, 1803, for the purpose of promoting the voluntary idea. Organizers were sent out and the Sunday school movement commenced in real earnest.”<sup>8</sup>

England thus received recognition for the Sunday school movement, but in the United States of America “as early as 1791, *The First Day or Sunday School Society* had been organized in Philadelphia on the general plan advocated by Fox. Local unions soon replaced "societies" for the purpose of paying teachers.”<sup>9</sup> Eight years after formation of the Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union, Alexander Henry took the lead in reforming this organization into the American Sunday School Union in 1824, with headquarters in Philadelphia.<sup>10</sup>

The early Unions and Societies paved the way for the modern Sunday school movement. The model for associations and Sunday school may both have come from England, but some scholars trace both the Sunday school and association back to New Testament times. “At a very early date in the history of the Baptists of America, our fathers in the faith began to organize district associations, embodying the New Testament principles.”<sup>11</sup> “In New Testament times, groups of churches worked together in two ways and for two great purposes. They came together in church councils for conference on great questions affecting the life and work of all the churches, and co-operated together in associations” to plan and promote missionary tasks.

“Two examples of churches co-operating together in groups or associations are left to us in the New Testament—one in the home field and one on the foreign field.” “The first one was where the church at Antioch took the lead, though other neighboring churches may have had part. In this example, a prophet of God from Jerusalem came down and predicted a widespread famine. In order that the Christians everywhere and particularly the aged and needy ones left throughout Judea and in Jerusalem, should not suffer, “the disciples, every man according to his ability determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea.” (Acts 11:27-30.) The second example was from gentile

churches, where Paul and his associates raised money to care for the aged and needy Christians in Jerusalem and Judea.” (Acts 20:13-28; Acts 26:20; II Corinthians 8-9; 1 Peter 5:1; I Corinthians 16:1)

“When our fathers in the faith came to organize their co-operative work into associations, they had two things to guide them, the nature and work of the New Testament churches and the church councils and co-operative work of the churches in New Testament times.”<sup>12</sup>

As to the origin of Sunday schools, there was a pre-cursor to this movement dating to the years just after the New Testament called the Catechetical School. B. W. Spilman wrote, “The early churches during the days after the apostles practically all had provision for instruction in the truths of Christianity. So prominent a place did it occupy in the work of the early churches that in the buildings erected, a place was almost always provided for the sessions of this school. Its students were divided into grades practically as is the modern Sunday school. The subject-matter taught was the story of the Old and New Testaments; a general view of the doctrinal teachings of the Bible and the constitution of the church.”<sup>13</sup> J. N. Barnette wrote “The Sunday school movement has differed from the religious education of the Middle Ages and the Reformation in that it is (1) a laymen's movement, (2) a Sunday enterprise, and (3) an organized program.”<sup>14</sup>

While not officially called Sunday schools, “the Baptists of America were engaged in a similar work in and around Philadelphia before the year 1738. They provided for schools of instruction with the use of the catechism, and had reports on the work in the Philadelphia Association.”<sup>15</sup> In a study of the early Philadelphia Association actions, it is clear that “Sunday schools” were taking place. The Philadelphia Association at their fall session held in Philadelphia, on October 13, 1774, recorded, “The Association considering that the catechizing or instructing youth in the principles of the Christian religion, though so plain and important a duty, is yet too generally neglected, have thought it expedient to recommend to the churches, seriously to consider and promote the same.”<sup>16</sup> At the 1794 session of the association, the members present, “Resolved, That it be recommended to the different

churches in this Association, to institute the catechizing of children in their respective congregations, at stated seasons.”<sup>17</sup> This catechism used by the Philadelphia Association was “The Baptist Catechism,” which had been adopted by the General Association of Philadelphia, September the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1742.<sup>18</sup>

Sunday schools, in Baptist churches and in Union schools, used the catechism as curriculum until the early 1900's even though a Sunday school curriculum had been developed well before 1840. “So important was this emphasis that in 1891 the Sunday School Board commissioned John Broadus to produce a catechism that could be used to teach sound doctrine to children.”<sup>19</sup>

“One of the major purposes of the association was to provide mutual edification.” Another “concern” of the association was to supply the churches with printed materials, designed to meet the needs of the churches, and they included: the Confession of Faith, the Treatise of Discipline, a catechism for the instruction of children and a hymnal, also, a treatise on the education of children, in 1795. The most frequently printed item was the Catechism. According to the Philadelphia Association minutes, a reprinting of the Catechism was authorized in 1738, with new editions in 1747, 1761, and 1779.<sup>20</sup> As in the Philadelphia Association, other early associations sponsored Bible societies and Sunday schools.

“An examination of early associations in America reveals that they were theologically, rather than geographically, constructed. Churches joined associations, not for reasons of geographical proximity, but for theological affinity. The associations were used more and more as the denominational voice for missions, education, and religious liberty. The denominational solidarity which Baptists achieved in the eighteenth century was due primarily to the cohesive power of associational life.”<sup>21</sup>

It is difficult to establish the relationship between Associations and Sunday school during their formative years. That there was a mutual support is not questioned, but how they worked together can only be pieced together through associational reports. Baptist laymen were involved in the Sunday school movement from its beginning, but

the earliest Sunday Schools in America, were not a part of the organized work of local churches. "They were conducted by interested individuals or groups. These non-denominational schools were organized in several states by 1790. Gradually they came to see the need for relating the movement to the churches. Within fifteen years Baptists in Virginia, Pennsylvania, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina organized Sunday schools."<sup>22</sup>

### **Opposition to Sunday School**

Hesitation to promote and lead Sunday school work has been an ongoing complaint concerning pastors since Sunday schools began. Reading minutes of associations, Lynn May wrote: "Both pastors and laymen hesitated to support the early Sunday Schools. Many Baptists opposed the Sunday School movement as unscriptural. Some even called it the devil's work. Perhaps the greatest single factor limiting its growth was the indifference of pastors. Only when Baptist churches approved the Sunday School as a teaching agency of the church and recognized the need for their own schools did the denomination make significant advances in Sunday school work."<sup>23</sup>

"Between 1780 and 1814 a rapid expansion of associationalism took place. During the first decade of this period twenty-three new associations were begun, almost twice as many as had been established in the previous 140 years of Baptist life. By 1814 more than 120 associations could be counted."<sup>24</sup> "Prior to the formation of the Sunday and Adult School Union in 1817, there were probably not more than 100 Sunday schools in the United States."<sup>25</sup> This means there were more associations than Sunday schools prior to 1817.

"At the 1817 meeting of the Triennial Convention, Richard Furman, pastor of the First Baptist Church, Charleston, South Carolina, urged Baptists to organize Sunday Schools. The denomination, however, took no definite steps to establish a program of Sunday School promotion until 1840. In that year, the American Baptist Publication Society began to publish some Sunday School books and to employ workers to organize churches and Sunday Schools."<sup>26</sup>

The establishment of South Carolina's state Baptist Convention in 1821 ushered in a new dimension and layer of structure for Baptist

Sunday schools and associations. By the time South Carolina's convention was established, associations and Sunday schools had spread in scattered areas throughout the country. Sunday schools (or Sabbath schools as they were mostly called) began to multiply "when laymen and a few ministers interested in Sunday schools organized a union movement that soon swept across America. Leaders of this movement formed most of the Sunday schools organized in the South before 1845. In every city along the Atlantic seaboard and in many of the large towns of the interior, Sunday School Unions were organized. These local unions organized a national union in 1824 called the American Sunday School Union, with headquarters in Philadelphia, the first national Sunday School body. Within its first decade the Union established 16,000 schools. Most of these union schools met in church buildings but had no close relationship to the churches."<sup>27</sup>

J. C. Bradley noted a major change in the functions of associations as they began shifting their attention to promotion activities beginning about 1840. He wrote: "Until the 1840's, associations had been primarily concerned with the internal life of the churches; after that . . . intensive promotion was allowed to eclipse the concern for fellowship among the churches."<sup>28</sup> This marked a significant change in the established purpose of associations.

Our best information on early Sunday schools comes from the minutes of Baptist Associations. The reports were sometimes humorous, but often decried the lack of support for Sabbath schools by laymen and pastor alike. Several things are evident from these reports. First, from their formation, associations were involved in Sabbath schools. Second, the annual reports on Sunday school made a significant contribution to associational records. Third, Sabbath school committees were formed early in the associations life. And fourth, committee members were passionate about Sabbath schools in their associations.

Florida's first Baptist association came in 1835 with the establishment of Suwanee Association, organized at Providence Church, Columbia County. With a controversy over the anti-missionary movement, this association did not survive, but by 1842, Florida Association, had been formed and provides historical records to this

day. Two other early associations, West Florida and Alachua Associations date from 1847 and tell about Sunday school almost from their formation.

### **Baptist Sunday Schools in Florida**

Baptist Sunday schools in Florida began in 1843 at Providence Baptist Church in Gadsden County only one year behind the formation of Florida Association. The second Sunday school was on the opposite end of the state at Key West, and began in 1844. Only three years later and within two years following the establishment of West Florida Baptist Association in 1847, these bodies were reporting on Sunday schools.

Early church histories are infrequent but one can follow the development of Sunday schools through annual associational reports. These reports told of the opposition to Sunday schools, the formation of unions, establishment of Bible Societies, the work of associational Sabbath school committees, the value and importance of Sunday schools and of their evangelistic impact.

The “promotional period” had begun for associations in the early 1840's and their reports began to shift from dealing with origins to efficiency. Associations were in the “book and Sunday school literature business,” employing missionaries and colporteurs to sell and distribute materials while they preached and established Sunday schools and churches.

Circular letters admonished the brethren to support, attend, and lead in Sunday school development. By the 1850's associational Sunday school conventions had begun. Santa Fe River's convention in 1869 was the first recorded in Florida, but an earlier report of convention participation came from Florida Baptist Association in 1858, where they appointed representatives to a convention in Americus, Georgia.

In the decade following formation of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, pressure began to build for using Sunday school materials produced in the south, specifically, those of the Southern Baptist Publication Society, and the Southern Baptist Sunday School Union.

Associations Sunday school reports reflected a remarkable difference in tone from the antebellum period to reconstruction years. While Sunday schools had begun to strengthen and develop in years since organization of the Southern Baptist Convention, during reconstruction Sunday schools had lost much of their initiative and momentum. Tensions were growing from the established work and friendships with Sunday school missionaries of the American Baptist Publication Society and pressures to use materials produced in the south by local leaders. Associational reports began to admonish the brethren to shift from union school materials to a more “Baptistic” literature, and to “our own literature” with the publication of *Kind Words* in 1866 and *Child's Delight*.

Sunday schools were on the way back by 1880, but still had a long way to go from their pre-war years. Reconstruction was taking time and a toll. Rev. B. M. Pack, Sunday school missionary from the American Baptist Publication Society was well entrenched in Alachua Association, and was adopted by South Florida and Manatee Associations in 1881, along with Rev. T. J. Sparkman and a “Reverend Gordon.”

“Between 1880 and 1884, Florida “got their act together” in Sunday school work. The appointment of a Board, and the employment of G. W. Hall, as Sunday school missionary gave direction to the growing agency. A consistent planned direction by the state, a choice in Sunday school materials, associational Sunday school conventions, a gradual transfer from northern Baptists to Southern Baptist leadership, a recovery from loss of “colored” members, and devastation of the great War, and expansion to Adult Sunday school classes all happened in the years of 1880-1900. By 1900, Sunday schools in Florida had grown from the 1,010 teachers, officers and pupils reported in 1884 to 10,064 in 276 Sunday schools”.<sup>29</sup>

### **Antebellum Association Sunday School Reports**

The following excerpts from associational Sunday school reports present a portrait of these years and show some of the associational connections.

From the minutes of West Florida Association in 1847.

“Rehoboth was "the only one that sustains a Sabbath school.”

The church had received thirty-five new members during the year, which resulted in some attention in the associational meeting regarding the value of the Sunday school. The question was raised, “May not other churches learn an important lesson from the engagedness of this in a good work?”<sup>30</sup> The impact of evangelism in Sabbath schools was evident from associational reports.

Florida Association's report showed they had established a Sabbath School Committee by 1849. This committee made annual reports, and promoted Sunday schools, and their value to churches.

From the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Session Florida Baptist Association 1850 “The Association having submitted to this Committee the control of their funds for Sabbath School, Baptist and other standard works, report, that they have invested the sum of \$112 with the Southern Baptist Philanthropic Society . . . and about one-fourth part of them have been sold at Charleston wholesale prices.”

“For Sabbath School books, the sum of fifty dollars was invested with the American Sunday School Union, from which we received a donation in books to the amount of \$25 to \$50. Your Committee having received the above books, thought it advisable to employ Brother W. B. Cooper as a Missionary and Colporteur, to aid and establish Sabbath Schools wherever it was practicable, and furnish them with libraries; and for these services we have awarded him in the same proportion as the other Missionaries. In the Sabbath School enterprise, he has aided and established two schools in each of the Counties of Thomas and Lowndes, Georgia; in Hamilton, Florida, one; Madison, Florida, five; in Jefferson, two, and in Leon, one.”<sup>31</sup>

The above report reveals several interesting facets of the association's Sabbath school work. First, they were purchasing books from the Southern Baptist Philanthropic Society. Second, they were receiving Sabbath school books from the American Sunday School Union. Third, Colporteurs were employed by associations to sell and manage books for both the Sabbath schools and church libraries; and these Colporteurs were considered missionaries for the associations,

working both in establishing churches and Sabbath schools, and in making visits to church members.

From West Florida Baptist Association, 1852

“Bethlehem is the oldest Church in the association-has a prayer meeting and Sunday School. There are but a few male members in this Church-the deficiency is well supplied by the females, who are active and zealous. The work of grace among this people are bright and cheering. Soon shall we expect to hear that the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon them. Orange Hill, Washington County, Florida, is in a healthy and growing condition-has in its connection a Sunday School and Prayer Meeting, together with a Missionary Society.”<sup>32</sup>

From Minutes of 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Session Florida Baptist Association

“The Executive committee beg leave to submit the following report of their actings and doings, as follows: At our first meeting held on Saturday, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1852, Brother Craft was appointed Colporteur and Missionary, within the bounds of the Association, his services to commence January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1853. (Brother Cooper continuing up to that time.) Your committee in the discharge of their duty, find that the amount of book funds is too small to carry on the Colporteur operations, with that efficiency that it could be, if the funds were more ample. We would therefore, respectfully recommend, that this Association make the amount at least \$600, which would enable those entrusted with the business more easily and punctually to meet orders for such books, as experience in the work dictate the purchase of. They are also convinced, that under the present mode of operation, there is much valuable time lost, consequently many good books unsold, by throwing on the Colporteur, the business of ordering books, corresponding, etc. Therefore we would suggest the propriety of some one being appointed to act as corresponding secretary and depository agent, to open correspondence, with all the principal publishing houses, to order such books as the committee (if the Association see fit in their wisdom to appoint one) may direct, or the Colporteur may find saleable”

“Your committee is also of the opinion, that the amount paid the Colporteur, say at the rate of \$400.00 a year, is insufficient for his support; therefore recommend that the amount be increased. All of

which is respectfully submitted.”

“My Dear Brethren and Sisters;

“Having again engaged to act as your Colporteur and Missionary for the ensuing year, I take this method to inform you of the fact, that if the Lord will, I expect to visit you as soon, and as often as possible. I shall at all times, be prepared to offer you a general assortment of denominational, and other valuable books, and from the arrangements already entered into, it is thought they can be afforded, hereafter, upon better terms even than heretofore. Should you wish any books, which we have not already on hand, by addressing Brother Fuller, at Monticello (who has been appointed Corresponding Secretary and Depository Agent) he will order them for you. . . .

“In visiting you, the present year, it will doubtless be for the last time, as Colporteur and Missionary. The arduous labors of the past year, admonish me, that after the present, both my physical and mental frame, will require repose; hence I have resolved, if spared, to settle contiguous to some church, that may then need a supply, and desire my labors. Samuel C. Craft, Col'r. and Miss'ry.”<sup>33</sup>

From Minutes of West Florida Baptist Association, 1856

“An interesting letter from the Sabbath School Missionary Society at Orange Hill was received and read, with a contribution of \$4.65 for Domestic missions.” “Resolved that this body tender its thanks to the Orange Hill Missionary Society for its liberal donations.

“Resolved, That the following proposition for the encouragement of Sabbath schools be inserted in our Minutes, viz.: The undersigned will make a donation of one \$10 Sabbath School Library to the best organized Sabbath school that shall be established within the bounds of this Association between this time and the next session of the body; and one \$5 Library to the next best organized school, located within the same territory. The claims of the schools applying for the premiums are to be decided by the Moderator of the West Florida Association, at its next session.” C. N. Hartsfield, W. M. Davis, D. P. Everett, Wm. Sorey, F. T. Allen, Joseph A. Collier.”

“Brother W. W. Odom's proposition.”

“In addition to brother Hartsfield's proposition to induce the brethren to form new Sabbath schools, I will give 15 copies of the *Childs Book*, to the best organized school, and 10 copies to the next best school, to be called for when said books are received. W. W. Odom.”<sup>34</sup>

When these awards were made the following year, first prize went to Greenwood and second to Sardis. By the next year eight schools were recorded by the association, two schools in Greenwood, New Hope, Sardis, Orange Hill, Chattahoochee, Bethlehem and Apalachicola.

From Minutes of 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Session of Florida Baptist Association, 1856.

Resolved . . . and that we recommend also the Southern Baptist Publication Society . . . and the organization of Bible Societies, at the various churches; and that they be requested to report the result of their labors, in their next letters to this Association.”<sup>35</sup>

“Report C.” “The Secretary was instructed to seek, by correspondence and otherwise, a suitable man to put into the field as Missionary and Colporteur. A committee also was appointed for the same purpose. But their efforts were unsuccessful until sometime in February, when they were fortunate in securing the services of Elder R. Fleming, "at a salary of \$45 per month, for the time which he could devote to the work.”<sup>36</sup>

Minutes 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Session Florida Baptist Association  
“The report on Sabbath Schools was read and adopted, and Brethren Long, C. Smith, Ardis, Fleming, and Cooper were appointed to represent this body in the Sabbath School Convention to meet in Americus, in April next.”

“(A) Report on Sabbath Schools.”

“The committee to whom was referred the subject of Sabbath Schools, deem it both unnecessary and out of place here, to enter into any lengthy exposition of the advantages of Sunday schools. Their efficiency as a means of communicating a knowledge of God's Word is universally acknowledged; and their influence in advancing the Redeemer's Kingdom is seen in the fact, that in places where they

receive due attention, at least one half of all the conversions take place among Sunday School scholars. . . . "

"The only question which now requires any consideration is, "How an institution so beneficial in its influence can become universally established?" As a partial answer to this enquiry, we would suggest the propriety of having, as far as practicable, a Baptist, not a Union, Sunday school connected with every church in the bounds of the Association, and would earnestly remind our brethren of the importance of this subject."

"We would also recommend a hearty co-operation of Southern Baptists for the advancement of this great enterprise. We rejoice to see that our brethren are acting, and that they have organized a Southern Baptist Sunday School Union. The convention which formed this Union submits the constitution to the Association, for their approval or rejection, and at the same time requests the appointment of delegates expressive of their views, to meet at the Georgia State Convention. In accordance with the wishes of the Convention, your committee respectfully recommend the adoption of the following resolutions:

1<sup>st</sup>. That this Association cordially approve of the objects of the Baptist Sunday School Convention, recently held in Nashville, and that the constitution of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Union meets with our entire approbation.

2<sup>nd</sup>. That brethren be appointed to represent this body at the Georgia State Convention. John C. Long, Chm'n. Com."<sup>37</sup>

The APPENDIX of Florida Baptist Associations 1857 report record the Minutes of the first annual session of the Bible Society of the Florida Baptist Association, held at Ocklocknee Church, Thomas County, Georgia. They approved the constitution, but did not include it in the Minutes. They reported that funds collected that could be paid to the Society be sent to the Society of the Baptist State Convention, elected officers and planned to meet during the next session of the Florida Baptist Association.

Minutes West Florida Baptist Association, 1857

"The Committee to whom was assigned the duty of making a report on Sunday Schools, beg to present the following: We feel no

hesitation in saying that the prosperity of the churches is directly and intimately connected with their interest in this matter.”

“The problem is not to be solved by our posterity; it has been already demonstrated clearly and beyond contradiction, that to be indifferent to the religious education of youth, is suicidal to their welfare, the cause of good morals and the future enlargement of our denominational success. Your committee are pleased to state that the churches composing this Association have given more than usual attention to this subject during the past year. Several new schools have been organized, and previous establishments have been conducted with increased attention. And, your committee would also propose, that it be, Resolved: As the wish of this Association, that every brother and sister in our churches encourage and attend the schools at their regular places of worship. Respectfully submitted, J. H. Wombwell, Chairman.”<sup>38</sup>

Minutes, 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Session, West Florida Baptist Association, 1858.

“The Committee of Sabbath Schools beg leave to make the following report: That they feel encouraged to hope that the interest felt by our churches, in the cause of Sabbath schools, is not waning, but on the increase. We would, in this connection, recommend adoption of a more Baptistical, a more scriptural literature in our schools. In the Sunday School it is, that many receive the only education they ever get . . . Sabbath Schools thus viewed, may well be said to be valuable auxiliaries to the churches of Jesus Christ, and as such, your Committee cheerfully and warmly commend them to your watchful care and attention.”

“Report of Committee on Publications: “To Sabbath Schools we would recommend Elder A. C. Dayton's *Question Book* as one thoroughly adapted to Baptist Sabbath Schools. We would, also, endorse and recommend the purchase and circulation of a pamphlet by brother W. B. Lacy, entitled *Arguments Against Infant Baptism*.”<sup>39</sup>

13<sup>th</sup> Annual Session, West Florida Baptist Association

(B)Your Committee on Sabbath Schools, report-

“That they regard the cause of Sabbath Schools as of vital importance to our religious interests. Next to the preaching of the gospel, we deem the subject of Sabbath School Instruction as requiring our most earnest

efforts; surely no Christian labor is more important than the truths of the Bible to the young and rising generation. And your committee cannot but regret so few of our Churches have availed themselves of the advantages arising from Baptist Sabbath School literature, and are still using the Union Books, which purposely keep hid our distinctive principles as Baptists. We think Baptists should not be afraid, or ashamed, to teach in the Sabbath School, what they declare from the pulpit. In closing this report, your committee would therefore recommend to the friends of our schools the Books published by the S. S. Union—especially the *Question Books* by Elder A. C. Dayton.<sup>40</sup>

The following report from the Florida Baptist Convention shows both the existence of a Sunday School Committee at the state level in the antebellum period and their attempt to gain statistical reports on Sunday schools from the associations. It would take nearly a quarter of a century, until 1884 before such reports could be obtained.

Florida Baptist Convention, 1860 Monticello.

“An attempt to secure information regarding Sunday School was initiated by G. W. Call of Fernandina who was Chairman of the Sunday school committee at the 1860 Monticello Convention. In the report he suggested “that the Secretary of this Convention be instructed to address a circular letter to each church within the bounds of the Convention...requesting their clerk or other persons to furnish by the next meeting of the Convention, accurate statistics of the number of children between six and sixteen years old who usually attend Sunday School, number of teachers, etc.; and, moreover, every church and every isolated Christian brother should “see to it, that the children in his or her immediate vicinity are instructed every Sunday. Where there is no church organization or building, the house of every Christian Brother should be a Sunday school house for the neighborhood.”<sup>41</sup>

Minutes, 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Session, Florida Baptist Association, 1860.

Report of Committee on Sunday Schools.

“The committee, to whom was referred the subject of Sabbath Schools, beg leave to report that not more than one fourth of our churches have any Sabbath School at all, and not more than two of these have regular and well conducted schools, viz: Thomasville and Monticello. Ebenezer,

Friendship, Indian Springs, Providence, and perhaps others, carry on Sabbath Schools irregularly - some one Sabbath in the month, some two, and perhaps some more. We would recommend Sabbath Schools, as one of the most efficient means of impressing the minds of our children, at an early age, with the saving influences of the Gospel. We would take the liberty to suggest that our churches use our own Sabbath School literature. We would recommend the adoption of the following resolution: "Resolved, That the pastors of all our churches interest themselves in the Sabbath School enterprise, and co-operate with the churches, in establishing and conducting Sabbath Schools throughout our Association; and that our churches report their success at the next meeting of this body."<sup>42</sup>

### **Reconstruction Years**

There was a decided difference in the tone of associational Sunday school reports from the foundational antebellum years and reconstruction years.

"By 1864 only three schools were reported in the West Florida Association and these met at irregular intervals."<sup>43</sup>  
Report of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Florida Baptist Association, 1867.

"Report on Sabbath Schools." "There seems to be an unaccountable apathy existing among the churches in reference to this subject. We learn there are nine Sabbath Schools in operation in our Association limits, under the principal care of Baptists-three of which have been organized during the past year, by the efficient and energetic efforts of Brother W. F. Cook. Let every brother present at this Association go home and do likewise; and then the committee on Sabbath Schools will have a pleasant task and not a painful duty to perform next year in preparing a report."<sup>44</sup>

"Towards the end of the 1860s momentum was growing for more and better Sunday Schools in Florida. A report from the committee on Sabbath Schools, George S. Anderson, Chairman, in the minutes of the Florida Baptist Association from October, 1867 reported five schools with nine teachers and fifty-six scholars. The numerical report was followed by some strong admonitions and positive suggestions.

“This apathy in the Sunday school work which is second only in importance to the preached Word is the result of indifference and neglect on the part of both ministers and members.” They then recommended “that the Missionaries appointed by this Association be instructed to make this subject a special object, and organize Sunday schools in every church and that we hold a Sunday School Convention which shall be represented by delegation of the various churches and Sunday schools of the association and that a committee be appointed for said Convention.”<sup>45</sup>

### **Sunday School Conventions**

The first recorded Sunday School Convention was conducted by the Santa Fe River Association on October 10, 1869, as reported in the state convention that met in Jacksonville, November 24-25, 1870. Florida Association followed Santa Fe River, conducting their own first Sunday school convention the last Saturday and Sunday in March, 1873.

Minutes of the Alachua Association reported on their Sunday school convention that met on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1882 with the Ft. McCoy church.

The Sunday School report of the Santa Fe River Association again reported in the October 1892 minutes that credit for the existence of Sunday Schools was due to the associations convention “but warned the churches to keep them strictly a department of church work and to stick to the Bible and publications of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. However, if these publications were not available, they were to secure American Baptist Publications.”<sup>46</sup>

One of the contributions of Sunday School Conventions was statistical reporting from the churches on Sunday Schools. Prompted by their Sunday school convention, Florida Baptist Association began statistical reports on Sunday school in 1872. Even with this encouragement, state statistical reports on Sunday School did not occur until 1884, and even then they were not complete.

Florida also heard a request for a state Sunday School secretary coming from actions of their first state Sunday School Convention in 1903, but action was not taken until 1909.

The Sunday School Convention of the eastern district of Marion Baptist Association held their convention at Moss Bluff Congregational Church, March 28-29, 1903. Featured was singing, preaching, reports from the Sunday schools, enrolling delegates and organizing committees. Conferences offered at the convention included, "How to Keep up an Interest in Country Sunday Schools"; "The Sunday School Superintendent, His Qualifications and Duties"; "The Relation of Pastor to Sunday School"; "How to Teach the Bible Class"; and "The Benefits of Music in the Sunday School."<sup>47</sup> The Marion Convention, West met with Pleasant Hill Church. Some of the churches in attendance were Ocala, Buck Pond, Fellowship, Heldville, Pleasant Hill, and Lebanon.

Marion Association had combined east and west into one Sunday school convention for their 1904 meeting on August 29-30 at the Flemington church. Nineteen schools were represented at this convention.

Associational conventions for 1904 were at First Baptist Church, Ocala, May 28-29 for the eastern district of Marion Association, and the Santa Fe Sunday School Convention met May 27-28 at Eliam Church in Melrose. Some of the churches participating were: Alachua, Campville, Eden, Montechoa, Eliam, Ochwilla, Rochelle, Waldo, Orange Creek, Hawthorne Hampton, and Oak Grove.<sup>48</sup>

Florida Baptist Association Report on S. S. Convention Plans  
"Report of Committee on Sabbath School Convention"

"The special committee to arrange for holding a Sabbath School Convention beg leave to make the following report: (1) That the said convention be held with the New Hope Church, commencing Friday before the fifth Sabbath in March. (2) That each church and Sabbath school be represented by two delegates in said convention. (3) That the ministers and members interested, who are not appointed to write essays, study and be prepared to deliver addresses on the various subjects embodied in the exercises of the convention.

Order of Exercises

Essays by the following named brethren:

1. History of the Sabbath School, by Elder A. M. Manning.
2. What are the best means to be employed to organize

- and permanently establish a Sabbath School in every Church and neighborhood? By brother W. F. Hubert.
3. The duty of parents to support the Sabbath School, by Elder R. P. Green.
  4. The obligations resting on Ministers to labor in this department of duty, by Elder A. C. Stephenson.
  5. The officers and teachers of a Sabbath School, their qualifications and duties, by B. F. Wardlaw.
  6. The sphere of the Sabbath School and its relation to the Church, by Elder J. M. Rusbin.
  7. The benefits arising from co-operation of Church's and Sabbath Schools in the Sabbath School work, by Elder W. B. Cooper.<sup>49</sup>

#### **State Statistical Report on Sunday Schools.**

The first attempt at a state statistical report on Sunday schools occurred in 1870. "While not identifying the churches, 23 Sunday schools were reported in Florida in 1870." "Florida Association showed eight Sunday schools, with eight superintendents, thirty one teachers and two hundred seventy-five pupils. The Santa Fe River Association reported thirty-nine churches with fifteen schools, fifty-three teachers, and four hundred nine pupils." Apparently, no report was received from West Florida Association at the state convention as to the status of their Sunday schools.<sup>50</sup>

"By 1870 the number of Southern Baptist Sunday Schools had grown to 4,333, compared with 8,378 churches. In the 1870's state conventions began to expand their Sunday School work."<sup>51</sup>

Minutes of 1872 Florida Baptist Association

"Report of Committee on Sabbath Schools." "Year after year reports have been made on this subject, deprecating the lukewarmness and general indifference manifested throughout the Association in this department of religious duty. Again we are forced to report a deplorable lack of interest in this cause, five schools, with nine teachers and fifty-six scholars out of thirty-six churches and one thousand eight hundred and eighteen members, constituting the entire Association, are reported; others are said to exist not reported; many of them struggle continually

for school work, which is second only in importance to the preached word, is the result of indifference and neglect on the part of both ministers and members. In view of this despondent state of affairs, we recommend the following plan for future operations:

1<sup>st</sup>, That the Missionaries appointed by this Association be instructed to make this subject a special object, and organize Sunday schools in every church and community possible in their fields of labor.

2<sup>nd</sup>, That each minister and delegate be requested to act as special agent in his community for the advancement of its interest.

3<sup>rd</sup>, That we hold a Sunday school convention at some central and convenient point, in which shall be represented, by delegation, the various churches and Sunday schools of the association.

4<sup>th</sup>, That a committee be appointed to select time and place and arrange the order of business for said convention.<sup>52</sup>

Minutes, Santa Fe River Baptist Association, 1872

“J. H. Tomkies, Chairman of the Committee on Sunday Schools for Santa Fe River Association reported, “All of our churches should earnestly seek to maintain a Sunday school and a permanent prayer meeting.” He may have also initiated the shift from American Baptist Publication Society to Southern Baptist Convention literature in 1872 when he wrote “We would recommend to all parents and teachers that excellent paper for children “*Kind Words*” the Sunday school paper of the Southern Baptist Convention.”<sup>53</sup>

Minutes, Alachua Baptist Association, 1875

“Report of the Committee on Sunday Schools and Missions.”  
“Your committee on Sunday Schools and Missions, would say that the reports of Sunday schools coming up from the churches are so meager that they are unable to state even approximately the number of schools connected with the Association, or to make any report which will be of value as showing what has been done or what is now doing in that direction. Your committee believes it to be our duty to train up our children in the pure faith of the Gospel and regard the Sunday school as the best auxiliary to family instruction. We would also urge upon each church the necessity of having a Sunday school. Wherever there are enough members to have a church, there are surely enough persons

interested in the study of God's Word, to form a Sunday school, and this your committee thinks should be done in every church.<sup>54</sup>

The foregoing from Alachua Association is the first report in which they used the term Sunday school rather than Sabbath School.

From Florida Association, 1878

In 1878 two Sunday schools were reported - Harmony and one at Tallahassee with a combined enrollment of 50. Their report in 1883 recorded, "only 5 Sunday schools with a total of 197 members."<sup>55</sup>

Alachua Baptist Association, 1881.

"Report of Committee on Sunday-Schools"; "We, your Committee on Sunday-schools, offer the following. We have not nearly the number of Sunday-schools in our churches there should be. We notice that some few schools have been allowed to go down. This is not as it should be. We should seek by every means possible, to keep every school now in operation going on and it should be our deep concern to organize as many more schools as it is possible for us to do."

"We, therefore, hail with pleasure, the presence of Rev. B. M. Pack in our midst as Sunday-school missionary, stirring us up to our duties in regard to Sunday school work, and we pledge ourselves to cooperate with him, so far as practicable, in all Sunday school efforts."

"We respectfully urge, that our pastors and other Christian workers manifest a livelier interest in this department of Christian labor. And we further recommend that there be a meeting called by some church wishing it after Christmas to organize an associational Sunday school convention."<sup>56</sup>

South Florida Baptist Association

Rev. B. M. Pack had come to Florida as a Sunday School Missionary employed by the American Baptist Publication Society. Pack "visited the meeting of the South Florida Baptist Association in 1881 and aided in the establishment of Sunday schools and a Sunday school convention. His work was continued the following year by Reverend T. J. Sparkman, also a representative of the American Baptist Publication Society. Sparkman worked in both South Florida and Manatee Associations." "On the Sunday afternoon South Florida Association was in session in 1882, a Sunday school mass meeting was held at which

stirring appeals were made on behalf of Sunday schools by Reverend Sparkman, Reverend Gordon, and Reverend Simmons. In the year of labor in the two associations, Reverend Sparkman traveled 3405 miles, visited 1003 families, and organized fourteen new Sunday schools.”<sup>57</sup>

Associations often reported the number of Sunday Schools, but usually did not give the name or church where the schools were located before 1884. The first state report on Sunday schools was in 1884, and while this report gave the number of teachers, and officers and pupils, it still did not identify the schools by name. Annual reports were made by the Sunday school committee at state conventions, but no statistical reports were collected or printed until the convention of 1884 in Orlando. Fourteen associations reported at this convention, but only four gave any Sunday school information. Even then, the schools were not identified. The report:

Association	Officers and Teachers	Pupils
Alachua	41	269
Beulah	29	240
Florida	39	272
South Florida	20	100
Totals	129	881 <sup>58</sup>

### **Florida's Sunday Schools Mature**

Between 1880 and 1884, Florida “got their act together” in Sunday school work. The appointment of a Board, and the employment of G. W. Hall, as Sunday school missionary gave direction to the growing agency. A consistent planned direction by the state, a choice in Sunday school materials, associational Sunday school conventions, a gradual transfer from northern Baptists to Southern Baptist leadership, a recovery from loss of the “colored” members and the great War, and expansion to Adult Sunday school classes all happened in these developing years of 1880-1900. By 1900, Sunday schools in Florida had grown from the 1,010 teachers, officers and pupils reported in 1884 to 10,064 in 276 Sunday schools.<sup>59</sup>

Alachua Baptist Association, 1886.

“Report on Sunday schools.” “Your Committee find, on examination of the church statistics for the past associational year, that there are 13 Sunday schools, 12 Baptist and one Union school. In these there are 578 persons enrolled, with 87 officers and teachers. Of these schools there are eight that are evergreen, or hold forth every month in the year. Too much importance cannot be attached to the Sunday school work and influence. It is the nursery of the church, and from it the churches draw their supply of trained workers that make active and useful members. We therefore deem it the duty of every member of the church, that is not feeble or infirm, to attend and work in the Sunday school. None are too old. We advise the formation of adult classes, of classes for the old and for the young. Your Committee further recommend that this body consider putting a Sunday school Evangelist in the field, to work up and organize Sunday schools in this Association.”<sup>60</sup>

Santa Fe River Association, 1891

The minutes of Santa Fe River Association in October 1891 recorded “It is important to choose Superintendents who are regular and teachers who are God loving and God fearing men and women. We recommend denominational literature but insist that the Bible be held pre-eminently as the best book.”<sup>61</sup> The Sunday school report of the association (Santa Fe River) again reported in the October 1892 minutes that credit for the existence of the Sunday schools was due to the associations convention “but warned the churches to keep them strictly a department of church work and to stick to the Bible and publications of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.”<sup>62</sup>

**Associations Sunday School Work in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Sunday school conventions had become a dominant force in associations by 1900. With these events consuming a major amount of the time and energies, and strong requests coming from the Southern Baptist Convention for other denominational promotions, the nature of associations had changed rather dramatically.

“Glynn R. Ford noted radical changes in associations that occurred primarily in the mid-nineteenth century. The changes involved

shifting from a doctrinally-based fellowship of churches to an implementing agency of the denomination; shifting from a guardian of the fellowship to a denominational promoter; and shifting the initiative from the churches to the state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention.”

“Charles H. Ryland, speaking to the Dover Association in Virginia in 1900, described the situation at the beginning of the twentieth century as follows: "The district association has been diverted from its original purpose, and has become a mere reproduction on a small scale of the General Association (state convention).”<sup>63</sup>

This report was a shot over the bow regarding the work of associational leaders. Later the issue of the associations own place in the hierarchy of Baptist life became a crisis resulting in a decades long evaluation and redefinition of it's tasks.

Sunday schools and associations expanded together during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Florida added seven associations, including Miami and Tampa Bay between 1900 and 1914, with Sunday school enrollment increasing from 10,127 to 35,058 by 1915. Annual reports from associational Sunday school committees shifted from their pattern of lamenting the lack of support or existence of Sunday schools to statistical reports and attention to curriculum offerings in the early 1900's. The development of teacher training during the early 1900's changed the image and place of Sunday schools in churches and associations.

B. W. Spilman wrote an administrative booklet called *The Sunday School* in 1902 that ushered in the age of teacher training. This led to the “Normal Course for Sunday School Workers.” In 1909 *The Convention Normal Manual* was published. With these resources associations began to ratchet up the call for improved teaching. “A popular historian from outside the denomination called this training program “the Southern Baptist miracle,” because of the number of workers it has reached and the effect it has had on the Sunday schools of the denomination.”<sup>64</sup>

Harvey Beauchamp wrote *The Graded Sunday School*, in 1911, encouraging development of adult Sunday school work. The “Organized

Class,” and the Baraca-Philathea movement were functioning in larger city churches and associations, but largely left rural churches and associations looking on. In 1913, Florida Baptist Association recorded: “We are glad to report that more young men and ladies are becoming interested in the work, and that busy men find time to teach them. The school is no longer looked upon as a school for children, but a Bible school for all.”<sup>65</sup>

Jacksonville Baptist Association recorded in their 1910 minutes: “The adult department is a distinct movement to enlist men and women in Sunday school endeavor as students.<sup>66</sup> The development of adult work and growth in Sunday school attendance resulted in churches building educational buildings to house their Sunday schools.

As Southern Baptists developed and expanded their own Sunday school resources, tensions began to develop with leadership from the American Baptist Publication Society, the North American Baptist Convention, and participation in the International Sunday School Association and other societies. An example of this stress is recorded in the minutes of Florida Baptist Association in 1917 where we read: “There are 27 Sunday schools with an enrollment of 1870 pupils and a working force of 216 teachers. Recommend every teacher take the Teacher Training Course, literature published by our own Sunday School Board be used in all the schools, endorse the grading and use of graded literature and avoid as far as possible all entangling alliances with the Florida Sunday school Association, an interdenominational organization.”<sup>67</sup> Again, in 1920 they reported: “In Florida the Baptist Sunday school work has no relation with the interdenominational work or with the inter-church movement . . . We believe in using only Baptist literature and tracts along with the Bible in our Baptist schools.”<sup>68</sup> In 1900, minutes of West Florida Association recorded: “Recommend that each school established be distinctly a Baptist Sunday school.”<sup>69</sup>

In Nashville, the Sunday School Board continued to expand their publications until a fully graded curriculum was on line by 1915. That exacerbated the trend to shift from materials published by the American Baptist Publication Society to Southern Baptist Convention

literature that had begun in 1866 with the publication of *Kind Words*. The impact on associations was huge - as the ABPS had been the driving force for Sunday school in almost all associations. The presence of their Sunday school missionaries and colporteurs provided staff for Sunday school and church support as well as associational cohesiveness. Associations profited from the wholesale to retail sales of their materials as well as reaping direct financial support from such as the paid ads placed in most associational Minute books. Inside front, and back covers of West Florida's Association Minutes were full page ads for the ABPS in 1900, but by 1902, they were gone. Alachua Baptist Association recorded in 1901, "We recommend the literature of the American Baptist Publication Society and the Convention Series published by our own SBC for our Sunday schools."<sup>70</sup>

The 1904 minutes of Jacksonville Baptist Association reported: "At no time in the past history of our Association has there been felt such intense interest in the Sunday school cause as is felt at the present time. Your committee is deeply conscious of the helpfulness of the Sunday School Convention that is being so well sustained by the churches of this Association."<sup>71</sup> In 1922, they referenced their 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Sunday school convention conducted in April.

Associational Sunday school conventions led to creation of the state Sunday school convention organized in 1903 resulting in the request for a state Sunday school secretary. This request led to employment of Louis Entzminger as the first secretary in 1909.

Florida Association Minutes recorded in 1923, "This is the day for large Sunday schools. The BIG Sunday School idea has hit Florida. There are four factors that make for progress on the field: The active, wide-awake pastor with a Sunday school vision; the well-informed energetic Superintendent, The associational Sunday school convention and the two Baptist Assemblies."<sup>72</sup>

Sunday school reports in associational minutes reflected a happier time in the new century. Note the tone of Alachua Associations minutes in 1904: "The day to discuss the importance of the Sunday school is past. It is now recognized as an essential part of our church work."<sup>73</sup> And Florida Baptist Association reported in 1904, "We are

living in a day when the world is flooded with trashy and evil literature and the youth of our day is seeking knowledge.”<sup>74</sup> In 1906 they reported, “We are much gratified that 11 out of 31 churches have schools. Many of our churches may not be able to have preaching more than once or twice per month, but every church can meet every Sabbath” (for Sunday school).<sup>75</sup>

As the Sunday School movement matured in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a significant change became apparent in city and rural churches. City churches began to grow and expand as a result of a trained teacher corps. Their schools became better organized, and they had new Sunday school materials from the SBC. People were moving to the cities, and churches began to build educational buildings for their Sunday schools. But these developments largely skirted the rural churches and their Sunday schools. Florida Baptist Association wrote in their Sunday school report in 1907: “The Sunday school question is here presented to us under different conditions from those which exist in large towns and cities. In such localities it is easy to carry out a plan of organization which provides for all the congregation that attend the preaching and their families, from the grandparents to the newly-born infants. With a large school membership and a Sunday school with its Bible and Baraca classes for adults, its special classes for foreigners who understand our language imperfectly, with its different grades according to age, down to the infant class with its kindergarten methods, all in separate rooms and sometimes a cradle class, Sunday school is a mighty influence for good.”<sup>76</sup>

### **Associations Promote 75 Million and Rural Sunday School Campaigns**

As state Sunday school superintendent W. W. Willian began giving leadership to Florida's Sunday Schools in 1916, two national projects came to bear on associations and churches: the 75 Million Campaign, and the Rural Sunday School Campaign. The 75 Million Campaign, was not a Sunday school project, but Sunday schools served as a vehicle to promote the campaign, and the campaign served as a unifying force for Sunday schools and associations.

The 75 Million Campaign of 1919-1924 ushered in a new level

of cooperation among Southern Baptists. Each state was assigned responsibility for raising a proportionate amount of the goal. Florida's responsibility amounted to \$1,000,000.

As the campaign got under way, a total of more than 92 million was pledged, but only 58 million was actually raised. Since programs had been projected based on achieving the 75 million, national and state agencies were left in a severe debt when the goals were not reached. A widespread depression had caused the shortfall. But this was still much more than the agencies had been accustomed to receiving. States and associations actually received \$9,900,785 as their allotment from this campaign.<sup>77</sup>

Florida Baptist Association recorded: "The Sunday schools have an important part in the 75 Million program. Let us rally to the support of the teaching service of our church."<sup>78</sup> Alachua Baptist Association wrote in 1921, "We note with interest the increase in the number of organized Sunday schools since the launching of our 75 Million Campaign."<sup>79</sup>

Associations were to reap little of the funding from the campaign, but they were intensely caught up in promoting the project. The old pattern that had developed by the turn of the century was at full throttle now. May wrote, "The need for promoting such denominational programs and emphases caused denominational leaders to look to the association as a promotional agency. Serving as a promotional agency became a major role of the association by the 1930's."<sup>80</sup>

Another major breakthrough in Sunday school expansion came during the Rural Sunday School Campaign. This program was largely the initiative of I. J. Van Ness serving with the Sunday School Board in Nashville. In a 1924 *Sunday School Builder* article "Where Great Possibilities Lie - The Rural Sunday School," he wrote, "We have for several years been giving special attention to what we have called our Rural Campaigns in an effort to carry the message of a modern Sunday School to the rural communities. In most states the work is carried on by an intensive summer campaign, employing students and other workers for from three to four months. Some of the states prefer to have year-round campaign, employing distinctive rural workers who continue

themselves to specific Sunday school and B. Y .P. U. work, either covering districts or in single associations.”<sup>81</sup>

Arthur Flake wrote in the same issue, “The Sunday School Departments of the different State Mission Boards, co-operating with the Baptist Sunday School Board, are at the task in dead earnest of helping these 17,027 rural Sunday schools in making their Sunday schools larger and better in every way. Some of the methods now in operation to accomplish this end are the Rural Sunday School Summer Campaigns, District Sunday School Workers and Associational Sunday School Workers.”<sup>82</sup>

### **Associational Sunday School Workers.**

The Rural Sunday School Campaign, employing workers to serve in rural churches and associations changed the face of Sunday school work in thousands of churches, and placed the Sunday School Board in a leadership position rather than just a provider of materials. Flake continued in his article: “This method is similar to the district Sunday-school work, except a worker is employed for his full time and his operations are confined to one association. Sometimes two associations are assigned to one worker. It has in it a quality of permanency, and workers can get into all the churches in the association within twelve months' time for an intensive campaign of enlargement, re-organization, grading and training.”<sup>83</sup>

### **Associational Organization**

The Rural Sunday School Campaign accelerated associational Sunday school organization. No official associational Sunday school organizational strategy had been drafted until Bryan Robinson published his work in July 1924. Local leadership had simply organized as they saw fit. Flake recognized this movement in his article writing: "In practically all of the states some of the associations maintain an organization for the furtherance of Sunday-school work. These organizations hold conventions at stated times, some of them hold four of these meetings a year, others hold only one. The meetings present fine opportunities for disseminating Sunday-school information and arousing interest and enthusiasm in the work. In addition to these public gatherings many of these associations co-operate with the State Boards

and the Baptist Sunday School Board in supporting paid Sunday-school workers for full time as mentioned elsewhere in this article.<sup>84</sup>

Secretary Willians Sunday school report to Florida in 1928 showed how the state was involved in this program. "Dr. I. J. Van Ness, Secretary of the S. S. Board, is giving our state most generous aid in helping our Board to keep three workers as District Field Workers the year around. These workers are as follows: West Florida District, Rev. E. B. Evans; South Florida district, Mr. O. K. Radford; East Coast District, Rev. C. H. Elliott. These Field Workers live in the midst of their territories-or in other words, "They Live in their suitcases." It was agreed with Dr. Van Ness to accept these workers for the year round instead of summer field workers. "Our greatest hope for development lies in the strength and power of the associational or county unit, when properly backed up by the churches."<sup>85</sup>

### **Six Advances in Associational Sunday School Work**

Two years and at least six seminal developments signaled the coming of age for Sunday schools and associations. By 1924 the Rural Sunday School Campaign was changing the face of rural Sunday schools and smaller associations. I. J. Van Ness's second major contribution was the "Approved" and "Qualified" worker program. "Approved Workers" were Sunday school leaders from churches and associations who were distinguished in a particular age group and had the ability to teach others how to do quality Sunday school work. "Qualified Workers" served as a back up to Approved Workers. This program gave recognition to outstanding Sunday school leaders and provided local leadership for associations. That process initiated under I. J. Van Ness continues today under different names. Florida had a corps of workers in Jacksonville, Tampa, Daytona Beach, Tallahassee, Orlando, Miami, Pensacola, West Palm Beach, Winter Haven, and Gainesville serving the state and associations by 1928.

### **Associational Sunday School Organization Developed**

A third major contribution to associational Sunday school work came from a "new hire" at Nashville, Mr. Bryan Robinson, who had been employed "to give special attention to the Daily Vacation Bible School movement and to the foundation of plans for the rural school."<sup>86</sup>

Mr. Robinson created a detailed strategy for organizing and carrying out the work of Sunday schools through local associations. Larger associations already had some degree of organization, but each one was somewhat different and they lacked a common strategy. Mr. Robinson wrote, "There should be an active, aggressive Sunday-school organization in every Baptist church. These results cannot be accomplished through the combined efforts of the Sunday School Board and the various state Sunday school departments. Every pastor, associational missionary, educational director, superintendent and Sunday school worker should aid in this challenging program."

"The most satisfactory way to utilize the efforts of our Sunday School Board, state Sunday school departments and county and local forces is through an associational organization. Organizing and grading Sunday schools, training the officers and teachers, creating sentiment for, and wisely advising in, church building programs, carrying on organized class work, etc., can best be done through an associational Sunday-school organization. The associational organization should be the unit in the state Sunday-school organization. Many associations have employed a Sunday-school missionary to direct the Sunday-school work. This example should be followed wherever possible. Some of our state Sunday school departments have worked out splendid plans of their own along this line but it is to be hoped that the proposed organization will be usable everywhere in order that associational Sunday school work among Baptists may be uniform as are other phases of our Sunday school work."<sup>87</sup>

With this introduction, Mr. Robinson laid out a complete structure and strategy for associational Sunday school work with four main objectives: 1) an annual Sunday school convention, 2) an annual Associational Training School, 3) Closer correlation of Sunday-school work and 4) reaching and helping every Baptist worker in the association." His plan detailed how to inaugurate the organization, and spelled out the duties of suggested officers.<sup>88</sup>

Two things are of note from Mr. Robinson's work. One, he states that many associations had employed Sunday-school missionaries, and two, this practice, which had been instituted in the

1800's by some larger associations, now had national recognition and would be expanded in the coming rural Sunday school campaigns.

The fourth contribution came from Arthur Flake through Enlargement Campaigns conducted in major cities. The first one was in 1923 in San Antonio, Texas. It was unique in that it was the first campaign of its kind ever undertaken so far as we know.<sup>89</sup> Flake next tried out his strategy in Little Rock, Arkansas. A brief report in the *Builder* reads: "Simultaneous Sunday School Enlargement Campaign Little Rock, Arkansas, March 9-16, 1924, 10 churches participated."<sup>90</sup>

Since that beginning, Florida has used associational Sunday School Enlargement Campaigns to boost Sunday school work. Secretary William's report in the 1928 Florida Baptist Convention Annual read: "During the year we have held twelve Enlargement Campaigns. In these Campaigns the census is taken, organization enlarged, classes re-graded, Six Point Record System installed, training classes conducted, teachers' meeting explained, Workers' Councils promoted, etc."<sup>91</sup>

The fifth contribution also came from Mr. Flake, through publication of his book, *Building a Standard Sunday School* in 1923. This was the first major change in the process of training Sunday school workers since publication of the *Convention Normal Manual* in 1903, and continued to guide Sunday school work until the 1960's.

The sixth impact for associational Sunday school work was the combination of a man and his book. J. N. Barnette, working at the Baptist Sunday School Board since 1927 published *Associational Sunday School Work* in 1933. Associational Sunday school work has been measured against that standard ever since. While Mr. Robinson's work in 1924 had ushered in an associational organization and strategy for Sunday school work, it took Barnette's personality, clout with the B.S.S.B., charisma and leadership to change the face of associational Sunday school work and Sunday school work in general.

#### **J. N. Barnette - Father of Associational Sunday School Work**

Barnette clarified the purpose of his work in the Foreword writing: "The direct objectives of this book are three: first, to show something of the challenging possibilities which God has given to Southern Baptists in their Sunday school work; second, to magnify the

district association as a great missionary agency and to hold it up as the best means through which the most remote church and community may be reached; and third, to present in detail a Sunday school organization for a district association which has already proved resultful in the promotion of Baptist Sunday school work."<sup>92</sup>

Barnette followed his opening with a lengthy apology for associational Sunday school work. Following are highlights from this section of his book.

"A functioning associational organization provides one effective means of reaching even the smallest and most remote church with all the plans of the denomination at very little cost to the state or general boards."

"The district association is potentially the most important extra-church organization Baptists have. More good can be done to a larger number of churches through associational work than through any other agency have. In promoting Bible study, in winning the lost, and in enlisting individuals and churches in every phase of denominational work, the association becomes primarily a missionary organization."

"Before the plans for an associational Sunday school organization are presented it seems well to study some of the reasons why a district association should be organized for Sunday school work. The limited time in the regular meeting of the district association does not give time for discussion of Sunday school work. The usual time for the meeting of the district association is two days. Very little time is available for the discussion of plans and methods. The opportunities are so many and the needs so challenging that more time is needed for. . . practical phases of the work."<sup>93</sup>

Barnette's heartbeat for Baptist work is seen in the following summary. "Southern Baptist methods are distinctive because of Baptist doctrines. The Baptist message is as near that of the New Testament as Southern Baptists know how to make it. Baptist methods of Sunday school work must ever be such as to strengthen this message and carry it to the maximum number of people. The methods of Southern Baptist Sunday school work have come out of their doctrines."<sup>94</sup>

Barnette then spelled out the officers and duties of the

associational Sunday school leadership team. Following are some of the classic relationships, qualifications and expectations Barnette laid out in this historic work.

"In every association there should be at least the following officers: an associational superintendent, a superintendent of training, a superintendent of enlargement and evangelism, a superintendent of Vacation Bible school work, a secretary, a group superintendent for each group of churches and associational department or age-group superintendents: Cradle Roll, Nursery, Beginner, Primary, Junior, Intermediate, Young People's, Adult, Extension. It should exist for the promotion of the Baptist Sunday school work in the association, and should advocate only such methods and plans as Baptists use. This type of organization makes possible an army of volunteer workers. The denomination could not employ enough paid workers to approximate the carrying out of any great program of enlistment touching in a vital way all the churches. Literally hundreds of capable workers can be enlisted and trained to render volunteer service as associational officers. These workers have close, intimate, and vital contact with the churches. Through these officers, it is possible to know the needs and to understand the problems.

"The associational Sunday school organization is for the purpose of the promotion of the Baptist Sunday school work in the association and should function in co-operation with the general associational officers."

"If Southern Baptists could find some ten to twelve capable men and women in each association who would give themselves to this work in perfect abandonment, these workers could start a great upward movement in Southern Baptist Sunday school work."

"The position of an associational Sunday school officer provides a place for laymen to serve, not one year but ten or twenty years. This work needs men and women who will faithfully instruct, inspire, and love until . . . progress is made in all of the churches. This work demands men and women who can see the people they have helped to train and enlist move away, and then have the courage and vision to find and train and enlist others. In doing this they are also

furnishing members and workers for other churches."<sup>95</sup>

"An associational officer should count the cost, but not like the rich young ruler, turn back; rather, he should be a true soldier for Jesus Christ, an example to every pastor, superintendent, and teacher in the association. When the associational Sunday school officers see as Jesus saw, they will begin to give as he gave and work as he worked."<sup>96</sup>

His book concludes with the following caution and admonition: "The associational officers will be tempted to turn aside and put on programs which some are pleased to call inspirational and spiritual. The associational superintendent should not let excitement, sentiment, and tradition turn him aside from emphasizing the church's training an army of workers to reach the people, teach the Bible, win the lost, and inform and enlist all the people in doing all the things which Jesus has commanded."<sup>97</sup>

"The truth of the whole matter," Barnette said, "is just this. It is necessary to get in touch with a church to help it. The district association makes it possible to make a direct, sympathetic, and constant contact with every church."<sup>98</sup>

The success Barnette experienced in associational work combined with that of the 75 Million Campaign, the Rural Church Campaigns and the beginning of the Cooperative Program led to unprecedented denominational cooperation in the 1920's and 30's. But there was a downside. All the attention to promotional activities and programs led to a question as to the primary role of the association. Was it to be a promotional agency on the local level for the denomination, or was it a fellowship and missionary enterprise? There were those who were concerned with the increasing centralization of the denomination. On the plus side, all the promotional activities through the association led to a focus on the association. "The stage had been set for the reemergence of the association to prominence in Southern Baptist life. In addition, the rationale had been developed for viewing the association in a manner that would channel the denomination's programs to every church."<sup>99</sup> With such successes, the issues were put aside until re-evaluations began in the 1950's.

Associational Sunday school work was beginning to

synchronize by 1930. The early 30's saw another expansion in Sunday school efficiency. Attention was focused on achieving the Standard of Excellence, a study of Flake's *Building a Standard Sunday School*, and *The True Functions of the Sunday School*. Secretary William had Florida's Sunday school leadership involved in district Sunday school conventions, associational Sunday school rallies, and assemblies at Deland and West Florida.

In the mid 30's, the denomination was looking for a way to advance in associational Sunday school work. "The extra spark needed was provided when T. L. Holcomb became executive secretary of the Sunday School Board in 1935. Holcomb's primary goal was to make the resources of the denomination available to every Southern Baptist church, and the association provided the way to do that."<sup>100</sup>

J. N. Barnette, employed since 1927 at the Sunday School Board had achieved much through associational Sunday school organization. His second wave of leadership came in directing the Five-Year Campaign of 1936-40. "When this program began in 1936, there were 24,537 churches affiliating with the Southern Baptist Convention, of which 15,000 were one-fourth time churches and 5,000 one-half time. There were approximately 910 district associations. This meant that a special effort would be made to reach the 20,000 churches that had less than fulltime preaching. Although these constituted 80 percent of all the churches in the Convention, they were the ones that had made fewest requests for aid and yet probably had the greatest need."<sup>101</sup>

The Five-Year Program began with two day conferences in each state "for a select group of both Sunday school and Training Union workers in an effort to enlist and train 30,000 volunteer workers."<sup>102</sup> The program was timed to culminate with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sunday School Board in 1941.

Annual training sessions were held in each state with Sunday school workers from each association. Associational leaders then provided training schools for church leaders. In 1939 fall and spring training schools were begun in each association. In the fall, schools usually taught Sunday school administration books. In the spring, content was focused on Bible content and/or Sunday school skills.

The Sunday School Board began publication of the “Pacemaker” in 1939 mailed to every associational Sunday school worker to provide encouragement and information. “In 1944 the “Pacemaker” was absorbed into the “Sunday School Bulletin” that continued until 1978 when it was named the “ASSIST Bulletin.”<sup>103</sup> These publications provided a communication link with associational Sunday school leaders until the 1990's when the Board disbanded the associational unit.

“In 1940 Prince E. Burroughs said that the Five-Year Campaign had been the most fruitful effort of its kind ever undertaken. Every aspect of Sunday school work showed improvement. The average net gain during the several years preceding the campaign was about 35,000; but during the years of the campaign, the average net gain increased to over 100,000 each year. This five-year campaign was a watershed in its wide influence.”<sup>104</sup>

The movement set Baptist Sunday School interests forward in Florida at a pace not realized in any similar period before”<sup>105</sup>

Florida participated in the Five-Year Program from the beginning. Goals were set for: Increase in Enrollment 20,000; Increase in number of schools, 60; Enlargement Campaigns, 75; Church Training Schools, 400; Teacher Training Awards Per Year, 10,000; Increase in Vacation Bible Schools, 75; Active Sunday School Associations, 33; Increase in Baptisms, 25%; Increase in Building Equipment 100 churches; and Paid workers in Churches, 40.

#### **Associational Sunday School Work in the 1940's**

“The success of the Five-Year Program resulted in its sequel, the Four-Year Program (1940-1944.) A new element in the Four-Year Program was a follow-up meeting in every association. Despite the difficulties due to World War II, the campaign was successful; and the Sunday School Board reported to the Convention its intention to continue using the district association as its main approach to promotion. The view of the association as a promotional unit was not peculiar to the Sunday School Board, however. It was a part of the generally accepted view of associations and the way the denomination went about its cooperative work.”<sup>106</sup>

In the Five-Year Program, Florida associations had begun choosing Sunday school leaders to help in their work, and the state began statewide conferences for associational Sunday school officers and workers. In 1940, Florida was in their 5<sup>th</sup> statewide conference, and 28 of 35 associations were represented with a total of 314 workers receiving training. In 1943, even with restrictions by the War, reports showed there were 36 associational meetings with 2,351 persons attending.

Florida's Sunday schools focused on enlargement campaigns, training banquets, associational Sunday school organization and state assemblies in the early 1940's. The War years curtailed some state Sunday school activities, including state assemblies. Since the 1945 assembly at Deland was not permitted by the war department, activities were centered in associational Sunday school events.

By 1940 the first four associational Sunday school training banquets had been conducted in Jacksonville, Miami, Lakeland and Tampa. In 1945 seven training banquets were conducted. Sunday school enrollment in the state dropped during the war from 125,476 in 1940 to 110,200 in 1943. Many leaders had been siphoned off during the war, but associational Sunday school work continued strong. Even in the critical year of 1944 during the height of rationing, gasoline restrictions and governmental prohibitions on meetings of more than 50 persons without permission, Secretary Willian managed to conduct four associational leadership group conferences.

1945 was Southern Baptists Centennial year. National, state and associational goals were set to celebrate. Florida's Sunday school goals that year included 36 associational Mass Meetings with an attendance goal of 3,000, and 60 associational enlargement campaigns.

1946 began with 33 simultaneous Sunday school meetings in January to promote associational work. While associations had been uncomfortable for years, feeling that they were pawns for the denomination, the second half of the 40's found Baptists in the mood for associational fellowship, enhancing the place of the association. Secretary Willian reported, "The Sunday school associational organization is the best way we know yet, of reaching every church in

each association with the very best plans and methods of Sunday School work.”<sup>107</sup> He conducted four associational leadership Group Conferences in February 1944 at Marianna, Jacksonville, Plant City and Delray. These conferences were repeated in January, 1945 in what he called District Conferences, at Marianna, Gainesville, Bartow and Belle Glade where associations had enlisted age group teams to train their church Sunday school leaders.<sup>108</sup>

1946 began with 33 simultaneous associational Sunday school meetings to promote associational work. Regional Sunday school Planning Meetings at Marianna, Gainesville, Bartow, and Belle Glade set the stage for the years Sunday School achievements. “Rev. Tom Collins became associate Sunday school secretary in 1945. In the belief that the associational organizations were the most effective means of reaching every church with the best plans, Mr. Collins was assigned to that special field.”<sup>109</sup>

On the national scene, J. N. Barnette was given recognition for the highly successful Five-Year Program, but it was T. L. Holcomb who actually conceived the strategy; just as Mr. Bryan Robinson had designed the first associational Sunday school organization plan in 1924, for which Barnette received credit, following his book *Associational Sunday School Work* in 1933. True, it was Barnette who provided the leadership, but others had designed and initiated the strategy in both programs.

### **Florida's Fabulous Fifties in Sunday School Growth**

Sunday school work in the 50's began with new leadership in Florida. C. F. Barry had assumed the leadership as state Sunday school secretary in 1949 and immediately re-instituted the state convention as a means to unify Florida's Sunday school work. In the eight years, 1946-1954 Sunday school enrollment more than doubled from 143,232 to 298, 891.

Statewide leadership schools were begun in 1950 to train associational Sunday school leaders. These schools were five days in duration, with conferences during the day and rally's at night where local church Sunday school leaders were invited to join in. The Jacksonville school in 1952 registered 1,395 with leaders from 22

associations participating. Simultaneous associational Sunday school planning meetings begun in 1946 continued into the 1950's divided into four district meetings.

Barnette's vision of "A Million More in '54" launched a Sunday school rally that established a level of achievement in Sunday school expansion that is not likely to ever be duplicated. The campaign was promoted in associational planning meetings with ACTION night rallies conducted in every association beginning in 1953. These rallies launched Sunday school week in the fall for local churches and associations and continued on an annual basis until they were discontinued for promotion of the Crusade of the Americas in 1968.

Standard Sunday school achievement continued to be the mark of quality Sunday schools in churches, and associations had their own standards to work towards. Southwest Florida Baptist Association was recognized for three straight years of standard recognition beginning in 1953.

Two new associational Sunday school events began in 1958, a Bible Teaching Clinic, and a change in enlargement campaigns to Associational Pastor-Led Enlargement Campaigns. All things considered, the 1950's were the most effective years ever experienced in associational Sunday school work. In 1957 Baptists champion of associational Sunday school work, J. N. Barnette retired from his position following 30 years of unprecedented achievements and the writing of numerous books to guide Sunday school work.

### **Associational Conceptual Reappraisals**

The Seventy-Five Million Campaign, beginning of the Cooperative Program and a heightened sense of cooperation between Baptists by 1930 had given new direction to the place of the association in denominational life. The prominence of the association in denominational program promotion had begun to take on a life of its own. Following the Rural Church Campaigns and Barnette's encouragement in associational Sunday school promotion, denominational program promotion seemed like the natural role for associations as much as the historical fellowship, doctrinal, missionary assignments.

The denominational promotional program function of the association was generally accepted as the norm from the mid 1930's until the mid 1950's. This role had come from the development of church program organizations with the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and caused denominational leaders to view the association in this light. The demands of World War II had so consumed the nation from 1940-1945 there was little energy left to consider denominational directions. Just as the country recovered from WWII, there was a new one, - the Korean Conflict. This "police action" did not have the same intensity as WWII though, and with time for thought, denominational leaders began to contemplate the effectiveness and coordination of their organizational roles.

Solomon F. Dowis published *A Mission Program for a Baptist Association* in 1953, beginning an almost 30 year evaluation of not only associations roles - but of all the agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention as well. His work declared "the association is not only a promotional agency, but also a vital evangelistic, conservational, doctrinal and missionary unit of our denominational life."<sup>110</sup> Lynn E. May, Jr. surveyed the study course books of the 1940's and 1950's and determined that references to the association were typically "in terms of its function as a promotional agency."<sup>111</sup>

The die had been cast. Interpretation and evaluations had begun in denominational circles. Dowis followed his 1953 work with publication of the *Associational Guidebook* in 1959. In this book he pointed out a more comprehensive role for the association, showing that this body had a place to not only promote programs, but also in teaching how to conduct the programs, while providing the fellowship resource base for coordinating and understanding the enlarged associational mission.

Even before Dowis' Guidebook was published evaluations were in full swing by Baptists and other denominations. In 1956 the S.B.C. appointed a committee "to study the function of the agencies and boards of the S.B.C. and their relationships with the churches, the state conventions, and other agencies and boards of the convention, with a view of finding the most effective way of promoting the Kingdom

through the Southern Baptist Convention.”<sup>112</sup> By 1960 “it began to appear that the association had no program of its own. Its meetings were filled with the reports of what other church agencies were doing or were planning to do. In fact, many associations did not know what their program was to be.”<sup>113</sup>

A new associational Sunday school role was defined in 1968, reading: “The associational Sunday school program has as its objective assisting churches with their tasks. Training leaders for maximum service, then, is a major responsibility of the associational Sunday school organization. Conducting associational training projects is one approach that the association can make in assisting churches in training leaders.”<sup>114</sup>

Some associational leaders viewed the work of the association to be educational. Some saw it as missionary. Some interpreted the work to be support of the pastor. Others held on to the fellowship principle. A series of introspective meetings began by and for Associational Missionaries. The first was at Mississippi's Gulfshore Conference Center in 1963.

“In this framework the Inter-Agency Council appointed a series of study committees to deal with the question of the place of the association in the promotion and organizational structure of Southern Baptist life. Following a period of intensive study by several committees and study groups, “The Associational Base Design” was written and approved by the Coordinating Committee of the Inter-Agency Council in 1972.”<sup>115</sup> This was followed by a national convocation on the Southern Baptist Association at Ridgecrest in 1974. This convocation resulted in a recovery of “the original philosophy of associations as a fellowship of churches. While it did not rule out associational involvement in denominational efforts, it did repudiate the essentially promotional role it had previously accepted.”<sup>116</sup> A follow up National Conference on the Association was conducted at Ridgecrest in 1981, and the agencies again re-wrote or updated the program statement in 1982.

Bottom line. Since 1970 the relationships between Sunday school and associations and their individual roles and functions have

never really been settled. Change that began during the 60's was worldwide, not just limited to Southern Baptists. Organizational life in the church, the business world, education and government has been in a constant state of re-organization ever since.

Sunday school came out of the 60's studies with new literature, new age groups, new organization and new names for leadership and structure. Associations had a major role in interpreting this redesign to church leaders following the national "Spirit and Structure of the 70's conferences." The changes were so traumatic that some long time Sunday school leaders gave up on the spot and never returned to their leadership roles - in their local churches - or their associations. The associational Sunday school organization was changed in name and function. ASSISTeams (Associational Sunday School Improvement Support Teams) were created with the term "director" used to identify key leadership positions in place of the previous title, superintendent. The principal function of the ASSISTeam was "to assist and challenge churches to improve and enlarge all areas of their Sunday school thorough planning, training, administration activities, consultation, program interpretation, and cooperative projects." National Sunday school leadership viewed the associational organization "as a process of involving an increasing number of people in Christian service."<sup>117</sup>

James Chatham was Associational consultant at Baptist Sunday School Board for a number of years prior to his retirement in 1988. In 1982, he was on a committee charged with redesign of the associational Sunday school program. With the desire for a first person account of this activity, I called Mr. Chatham. The following notes are from my telephone conversation with James.

David: James, I understand from reading J. C. Bradley's book on Associations that you were charged with re-writing the "Associational Base Design, 1982 Update," - from the 1972 Base Design, working through the Coordinating Committee of the Inter-Agency Council.

James: "Yes, I was a part of the committee of three given this assignment." David: How did this come about?

James: "The Sunday school department recognized the need to provide more help to the associations in their Sunday school ministries."

David: Tell me how you and the committee went about this assignment.

James: "We began with the definition of an Associational Sunday School Standard, which was, "The Standard is designed to help the ASSISTeam plan, conduct, improve and evaluate it's work."

David: This was the beginning of the term ASSISTeam?

James: "Yes, I came up with that acrostic, which was Associational Sunday School Improvement Support Team." "After we completed the design, we were budgeted \$60,000 to conduct ASSISTeam Institutes in six areas across the states to communicate the design and process. The next year we provided complete sets of curriculum materials for each age group leader to use in going to the churches to teach, consult, and conduct conferences. After the first year, we had 3,400 ASSISTeam members registered, and while it seems too high, I have written that we had about 37,000 ASSISTeam members after 5 years. Most states then began to conduct their own ASSIST Institutes after initial training."

David: James, in the 1980's BSSB was conducting what were called METRO's in the larger cities across America. Were you involved in that too?

James: "Yes, I actually coordinated the METRO in Los Angeles."<sup>118</sup>

J. N. Barnette had defined success in Sunday school by saying: "Sunday school methods which do not result in reaching the masses, no matter what else may be said about them, cannot be considered a success. The first test of a Sunday school is a test of numbers. This test must be met before the work of Bible teaching, evangelism, and Christian growth can be done. When Baptists keep this heaven-born and divinely-bought truth of seeking the lost at the heart of all their thinking, they will continue to keep the note of conquest prominent in their work."<sup>119</sup>

The *ASSIST* Guidebook defined success in a manner that would meet Barnette's criteria: "The success of associational work may be measured in several ways, including: the number of churches participating; the enrollment and attendance; the percentage of potential reached, the numerical result; the project staying within budget; result in the churches; previously identified outcomes realized."<sup>120</sup>

### **Sunday School Tasks Redefined**

New task statements were adopted in 1979 for Sunday schools on both the church and associational levels. The statement was: "Reach persons for Bible study, teach the Bible, witness to persons about Christ and lead persons into church membership. Minister to Sunday school members and nonmembers, lead members to worship and interpret and undergird the work of the church and the denomination."<sup>121</sup>

Programs, concepts and experimentation characterized Sunday school work in the 1970's. In addition to the structural changes, Associational Bible Conferences were tried beginning in 1971-72. October was designated "Outreach month" in the denominational calendar giving national priority to Sunday school.

Sunday School Revivals and People Search projects took place in the spring of 1972. In Florida, training was conducted for 42 Associational Revival Coordinators and 325 Church Director-Evangelists. When all was tabulated, 44 associations and 800 churches had participated in this project. As an extension of Vacation Bible School, Backyard Bible Clubs began in 1973.

Florida pioneered and introduced ACTION in 1975-76. Conceived by Rev. Andy Anderson, pastor of Riverside Baptist Church, Ft. Myers, Florida, ACTION called for enrolling any one, anytime, anywhere in Sunday school. At that time, the old rule, though long ago officially disbanded was "three straight Sundays in attendance required for enrollment." ACTION clinics and seminars were scheduled in 44 associations during a six-month period beginning in October 1975. Following this introduction and evaluation, ACTION became the National Sunday school focus for several years.

Florida closed out the 70's focused on BOLD ADVANCE as the state strategy for the years 1976-1979. Bold Advance conferences were conducted in every association between September 7 and 16, 1976, promoting not only Sunday school, but setting goals in all church programs.

### **Associations and Sunday Schools Go Retro in the 1980's**

The 1980's opened with a national celebration of Sunday School's 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Someone said the development of Sunday schools is to a great extent the history of Christian education in America. Bicentennial celebrations of the Sunday school movement in 1980 were worldwide. In England the celebration began formally in London with a ceremony at the statue of Robert Raikes.

Among Southern Baptists in America, recognition of the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Sunday schools focused in the areas of promotion, publications, and enlargement through Bold Mission Thrust, a national growth strategy.

Sunday schools first major focus of the 1980's came through METRO's, a reversion to the big campaigns conducted in the 1920's. As a strategy to stimulate growth and improve the work of Sunday schools in larger cities, the BSSB devised week- long Sunday school enrollment training clinics. These projects were called "Metro's" for short. Four of these events were conducted in Florida. The first one was in Jacksonville, February 18-26, 1984. Second was the Gold Coast Metro at West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and surrounding areas, September 17-25, 1988. The third Metro was at the state capital, Tallahassee, in Florida Association, October 13-20, 1990, and the last one was with the Tampa Bay and Suncoast Associations, September 14-19, 1991.<sup>122</sup>

Sunday school enrollment/training clinics provided quality Sunday school leadership training and were called "Metros" because they were conducted only in larger cities. Metros were enlargement campaigns on steroids. They offered the finest in Sunday School leadership training, but were very expensive.

The Gold Coast Sunday School Enrollment Training Clinic (Metro) September 17-25 was the central focus of Gulf Stream and Palm Lake Associations Sunday School work in 1987 and 1988. Enlistment for the Metro began on May 18 and 19 with separate banquets in Gulf Stream and Palm Lake Associations. A total of more than 700 persons representing 90 churches attended these two events. Sunday School leaders from more than 30 states had been invited to participate. Encouraging others to participate, Jenisu Ansley, a Florida

state Special Worker who served as a clinician at the Raleigh, North Carolina clinic wrote, "As I worked with a team in a church to help evaluate and upgrade their organization, methods, training, and commitment, my awareness became sharpened as to what my church can do to reach more people for Christ."<sup>123</sup>

In 1986-87, the state convention chose, "Start-a-New" as a theme to anchor the Bold Mission Thrust strategy. A goal was set to start 200 new Sunday Schools during the year. Mission Sunday School START campaigns were scheduled in Manatee Southern, Miami and Ridge Associations to train and equip leaders in starting new Sunday schools. Associational conferences on new Sunday school starts were conducted in Florida, Marion, Northeast and Orange Blossom Associations.<sup>124</sup>

### **1990's Bring FAITH**

Florida's associational Sunday school emphasis began the 1990's with Metro's in Florida, and Tampa/Suncoast Associations. Metro's produced the measure of success as defined by Barnette in 1933, but at a tremendous cost in time and money. Metro's cost between \$100,000 and \$500,000 each, depending upon the number of churches participating, and saturated associational calendars with activities for about eighteen months. Moderate sized associations put in a bid for Metro's at the beginning of the 90's but had to settle for enlargement campaigns since Metro's were discontinued on a national basis when funding became an issue. Spike Hogan, general leadership associate in Florida's Sunday School Department conducted Sunday school "Target 2000 Growth Campaigns" in Shiloh, Orange Blossom and Manatee Southern Associations in place of Metro's.

The centuries last national Sunday school focus was FAITH, an evangelism strategy. FAITH originated at First Baptist Church, Daytona Beach, Florida under the leadership of their pastor, Rev. Bobby Welch and Minister of Evangelism, Doug Williams. Initially limited to selected churches, FAITH expanded to encompass the efforts of all interested churches with support from associational promotion and enlistment. FAITH impacted Sunday school as no other movement in recent Sunday school history. The last statistical report on FAITH by churches and

Sunday school leaders is from 1998, when Lifeway reported 8,650 churches and 36,000 persons had been trained in national institutes and 374,000 persons had trained for FAITH in their local churches.

### **Associational Sunday School Work in the 21st Century**

A new definition for Sunday school, combined with a task statement for both churches and associational work was drafted for the new century, reading, "Sunday School is the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building Great Commission Christians through Bible study groups that engage people in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry and worship."<sup>125</sup>

Some associations still identified their Sunday school leadership as ASSISTeams but others chose new titles for the 21st century. Lifeway officially changed ASSISTeam to A.C.T. (Associational Consulting Team) with their last resource published in 1998. Some associations again adopted the term "Associational Sunday School Director" to identify the key leader, with age group "directors" for the team. Lifeway Christian Resources of the SBC essentially terminated its support for associational Sunday school work after 1997. States have tried to fill in the gap, but resources are greatly limited. Florida's state Sunday school department has continued to provide training for associational Sunday school leaders, but the structure continues to suffer from lack of national coordination. After over a half-century of associational leadership from Nashville, only two field leaders can be identified with responsibility for this ministry today. One of these leaders, Mr. Wayne Ethridge, at Lifeway, identified the only known current resource available for associational Sunday school work in a March, 2007 telephone conversation. This resource is the guidebook *Associational Sunday School Work*, written by Keith Wilkinson, Jim Gifford, Mark Miller, and Phil Miller, a task group of the State Sunday School Director's Association, an informal organization of Baptist state Sunday school directors. No national resource has been available from Lifeway Christian Resources since 1998. Fortunately, a rich history of associational Sunday school work for over 100 years, and a structured approach since 1924 leaves present day leaders with an experience base

to provide leadership in this new millennium.

Sunday school is being tested for validity by the present generation. Everything from the name to concept is on the table. Likewise, associations are manifested by various structures today. Both entities are likely to be redefined yet again and again in the not too distant future. With their histories of 300 years, both have withstood the test of time, and whatever structure and purpose may be drafted by future leaders, associations and Sunday schools are likely to continue working together in coming centuries to carry out the Great Commission.

Scripture quotations from *The Holy Bible, King James Version*.

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<sup>2</sup>J.C. Bradley, *A Baptist Association Churches on Mission Together* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1984), 18.

<sup>3</sup>*Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, Volume I* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1958), 87.

<sup>4</sup>Henry C. Vedder, *A Short History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1897), 202-203.

<sup>5</sup>*Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, Volume I*, op. cit., 87.

<sup>6</sup>B.W. Spilman, L.P. Leavell, Hight C. Moore, *Convention Normal Manual For Sunday-School Workers* (Nashville, TN: Sunday-School Board S.B.C., 1909), 62-63.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid*, 63-64.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid*, 64-65.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid*, 65.

<sup>10</sup>Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School The Foundation of An American Institution 1790-1880* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 61.

<sup>11</sup>E.P. Alldredge, *Southern Baptists Working Together* (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Board, S.B.C., 1925), 44.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid*, 41-42.

<sup>13</sup>*Convention Normal Manual For Sunday-School Workers*, op. cit., 59-60.

<sup>14</sup>*Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, Volume II*, op. cit., 1315.

<sup>15</sup>*Convention Normal Manual For Sunday-School Workers*, op. cit., 62.

<sup>16</sup>James L. Clark, *To Set Them In Order: Some Influences of the Philadelphia Baptist Association Upon Baptists of America to 1814* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2001), 325.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>19</sup>*The Founders Journal*, Issue 19/20, Winter/Spring 1995, 2.

<sup>20</sup>Winthrop S. Hudson, "The Associational Principle Among Baptists," *Foundations, A Baptist Journal of History and Theology, Volume 1, No. 1.* (January, 1958): 17.

<sup>21</sup>Lynn E. May, Jr., *The Work of the Baptist Association: An Integrative Study (CC-SR 12)* (Inter-Agency Council SBC) 6-9.

<sup>22</sup>Lynn E. May, Jr., "The Sunday School: A Two-Hundred-Year Heritage", *Baptist History and Heritage, Volume 15 No. 4* (October, 1980) 3.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>*The Work of the Baptist Association: An Integrative Study*, op. cit., 9-10.

<sup>25</sup>*Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, Volume II*, op. cit., 1316.

<sup>26</sup>May, "The Sunday School: A Two-Hundred-Year Heritage" op. cit., 4.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>28</sup>Bradley, *A Baptist Association Churches on Mission Together*; op. cit., 28.

<sup>29</sup>John L. Rosser, *A History of Florida Baptists* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1949), 130.

<sup>30</sup>Gordon Crawford Reeves, *A History of Florida Baptists* (Deland, FL: Unpublished Thesis, Stetson University, June, 1938): 187.

<sup>31</sup>Minutes, *8th Annual Session, Florida Baptist Association (12 October, 1850): 10-11.*

<sup>32</sup>Minutes, *6th Annual Meeting, West Florida Baptist Association (1852).*

<sup>33</sup>Minutes, *11th Annual Session, Florida Baptist Association (19 November, 1853): 8-13.*

<sup>34</sup>Minutes, *West Florida Baptist Association, (1856): 4-6.*

<sup>35</sup>Minutes, *14th Session, Florida Baptist Association, (16 November, 1856): 7.*

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>37</sup>Minutes, *15th Annual Session, Florida Baptist Association, (13 November, 1857): 4-8.*

<sup>38</sup>Minutes, *West Florida Baptist Association, (1857): 11.*

<sup>39</sup>Minutes, *Twelfth Annual Session, West Florida Baptist Association, (October, 1858): 7-9.*

<sup>40</sup>Minutes, *13th Annual Session, West Florida Baptist Association, (22-25*

October, 1859): B.

<sup>41</sup>Rosser, *A History of Florida Baptists*, op. cit., 122.

<sup>42</sup>Minutes, *18th Annual Session, Florida Baptist Association*, (19 October, 1860): 5.

<sup>43</sup>Reeves, *A History of Florida Baptists*, op. cit., 188-189.

<sup>44</sup>Minutes, *Twenty-Fifth Session, Florida Baptist Association*, (17 October, 1867): 10-11.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid*, Appendix

<sup>46</sup>Jane Moon Thorpe, *As The River Flows* (Santa Fe River Baptist Association, 1978), 26-27.

<sup>47</sup>*Florida Baptist Witness*, (April, 1903).

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid*, (September, 1904).

<sup>49</sup>Minutes, *Florida Baptist Association*, (October, 1872): Appendix.

<sup>50</sup>L. David Cunningham, *A History of Florida Baptist's Sunday School*, (Xulon Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>51</sup>May, *The Sunday School: A Two-Hundred-Year Heritage*, op. cit., 5.

<sup>52</sup>Minutes, *Florida Baptist Association*, (18-19 October, 1872): 8.

<sup>53</sup>Minutes, *Santa Fe River Baptist Association*, (12 October, 1872).

<sup>54</sup>Minutes, *29th Annual Session, Alachua Baptist Association*, (22-25 October, 1875): 6-7.

<sup>55</sup>Doak S. Campbell, *The Florida Baptist Association: The First Hundred Years 1842-1942*.

<sup>56</sup>Minutes, *Alachua Baptist Association*, (22-24 October, 1881): 10.

<sup>57</sup>Cunningham, *A History of Florida Baptist's Sunday School*, op. cit., 13.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid*, 14.

<sup>59</sup>Rosser, *A History of Florida Baptists*, op. cit., 130.

<sup>60</sup>Minutes, *40th Annual Session, Alachua Baptist Association*, (23-25 October, 1886): 5-6.

<sup>61</sup>Thorpe, *As The River Flows*, op. cit., 26-27.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>63</sup>J. C. Bradley, "Trends in Associational Life in the Twentieth Century," *Baptist History and Heritage*, Volume 17, No. 2 (April, 1982): 11-12.

<sup>64</sup>*Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, Volume II, op. cit., 1317.

<sup>65</sup>Minutes, *Florida Baptist Association*, (1913): 15.

<sup>66</sup>Minutes, *Jacksonville Baptist Association*, (1910): 19.

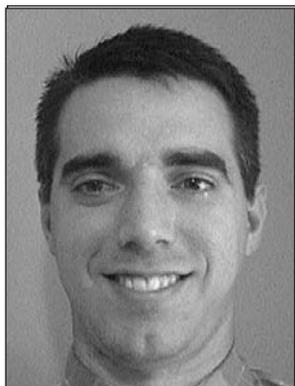
<sup>67</sup>Minutes, *Florida Baptist Association*, (1912).

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid*, (1920): 18-19.

<sup>69</sup>Minutes, *West Florida Baptist Association*, (1900): 13.

- <sup>70</sup>Minutes, *Alachua Baptist Association*, (1901): 10.
- <sup>71</sup>Minutes, *Jacksonville Baptist Association*, (1904): 8.
- <sup>72</sup>Minutes, *Florida Baptist Association*, (1923): 19.
- <sup>73</sup>Minutes, *Alachua Baptist Association*, (1904): 10.
- <sup>74</sup>Minutes, *Florida Baptist Association*, (1904): 20.
- <sup>75</sup>*Ibid*, (1906): 21.
- <sup>76</sup>*Ibid*, (1907): 19-20.
- <sup>77</sup>*Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, Volume II*, op. cit., 1196-1197.
- <sup>78</sup>Minutes, *Florida Baptist Association*, (1919): 14.
- <sup>79</sup>Minutes, *Alachua Baptist Association*, (1921): 19.
- <sup>80</sup>May, "The Work of the Baptist Association: An Integrative Study," op. cit., 20.
- <sup>81</sup>*The Sunday School Builder*, (July, 1924): 3.
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- <sup>83</sup>*Ibid*.
- <sup>84</sup>*Ibid*.
- <sup>85</sup>*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, (1928): 57-58.
- <sup>86</sup>*The Sunday School Builder*, (April, 1924): 6.
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- <sup>88</sup>*Ibid*, 9.
- <sup>89</sup>*Ibid*, (January): 5-8.
- <sup>90</sup>*Ibid*, (June): 12-15.
- <sup>91</sup>*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, (1928): 57-58.
- <sup>92</sup>J. N. Barnette, *Associational Sunday School Work* (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Board, SBC, 1933, Revised, 1952), 24.
- <sup>93</sup>*Ibid*.
- <sup>94</sup>*Ibid*.
- <sup>95</sup>*Ibid*, 27-37.
- <sup>96</sup>*Ibid*, 38.
- <sup>97</sup>*Ibid*, 97.
- <sup>98</sup>*Ibid*, 14.
- <sup>99</sup>Bradley, *Trends In Associational Life in the Twentieth Century*, op. cit., 12-14.
- <sup>100</sup>Bradley, *A Baptist Association Churches on Mission Together*, op. cit., 28-30.
- <sup>101</sup>Robert A. Baker, *The Story of the Sunday School Board* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1966), 131-135.
- <sup>102</sup>James E. Fitch, "Major Thrusts in Sunday School Development Since

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- <sup>103</sup>*Ibid*, 26.
- <sup>104</sup>Baker, *The Story of the Sunday School Board*, op. cit., 131.
- <sup>105</sup>Rosser, *A History of Florida Baptists*, op. cit., 138-139.
- <sup>106</sup>Bradley, *A Baptist Association Churches on Mission Together*, op. cit., 31.
- <sup>107</sup>*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, (1945): 59.
- <sup>108</sup>*Ibid*.
- <sup>109</sup>Cunningham, *A History of Florida Baptist's Sunday School*, op. cit., 25-26.
- <sup>110</sup>Bradley, *A Baptist Association Churches on Mission Together*, op. cit., 32.
- <sup>111</sup>*Ibid*.
- <sup>112</sup>*Ibid*, 33.
- <sup>113</sup>May, *The Work of the Baptist Association: An Integrative Study*, op. cit., 25.
- <sup>114</sup>Daryl Heath, *Associational Sunday School Training Projects* (Nashville, TN: Baptist Sunday School Board, SBC, January, 1968), 2.
- <sup>115</sup>Bradley, *Trends In Associational Life in the Twentieth Century*, op. cit., 18-21.
- <sup>116</sup>*Ibid*.
- <sup>117</sup>Bradley, *A Baptist Association Churches on Mission Together*, op. cit., 98.
- <sup>118</sup>James Chatham, Telephone Conversation, (March 29, 2007)
- <sup>119</sup>Barnette, *Associational Sunday School Work*, op. cit., 27-37.
- <sup>120</sup>*Assist Guidebook for Associational Sunday School Workers*, (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Board, SBC., 1986): 23.
- <sup>121</sup>*Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, Volume 4*, (Nashville, TN., Broadman Press, 1982), 2497-2498.
- <sup>122</sup>Cunningham, *A History of Florida Baptist's Sunday School*, op. cit., 74.
- <sup>123</sup>*Ibid*, 44-51.
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- <sup>125</sup>Bill L. Taylor and Louis B. Hanks, *Sunday School for a New Century* (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Press, 1999), 11.



SERVING ON THE SEARCH  
COMMITTEE FOR A  
DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS:  
A FIRSTHAND NARRATIVE 1

**JOEL R. BREIDENBAUGH**  
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On several different occasions as a college student, I and a group of friends informed “metro”-students about the adventuresome endeavors of “snipe-hunting.” We told them tales about driving out to the country and hiding out in bushes late at night during full moons so that we could jump out and catch unique birds in potato sacks. We would shake the bags and let the birds loose so we could watch them stumble around for a few minutes before they flew away. Interestingly, we convinced a few city-slickers of this sport only to turn around and tell them it did not exist-that is, we never actually took them out to the country to give it a try.

In June 2006 I was asked by our association's moderator to serve on the Search Committee for a Director of Missions (DOM). Little did I know at that time that even though several pastors and lay leaders have talked about serving on such a committee, no one (to my knowledge) has ever shown anyone what it looks like or how to do it-I had fallen prey to my own snipe-hunting trick!

While searching for a pastor or an additional staff person of a church has its challenges, those challenges seem multiplied when looking for an associational missionary. Though thousands may serve well in the pastorate, few are comfortable in a DOM role or are gifted to lead a group of pastors, lay leaders, and churches-each with different

traditions, worship styles, visions, ministries, and more! That is to say, trying to locate a gifted and able DOM is not an easy task by any stretch of the imagination.

Though this account does not contain an ironclad step-by-step approach for a DOM search, it does tell you how we did it recently. This article also provides some lessons we learned along the way. Hopefully, the Lord can use our committee's experience in aiding other associations in their search for God's leader (rather than hypothetical snipes!).

### **How We Began**

Our search committee was formed during a special called meeting of the Executive Committee. Because our DOM had recently given his notice of resignation, our moderator appointed a six-person search committee.<sup>2</sup> This committee consisted of both pastors and associates ranging from large, medium, and small churches. We had four pastors, one associate pastor, and a minister of music on the committee. Our committee also represented the vast array of churches in our association—from city to community to mission spread out geographically (western, central, and eastern regions of the association). Because of a sizeable military presence in our county, the moderator even included a retired chaplain turned associate pastor. The search committee included two members who had served on the previous search committee (which had met only two years earlier!) so that we might follow some sort of pattern. We held an initial, impromptu gathering immediately following the Executive Committee meeting to elect a chairman and schedule the next meeting. It seemed obvious to elect one of the members from the previous search committee, and since only one of the two was present at that initial meeting, multiple choice was no longer an option!<sup>3</sup>

#### **The Initial Process**

We scheduled our first meeting three days later. Our main agenda at that time was to decide how to advertise the position of DOM. Because of the close proximity to two other states, we decided to run three-week ads in three Baptist state papers (Florida, Alabama, and Georgia) for period of four weeks.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to advertising the position, we spent most of the first three scheduled meetings <sup>5</sup> talking about a possible Interim Director of Missions. While a couple of professors and a soon-to-retire minister were contacted, none of these individuals were ideal because of their current work loads, travel time, and/or pay. Most of us agreed that the association expected at least 15-20 hours per week to help “referee and provide general oversight” of the staff and touch base with some of the churches.

After thinking and praying about the situation, one committee member recommended a local law enforcement chaplain. This individual had several noteworthy advantages: he had served as a pastor of a church in the association, he had a clear passion for both the Lord and the lost, he frequented the weekly ministers' meetings, and he was well-respected by most, if not all, of the area ministers. While meeting with this individual, everyone agreed he would work fifteen hours per week with ten of those in the office and five spent visiting churches. Furthermore, his salary was set at \$300 per week.

Once we had finalized all the details with our prospective Interim DOM, we presented him at a regularly scheduled Executive Committee meeting. As most of you know, it is difficult to get a group of Baptists to agree unanimously on anything. Now, imagine a committee represented almost entirely by ministers. Talk about compounding differences! Moreover, you should know that all of our committee's work up to this point had occurred in a span of only three weeks, so for us to find a prospective candidate and put his name before others for a vote seemed just short of a miracle from God. Those things being said, our candidate received 84% of the votes-not great, but high enough for him to accept. We could now focus our efforts on finding a DOM.

### **Going Back to the Future**

In order to aid our search for a future DOM, one of our committee members invited our ex-DOM and the newly-elected Interim DOM to provide us with some things to consider in calling a DOM. We used the association's job description for the DOM as a starting point, and our ex-DOM shared what he believed the top

responsibilities/characteristics were. He identified the following (in no particular order): ability to relate to and love pastors; ability to preach to fill the pulpit; have a heart for missions, especially in terms of Disaster Relief and the state convention; possessing a military background would be helpful (because of our military bases); ability to assist or envision condo resort ministry; able to administer staff, but not a great need because of several self-starters; desire to visit a number of churches; exemplify grace, wisdom, mentoring, and listening; and convictional without it interfering with the diversity in the association (worship styles, divorced pastors, certain doctrines, etc.). Our ex-DOM also noted that a recent seminary graduate would lack the maturity and pastoral experience needed to serve as a quality DOM.

In light of this discussion, our committee decided to send out a survey to every church and Executive Committee member so that we might evaluate the entire association's expectations for a DOM. Ultimately, the time spent reviewing the past was both necessary and important in assisting our committee for our upcoming work.

### **Separating Wheat from Chaff**

Two months after being formed, our committee sat down to begin going through the résumés. We believed that interested candidates would have had ample time to respond to the ads we had placed with the state papers. We had also received several surveys from numerous churches and pastors throughout the association. Every member of our committee received a compilation of the surveys as well as copies of each of the résumés. Our chairman advised us to alphabetize for easier finding whenever we discussed an applicant. Moreover, he instructed us to place the applicants in three sections: plus, minus, and question marks. With approximately 75 responses, the task seemed at first to be monumental. We had one week to separate the wheat (strong) from the chaff (weak) before we would re-convene.

The following week's gathering was met with an additional résumé. We discussed whether we should still receive them. Realizing that we might be faced with an even bigger pile of résumés, we decided to proceed with those received by the previous meeting.

Rather than begin with the bottom-up approach, one member

recommended starting with what we saw to be the best applicants. Our chairman recorded the names and tallied the number of “votes” from each member of the committee. He recommended that we keep anyone who received at least one positive score from someone in our group. This action limited our scope to some 25 applicants-67% had been eliminated.

Two weeks later <sup>6</sup> we decided to narrow our focus to those who received at least three votes, since this criterion comprised half of our committee. We now had our list down to the top nine applicants. After a little more discussion, we agreed to look at those with four or more votes, leaving us with four applicants. Furthermore, once we compared the four, it was obvious to everyone that one did not fit with the rest, so we placed his résumé aside. Now we thought we had the cream of the crop!

Our chairman recommended sending a form letter to everyone but the top nine candidates, so that others could move on with their respective ministries. He also informed us that we had just received three fairly strong résumés that we might want to consider. While no one wanted to throw new names into the mix at that point, we were curious as to how strong the applicants were. After hearing about each of the new applicants, one sparked our interest, because he was fairly well-known. We decided to include him with the other top three while resolving not to accept more applicants or else our work may never finish! The best news was that less than three months into our work, we believed we had a good short list of four candidates-surely the end was in sight (how short-sighted we all were!).

### **Prayer and Patience**

Two more weeks passed and we convened to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the top four candidates. Each had several positives, but a few negatives caused us from getting overly-excited about anyone. Our chairman recommended sending the top four (Group A) a questionnaire that had been used two years previously. This questionnaire (see appendix) covered ministry philosophy, DOM uniqueness, individual giftedness, and doctrinal stances. We viewed this form as a helpful tool to gather necessary information about our top

prospects. A final decision at this meeting concerned notifying the next five candidates (Group B) to see if they were still interested.

Though we wanted to get feedback from Group A, we also wanted to get an idea about who we thought was “the best of the best.” Thus, we discussed the top four candidates and quickly believed two stood out. Moreover, everyone agreed that one appeared stronger than the other in terms of leadership and effectiveness in ministry. Our chairman then assigned each member of the committee to contact a reference from the top candidate's list. The search committee from two years before had a former insurance agent-turned-pastor serving on it. He advised checking references “three deep,” to get a clearer picture of a candidate.<sup>7</sup> Though it would take a little more time, we realized that such a practice could prove beneficial in our search, especially since résumé references tend to be best friends. We began the process of calling and (often) leaving messages, waiting to hear back, and praying for divine wisdom.

By the time our committee met in two more weeks, two of our top four candidates said that they were no longer interested. Furthermore, two of the next five candidates declined further consideration. Thus, we were left with two of our top four applicants and five of our top nine. Our selection pool was getting smaller each meeting and we assumed that the Lord was answering our prayers by making the choice easier.

### **Red Flags and Dead Ends**

Because of conflicting schedules, it was four weeks before we could meet again. Everyone discussed their conversations with references about our top candidate, noting several similar strengths. A couple of negatives came up, but they were overshadowed initially by the numerous strengths.

One committee member questioned if we would lose the candidate to the state convention in a couple of years.<sup>8</sup> Another member received phone calls from two people in the association, one of whom was a well-respected pastor, who knew the potential candidate and had learned that we were considering him. Both callers strongly cautioned against the candidate, because of questionable administrative tactics.

Moreover, the committee observed that several staff had short tenures under the candidate, and we were concerned about our own associational staff. With a few other questionable items on his résumé, we began seeing all of these issues as red flags. While we may have misread an issue here or there, we felt obligated to heed so many warning signs. We all agreed to notify the candidate that we were pursuing other candidates.

With only one more candidate from the cream of the crop, we turned our attention to him. We were not convinced, however, that he should be the only one considered at that time—we could not get overly-excited about him. Instead, we placed him back in the mix with the next four to see who stood out.<sup>9</sup> Were we stalling or just coming to a dead end?

### **Waiting Too Late**

Since we had not been able to meet as often the previous month, we met one week later to consider who the top five candidates at that time were. Our chairman asked who was at the bottom of everyone's list and there was consensus! Moreover, after a little research on one candidate's church, we were in agreement over the best two candidates, one of which had been the remaining candidate from the previous Group A list. Because of an ongoing concern related to him, we decided to pursue the other candidate and find out if he was still interested.

Two weeks later, after opening in prayer, we were informed that our new “top” candidate was preaching in view of a call to a church in three days. He had been interested in our position but we had waited too late to let him know! We had missed out on a very good candidate.

Furthermore, we were still unable to agree on the re-surfacing candidate. Therefore, we decided to look at the next highest on our list. We sent him the questionnaire to find out more about him.

### **Déjà vu All Over Again—More Red Flags!**

Once we met in two more weeks, we were nearly six months into our work. Maybe we would have a candidate in place by the New Year. We covered our latest “top” candidate's questionnaire and were impressed with several areas. It did seem braggadocios, however, when

he listed all but two of the areas as “his greatest strengths.” Did he really believe he was strong in every area of consideration?

In order to speed up the process, we decided to begin calling references during our meeting. Dispersing to our vehicles or other offices and equipped with cell phones, we began placing calls. Since it was the middle of the morning when most people would be at work, only one of us was able to reach anyone. Our chairman advised waiting to hear back from the other references and told us to contact him via phone or email about our findings.

We met the next week and discussed our contacts. Several positives appeared, but questionable areas included being arrogant and opinionated while not being fully honest. Now his self-evaluation on the questionnaire saturated with so many “greatest strengths” was beginning to make sense. We felt compelled to pay attention to these red flags. In the words of the great philosopher Yogi Berra, “It was déjà vu all over again!”

### **More Prayer and Patience**

Since we would no longer consider our top prospect, we asked if any of the others from our short list were viable candidates. The committee was still not sold on the individual who kept re-surfacing, but we would keep him in the mix. To see where we stood as a committee, we reviewed what we were looking for in a DOM. The issues, in no particular order, were education (minimum MDiv at a Southern Baptist, or an accredited evangelical seminary), experience (minimum of 10-15 years in the pastorate), and leadership (proven track record). One committee member asked if we knew of anyone that would make a good DOM, even if we had not received a résumé from him. This prompted another member to encourage us to take the upcoming Christmas holiday to pray fervently and ask trustworthy individuals to give us some names. After six full months of searching for a Director of Missions, it seemed as though we were starting afresh. As we gathered with family and friends the following weeks, we also gathered with the Lord in prayer.

## **A New Year's Resolution-Find a Director of Missions, or Resign Our Positions!**

With a new year ahead of us, our committee came together prayed up and ready to move forward. We met weekly throughout the month of January, hoping to come to a conclusion on a potential candidate.

We had three people referred to us the first week of January and three more the second week. Of those six, four notified us within a week that they did not feel at liberty for us to consider them. We also finally came to a conclusion that our committee should no longer pursue the candidate who kept re-surfacing. Of the two remaining candidates, both had been given some strong recommendations. Our chairman sent a questionnaire to our top pick and we began contacting references on him. Furthermore, we began contacting references on our second pick, to speed up the process if things failed on our first selection. Hopefully, we were learning from the past.

### **Progress and Reward**

By the end of the month, we had received positive feedback on both of our top candidates. We awaited the questionnaire from our top pick. Once it was received, we were confident about proceeding. After conversing via phone and email, five of the six members of our committee could meet the candidate at a neutral site for lunch and an interview. Everything went well throughout our lunch appointment.<sup>10</sup> On a side note, since we had spent very little money on our work, the association picked up the tab. After eight months of hard work, we decided to splurge-we ordered dessert!

Everyone, including the candidate, was excited about the possibility and would continue praying for the Lord's will to be done. The only concern our committee could foresee at this time was the candidate's family. He had two teenage daughters, one of which was finishing her junior year of high school. We knew that teenagers do not like to leave friends. We knew that this could prove to be a tough hurdle to overcome.

### **Scheduling an On-Site Visit**

After a couple more weeks of prayer, everyone was in

agreement to pursue this candidate. We wanted to give him and his family a chance to tour our area. Different people on our committee scheduled meetings with a school principal, our associational moderator, and a dinner with spouses. To maximize the candidate's wife's time off from her school job, they opted to come at the end of March as part of their kids' Spring Break.

The time with the moderator included an informational tour of one-third of the church locations. The discussion also covered several other churches and associational matters. The evening dinner helped our committee get to know the candidate's wife. While the wives spent time discussing who-knows-what, the committee briefly met with the candidate about a couple of questions he had and how we would proceed.

### **Meeting with Personnel and Budget Committees-Pay Package Unanimity**

Since everyone believed God was leading us to call this candidate as our next DOM, our committee scheduled a meeting with the Personnel and Budget Committees of the association. We met on April 12 and wanted to make sure we were all in agreement about the pay package. We set the salary and benefits, which could be divided as the candidate felt. We also discussed ministry-related expenses along with moving expenses and related issues. Expecting that it would take the candidate a few months to sale his home, we agreed to offer a gas allowance of \$50 per week towards a 7-hour round trip commute on the weekends. Unanimity abounded-either from excitement over the candidate or readiness to have the position filled or both!

Since everything was moving forward expectantly, we believed it was time to call a special meeting of the Executive Committee for the purpose of voting on our candidate as the DOM. We invited the candidate to be the main attraction at our regular Monday morning Ministers' Conference (11 am). The Executive Committee would then meet at noon to vote and eat lunch. The date was set for April 30.

### **Looking Fastball, Thrown a Curve**

On April 19-20, each Search Committee member began receiving phone calls from our chairman. Several people in the

association had been informed that the prospective DOM would not be on the field permanently for at least one year. Others had heard that his work week would be Monday through Wednesday of each week during this twelve-month timeframe. Some wondered if he was trying to abuse the generosity of the \$50 gas allowance. Our chairman offered to contact the candidate to clarify these matters.

The candidate sent our committee an explanatory email on April 22. We realized that some issues had been exaggerated, such as the gas allowance (he expressed gratitude but also understood if it could not be granted) and the work week. The question about when he could move still remained. Since email is one-sided, our committee nevertheless had a few questions and we needed to meet, again!

We met on April 26 to see where we stood as a committee. Some were unsatisfied with the candidate's apparent unwillingness to try to move right away. Others recognized the housing market and the family situation. After a few hours of discussion, we were forced to cancel the April 30 Executive Committee meeting until we could get some resolution on these matters.

After our chairman contacted our prospect over the weekend, we met the following week on May 3. We discussed the last several days' discussions with the candidate. All of our questions were answered satisfactorily. Our concern was that we could not set the best possible atmosphere for our candidate to hit the ground running. We were unanimous that he was still God's man for the job. Thus, we re-scheduled the special called Executive Meeting for May 14 with a similar format as previously scheduled. Expecting a sizeable crowd, we selected a medium-sized, centrally located church so we could hold both our meetings and a lunch afterwards.

In retrospect, after our April 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, we were expecting smooth sailing or, in baseball terms, a fastball. When we got ready to swing, however, we realized it was a curve. Thankfully, we recognized it before it was too late so we could correct our swing.<sup>11</sup>

### **Electing a New DOM**

Prior to the Executive Meeting, our Ministers' Conference showcased our candidate and his family. After introductions and

welcoming, one Search Committee member led in an interview with the candidate. Questions ranged from the candidate's call to salvation and ministry to his philosophy for a DOM and special interests and hobbies. After thirty minutes of interview, another Search Committee member addressed the special concerns that had been raised in recent weeks. Then, the candidate took about twenty minutes to field questions from attending ministers and lay people. It was a very interesting and informative hour—none of us believed it could have gone better. As we were completing our swing, we thought we had hit a homerun.

With the Executive Committee meeting at hand, our chairman presented the motion to call our next DOM. The motion read, “The Search Committee moves that Rev. \_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_, be called as the next DOM of our association to start on June 1. The pay package is set at \$ \_\_\_\_ with ministry-related expenses at \$ \_\_\_\_.”<sup>12</sup> The chairman then accompanied the candidate and his family into another room of the church.

With very little discussion, the ballots were distributed and votes were cast. After a few minutes of tallying votes, the moderator announced that we had voted to elect the candidate as our next DOM. The candidate, however, was praying about his response. Everyone was invited to stay and eat lunch while the committee held a brief meeting with the candidate to handle his concerns.

While we each thought our job was now over, little did we know what would await us in that room. Upon arrival we discovered that only 69% voted in favor to call the candidate (strangely enough, our By-Laws required only a simple majority).<sup>13</sup> While he felt a divine call to our position, he did not want to hurt the association. We prayed and offered counsel. Ultimately, we all believed him to be God's man and supported him in accepting the call. We were able to enter the fellowship hall with a joyous announcement: “Welcome our new DOM!” The joy of the committee also concerned the fact that our work was finally finished.

### **There and Back Again—Hardly a Hobbit's Tale**

So, there you have it. That is what we did. Was it perfect? Hardly. Would we do some things differently? Certainly. Was it longer

than we expected? You bet. The entire process took us 11 fi months. Most, if not all, of us expected the process would take 4-6 months. There were definitely some times when others in the association wondered what was taking us so long. We always responded by requesting prayer for the task.

We have come full circle. I have re-traced our steps. Now we have a DOM, and a good one at that. I do not expect for one moment that taking you “there and back again” (to borrow a phrase from J.R.R. Tolkien's classic *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*) will result in millions of copies being sold. Maybe a few copies will circulate to help others in their search. Before closing, however, let me offer a few, brief pointers.

### **Things We Learned Along the Way**

**Keep Things Quiet**-we found out that we needed to keep things among ourselves, because even a word spoken in confidence to another friend in ministry could spread like wildfire (and boy, did it ever!). I learned this lesson the hard way, because I had a very casual conversation with a friend where a couple of questions were asked in confidence. In less than one week, several inactive members in the Executive Committee suddenly thought they knew who our next DOM was going to be and passed on their prophetic insights to others on our committee. Before anyone could think this matter was of the Lord, I stated my “mea culpa” and promised to keep my lips tight. To the credit of the rest of the committee, I do not believe any of them placed any blame on me.

**Lower Our Voices**-with additional staff at the associational office, it is possible that things were overheard (even unintentionally) in our meetings that could have caused extra questions and concerns to come from every corner of the earth (or at least of our association).

**Meet on Neutral Ground** (when necessary)-when information might be extra-sensitive, such as well-known names in our association, we found it helpful to meet at a nearby, local church. Moreover, when our normal meeting space at the association was already reserved for other functions, we could still carry out our work.

**Pray Early and Often**-although we prayed at every meeting

and we at least claimed that we were praying in-between meetings, we were reminded of our utter dependence upon the Lord, especially when the process was lasting longer than any of us had imagined. With a bunch of ministers on a committee, you would think prayer would be the linchpin of our work, but like Jesus' first disciples, we had to be reminded all-too-often of the necessity of prayer.

**Give Feedback to Prospects Often** (in or out of the mix)-I think it is fair to say that we missed out on a very strong candidate just a few months into the process because we had failed to give him multiple reminders that he was still in the mix. Because he had not heard from us for a few weeks, he proceeded toward a new pastorate. That is not to say that the Lord was not working in his life nor that He was not involved in our committee to lead us to the eventual DOM, but the entire process could have been much shorter for us if we had practiced this principle. On a related note, we were much more careful about notifying candidates when we would no longer consider them, so that they could proceed as they felt the Lord's guidance.

**Listen to Committee Members' Concerns**-a significant part of our committee was its composition. This aspect gave us a vast array of perspectives in our meetings. Our chairman did a stellar job throughout the process, but I believe his greatest strength was getting everyone's input on a regular basis. No "head-honchos" or "low-on-the-totem pole" people existed among our group, because we were all treated equally. Because of the mutual respect for each other, our members had greater reasons to attend every meeting-each person was important.

**Inform the Entire Committee of Communication with Key Prospect**-whenever we narrowed our search toward one candidate, our chairman would inform the rest of the committee of the correspondence they had shared (usually e-mails or phone calls). This practice proved helpful on several occasions, as it gave us extra insight into the candidate's character, interest, disinterest, and such. The reason our committee was caught off-guard by the curveball from our eventual DOM (see above) was because one piece of correspondence had accidentally been overlooked.<sup>14</sup> What the candidate believed would be okay with everyone actually resulted in a lot of raised eyebrows and

question marks. After a few meetings and ironing out the details, everything proceeded along fine, but we had definitely learned our lesson!

**Have Faith in God's Leading**-again, this lesson should go without saying, but our diligent efforts (even when others thought we were dragging our feet!) were not so we could find someone we would be satisfied with to do the job. Our work was to carry out the responsibility assigned to us by the Executive Committee to find our next DOM. We interpreted that to mean, "Find God's man to lead our association." From that viewpoint, a search could take some time, because we must trust God to lead us. It is no surprise, on that note, that one of the key elements of faith in the Bible is perseverance-the Lord definitely taught us to wait on Him!

### **Conclusion**

Hopefully, this account will provide some ideas for those associations that face the challenging task of finding God's man to lead all of their churches to cooperate in missions. If all else fails, at least you can be equipped the next time someone asks you if you want to go snipe-hunting! May we use this process as a means for the glory of God and the good of His people.

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<sup>1</sup>*The information from this essay comes from both my recollections as well as the minutes. Since I served as the clerk of our committee, I kept all of the minutes, except for one meeting when I could not attend. In any event, I always rely on the minutes for clarity, even when my memory recalls it a bit differently.*

<sup>2</sup>*The moderator serves as ex-officio of every committee in our association. Because of the pastoral demands of his own church, however, he was unable to meet with the committee more than a few times. He did stay abreast of our gatherings via phone calls and emails. Four months into our search, our association's annual meeting saw the vice-moderator promoted. He was even less involved, because we were considering him as a candidate in our search. After deciding not to pursue him for the position, we requested his participation, especially toward the last few weeks of our committee's search.*

<sup>3</sup>*To protect their identities, I have left the names of committee members*

and various candidates out.

<sup>4</sup>One must not underestimate the work of the chairman on this committee. He had the responsibility of keeping a group of ministers focused as well as assigning tasks to various members. The chairman often took personal responsibility in seeing that things were accomplished, such as contacting the associational secretary to place the ads or make copies of needed paperwork. Furthermore, he scheduled meetings and made phone calls as reminders. Our chairman did stellar work!

<sup>5</sup>The first three meetings after our initial impromptu meeting were June 8, June 22, and June 26, 2006.

<sup>6</sup>Because our committee members were so spread out across the association (one drove an hour one way to our meetings), not to mention each of us had plenty of ministry to do in our respective churches, we thought it would be helpful to meet every other week rather than every week while we narrowed our search.

<sup>7</sup>Going “three deep” means asking a reference on the list for the name and contact information of someone else that we might be able to talk to about the candidate. After talking with such a person, we would ask for the same information on one more possible reference, hence, giving us three levels of references.

<sup>8</sup>Our previous DOM served less than two years with our association before leaving for a state convention position. While nobody blamed him for doing so, we certainly did not want to repeat the same search process every two years!

<sup>9</sup>Sometime during the previous month, another strong candidate had been passed along to us for consideration. Due to an oversight on my part, I forgot to record this addition in the minutes. My hunch is that he either asked to be withdrawn or that he did not appear to be as strong as the other candidates we considered.

<sup>10</sup>Since we had to await feedback from the candidate and schedule several hours away to meet for lunch, we were not able to interview him until March 1, 2007.

<sup>11</sup>After finding out “the rest of the story,” none of us believed the candidate intentionally threw us a curve. Without him knowing it, some of his collaboration had failed to get filtered through the committee (accidentally). Thus, like a budding pitcher can suddenly discover movement in some of his pitches, both the candidate and committee were surprised by something new.

<sup>12</sup>Obviously, to protect the identity, and especially the privacy, I left some

*of the specifics out.*

*<sup>13</sup>It came to my attention later that one or two multiple-staffed churches influenced their staff to vote “No, because one person could not understand how the DOM could function without moving immediately to the field. Therefore, it appears that a much higher percentage of the churches were in favor of the new DOM.*

*<sup>14</sup>This accident was the only oversight on our chairman's part, to my knowledge. When he realized that he had forgotten to pass some information along to us, he was quick to apologize and no one cast blame on him. With all the work he did for our group, it is amazing that he made but one error in nearly twelve months worth of work. I would take that fielding percentage on my team any day!*

**Appendix**  
**Director of Missions Questionnaire**

1. Why are you interested in serving as a DOM?
2. Please give us a short statement of your philosophy of ministry for a DOM position. In this statement try to make clear what you believe to be the major functions of a DOM and the major emphases that would characterize your ministry if the Lord called you to this position.
3. Please tell us how important you believe each of the following areas is to the DOM's work. Rank each item as:

V = Very Important   I = Important   S = Slightly Important   N = Not Important

- Ability to administer the Associational Staff and Office
- Ability to relate personally to Pastors and other Staff members in the Association
- Passion and ability to lead in planting new churches
- Ability to lead, develop, and work with the Associational Staff
- Ability to publicize, promote, and interpret denominational emphases and programs
- Ability to maintain close working relationships with the state/national conventions
- Ability to counsel Pastors and other Staff members who have personal problems
- Ability to relate and work with lay people in the Association
- Preaching ability for pulpit supply and other opportunities in the Association
- Ability to develop and communicate a dynamic vision of the Association
- Ability to help declining congregations find ways to become revitalized
- Ability to assist churches and pastors where there is conflict
- Vision for developing new ministries within the Association
- Ability to develop and coordinate Resort ministries
- Passion and commitment to personal soul-winning
- Commitment to maintaining a personal walk with the Lord and to prayer
- Passion for seeking Revival for the churches within the Association
- Passion for developing an evangelistic and mission spirit in the Association
- Commitment to maintaining a strong personal family life
- Ability to guide Pastors and churches doctrinally and theologically
- Ability to mentor Pastors and coordinate a program of professional development for Pastors and Staff

4. Now that you have ranked each item as to its individual importance, please go back and put a numerical ranking 1-5 on the 5 areas above where you feel the most gifted and qualified (#1 being your very strongest area of giftedness).
5. As to your doctrinal stance, can you fully affirm the latest edition of *The Baptist Faith & Message* (2000)? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No. If you cannot, please indicate your areas of disagreement or tell us the doctrinal statement that most clearly reflects your convictions.
6. Please tell us any additional information about yourself that may help us make our decision.



## HOW CHURCH PLANTING HAS CHANGED IN FLORIDA BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONS, 1984-2006

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**Introduction:** The subject of this paper is important for anyone interested in the history of Associational Missions in Florida. It has a special interest for me because my calling by God has allowed me to plant churches, working closely with associations since 1958. It's been my privilege to serve in that ministry in Florida for over 20 years. From March, 1984, through December, 1996, I directed the Church Extension (now Church Planting) Department of the Florida Baptist Convention. This allowed me to work with all the associations in the state. Since then, I've continued to be involved in these ministries, presently serving as a consultant of the Church Planting Department of the Florida Baptist Convention in the Panhandle. This involves working closely with the associations and churches to plant new churches.

### **I THE ROOTS OF CHURCH PLANTING FLORIDA ASSOCIATIONS**

“Associational missions in Florida began in 1842 with the formation of Florida Baptist Association..there was no need to delineate any regional boundaries since member churches were spread from Wauchula to Jacksonville to Pensacola. Today's smaller association, located in Florida's capital city retains its all-encompassing title,”<sup>1</sup> says David Southerland, present Director of Missions of the Florida Baptist Association. Let's see what he means historically.

Several of the churches which formed the Florida Baptist Associations had earlier been members of the Suwanee Baptist Association (not the present Suwanee Association organized in 1872) <sup>2</sup>. When Suwanee Association became so anti-missions that it shut out pro-missionary churches, those churches joined the Ocklocknee Baptist Association (Georgia and Florida churches). In 1842 Ocklocknee Association adopted an action withdrawing fellowship from “churches that support any modern missionary, Bible tract, or Sunday School Union, societies or theological schools.”<sup>3</sup>

As a result, some of the pro-missionary ministers and churches called a meeting at Shiloh Church, October 22, 1842, to consider forming a new association <sup>4</sup>. Letters were sent to other Florida churches, inviting them to a meeting at Indian Spring Church, Leon County, March 2, 1843, to organize a new association. We know that the missionary issue was the reason for the formation of the Florida Baptist Association because the churches forming it were pro-missionary. A. C. McCants also verified this in his comment about the life of W. B. Cooper, “finally the crisis came; the Baptist family separated; the Florida Baptist Association was formed, having for its object the work of missions.”<sup>5</sup> The Association employed James McDonald as its missionary from 1842-1844 to go out to evangelize and plant churches<sup>6</sup>.

The West Florida Baptist Association was organized in 1847 in Campbellton<sup>7</sup>. Much missionary work had been done by Alabama Baptist associations and preachers<sup>8</sup>, including planting the Bethlehem Baptist Church, three miles from the Alabama line. Jeremiah Kimbrill, an itinerant Alabama preacher, and farmer-preacher E. H. Calloway, led in organizing it as a church on March 12, 1825 <sup>9</sup>. The name was changed in 1861 to Campbellton Baptist Church.

Joshua Mercer had come to Florida in 1841 and located at Hickory Hill, later called Orange Hill. From there, he also had circulated widely in missionary work<sup>10</sup>.

The Alachua Baptist Association was also begun in 1847 at Fort Clark<sup>11</sup>. Missionaries John Tucker<sup>12</sup> and James McDonald<sup>13</sup>, originally from Georgia, planted many of these churches.

The churches of these first “pro-missionary” Baptist

associations in Florida SHARED THESE CHARACTERISTICS COMMON TO MANY CHURCHES PLANTED IN THE LATE TWENTIETH AND EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES:

1. They were often begun by missionary church planters, sometimes from associations.
2. Men, who felt God's call, went to frontier areas in Florida to evangelize and plant churches. Sometimes they went on their own, and at other times with the sponsorship of a church, association or other Baptist entity.
3. New churches usually affiliated with associations and worked with others to extend the Gospel further.

## II MODERN DAY INFLUENCES ON CHURCH PLANTING IN THE ASSOCIATIONS, 1984-2006

### A. Missionary Nature of Florida Associations

During a prospective job interview with Dr. Dan Stringer, FBC Executive Director, December 19, 1983, he allowed me to raise questions about church planting in Florida. Here is my transcript of part of that interview with Dr. Dan Stringer:

Question 1: What do you think are the greatest challenges facing Florida Baptists in the next few years?

**Dr. Stringer:** (1) Starting the new churches needed for reaching the great numbers of people and those who will come. (2) Work with the Ethnic and language groups.

Question 2: Since there is only one person on the Church Extension staff...how do you expect this person to get the visibility and attention of the state (to meet such a challenge)?

**Dr. Stringer:** There is more openness among DOMs to start new work than there use to be.

Question 3: What is the most important thing you would want the Director of Church Extension to do when he comes?

**Dr. Stringer:** First, visit with the associational directors of Church Extension to build relationships and see where they are. Second, visit with the DOMs who have had PROBES to build relationships and see what they need to do next<sup>14</sup>.

Dr. Stringer's comments about the associations and their directors of missions being the key component for church planting growth were prophetic.

### **B. POPULATION GROWTH**

See Table 1, *Population Change for Counties in Florida, 1980 to 2006*<sup>15</sup>. Look at the decadal growth numbers and percents:

1980-1990	3,191,110 increase	+32.7%
1990-2000	3,044,753 increase	+23.5%
2000-2006	2,366,308 increase	+24.6% (only 60% of a decade) for decade if same growth rate continues

There has been a greatly increasing opportunity for church planting during this period, especially when we see that 24 counties increased in population by anywhere from 100,000 to over 800,000. This rapid growth broke much of the resistance of members of existing churches to planting new churches<sup>16</sup>.

In another section, we will see how the migration into Florida by immigrants (legal and illegal) has greatly increased opportunities for Language Missions.

### **C. CULTURAL CHANGES**

Even before 1984, the state had been changing, especially in urban areas, from a “deep-south” culture to a multicultural population. In addition to immigrants from other nations, large numbers of people came from various parts of the United States. A mission magazine author wrote about Gulf Stream Association, “The permanent population of this city (Fort Lauderdale) consists mainly of people who are moving from New York and New Jersey. As many as 80 percent of the people surveyed in the area indicate no relationship to an evangelical church whatsoever. Some areas have one church for a population of 50,000 to 60,000. Others have no Southern Baptist church. As many as 50 different ethnic groups have been identified at present, but the number increases almost daily”<sup>17</sup>.

Other changes relate to becoming a fast-paced, individualistic and highly competitive environment. All kinds of new housing, single family and multifamily, continue to be built and to tax the infrastructure's capacity.

## **D. RELIGION**

Newcomers brought their own religious beliefs, whether they affiliated with a local congregation or not. Baptist churches which reached out with the love of Christ to hurting people, were met by some who were suspicious, but others gladly received the Good News of life in Christ.

There was also a move from the certainties of the modern philosophy of life to the uncertainty toward truth, even Biblical truth, of post-modernism<sup>18</sup>.

The wonderful thing about the history of Florida Baptist associations is that God has continued to work through His people in a mighty way. As we can see from the New Testament record, church planting can thrive in the most culturally diverse communities, although not without pain, struggle and even conflict. The numerous challenges have brought the members of Florida Baptist Churches to their knees, but also to work in 50 associations planting new fellowships of believers. These reach new cultural groups and new generations of people.

We now look at changes in church planting in Florida Baptist associations. Our primary source for this will be directors of missions in associations which have experienced these changes.

The following interview form was sent to directors of missions in 25 of the associations which have planted large numbers of churches during the last eleven years. Replies came back from 17. The numbers indicate how many DOMs, especially those in associations planting churches rated the amount of change in each area. Of course, some respondents did not rate all ten changes. We will not deal with all the areas of change, but only those rated as changing a lot by several DOMs. Since their ratings and comments indicate the greatest changes occurred in numbers 1-4, those will be our focus<sup>19</sup>. The changes will be documented by associational and state convention annuals and other sources. We will read the comments of some who have served 10, 15 or even 20 years in their associations and add information from others serving in the role for a shorter time.

### III CHANGE ONE: MANY ASSOCIATIONS ARE GIVING MORE INTENTIONAL LEADERSHIP TO PLANTING CHURCHES

Dr. Woodrow Fuller, in his report at the annual meeting of the Florida Baptist State Convention in 1974, said, “Florida associations have moved from 12 field secretaries in 1969 to 28 fulltime and six part time directors of associational missions <sup>20</sup>. Mission strategists generally feel that DOMs paid by and accountable to local churches exert more initiative to meet local needs. Field secretaries, accountable to the state were thought to be more concerned with the interests of the state. Their large territories also hindered their effectiveness locally.

In 1984, I began my work by visiting the 49 associations. Most had fulltime directors of missions. Evangelism, church growth and missions were being promoted. Some associations, especially where high population growth was occurring, were helping start churches. They preferred to have sponsor churches start the mission churches. But where no church sponsor could be found, associations often sponsored the church start themselves. In other cases, DOMs saw the need but ran into so much opposition to starting new churches from existing churches that they did not act. I have observed this barrier continuing through the years, but not as great a hindrance to church planting in most associations as it used to be. Not every mission leader would agree. When I shared my subject with one from the panhandle, he reacted, “Changes in church planting! What changes? Nobody wants new churches!” Most of us church planting strategists have felt that way at one time or another.

As the population became more dense, new churches had to be located near existing churches. In time, many have begun to understand the urgency of reaching the lost multitudes, with different (new) kinds of churches being able to reach different kinds of people, even if near other churches.

As the associations began to give more leadership to planting churches, they began to sponsor more new churches themselves or, at least, to accept those who had no sponsors. At the 1988 Florida Baptist State Convention annual meeting, the New Work Report for the year

was distributed. It had a section titled, *New Works Started with no Sponsor Reported*. It listed 23 new churches started in 11 different associations out of a total of 62 started<sup>21</sup>.

The present FBC Church Planting Department director shared recently that 40% of churches started in 2006 had no sponsors<sup>22</sup>.

Here are quotes from some DOMs who are giving strong leadership to planting churches in their associations:

Association	Number of Church Starts 1996-2006
<u>Florida Association: David Southerland,</u> DOM, since 1993 <sup>23</sup> Our association only started aggressively planting churches in 1994-95. We (the association) planted 11 churches - it took 10 years of our aggressively planting churches to lead established churches to plant churches. This has just begun to happen.	23
<u>Royal Palm Association: Everett Rafferty,</u> DOM, since 1988 <sup>24</sup> Church planting was voted our number one priority during our strategic planning process nine years ago and has remained number one. We are in the process of establishing 5 - 6 church planting centers around the association so multiple churches can be started.	47
<u>Tampa Bay Association: Tom Biles,</u> DOM, since 1993 <sup>25</sup> We developed a missions consciousness and an emphasis on Kingdom	101
<u>Jacksonville Association: Ron Rowe,</u> DOM since 1993 <sup>26</sup> In the last ten years the association has been more intentional in making church planting a priority.	144
<u>Santa Rosa Association: Chip Fox,</u> DOM, since 2005 <sup>27</sup> We now provide more support for church planters through the association (than when I planted a church in the 1980's).	6 (3 in 2006)

All these statements tend to reflect a return to the roots of Florida's earliest associations. We remember that at its organizational meeting in 1843, the Florida Baptist Association employed James McDonald to preach the Gospel and plant churches in the region<sup>28</sup>.

Notice the leadership associations are giving to church planting by words such as “intentional” and “priority.” These reflect the fact that many DOMs have led their associations to prayerfully do strategic planning with follow through by taking missional steps to plant churches and to lead them to make disciples of all people.

INTERVIEW OF ASSOCIATIONAL DOMS ON PLANTING CHURCHES, 1985-2006  
 Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 ASSOCIATION \_\_\_\_\_ Became DOM in \_\_\_\_\_  
 Served in FL since \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Office: \_\_\_\_\_

**RATINGS FROM 17 RESPONSES**

About    Changed    Changed  
the same    a little    a lot

**Assess How Much Change in:**

1. Association's involvement? (Comment if you like)	4	3	9
2. Partnership w/FBC?	7	2	8
3. Funding of Church Plants?	6	8	3
4. The way Ch. Planting is done?	4	3	9
5. Theological issues that effect?	8	2	0
6. Objections to Church Planting?	7	6	1
7. Supervision of Church Planters?	4	1	6
8. Sponsorship of New Churches?	7	3	3
9. Long Term Growth of New Churches?	5	3	2
10. New Churches' participation in Association?	6	2	3

Question: What other changes in the way your association relates to and leads in planting churches have you seen since 1985?

#### **IV. CHANGE 2: THE NUMBERS AND TYPES OF NEW CHURCHES PLANTED CHANGED**

This appears obvious, but lets look at how much change has occurred. Study the attached report Table 2, *Number of New Church Starts, 1985-2006*<sup>29</sup>. Looking at the totals for each five year period, we see how big these increases were:

1985-1989 - 305 church plants

1990-1994 - 486 church plants; 181 more, + 59% than the previous five years

1995 -1999 - 591 church plants; 105 more, + 22% than previous five years

2000 - 2004 - 763 church plants; 172 more, + 29% than previous five years

Another obvious fact is that the number of new language churches increased a lot. New language church starts increased from only 14 in 1986 to 78 by 2001. African American church starts went from one in 1987 to 51 in 2003.

Gulf Stream Associational Director of Missions, John Fleming, says: "It takes 14 Languages for Gulf Stream (Baptists) to say hello. Seventy-two of the 176 churches of the association either rent or share space, and 85% of those churches who own property share the space with up to four other congregations. We are using every possible means to create churches."<sup>30</sup>

According to Everett Rafferty of Royal Palm Association in the southwest tip of Florida, The association includes 53 Anglo congregations, 18 Haitian, nine Hispanic, two African American and Korean, Romanian and Brazilian<sup>31</sup>.

Gary Johnson, DOM of Miami Association says: "Most of our new churches do not speak English. Most of our new churches are led by bi-vocational pastors with no plans to be something else."<sup>32</sup>

#### **V CHANGE THREE: THE WAY CHURCH PLANTING IS DONE IS CHANGING**

Associational directors were most vocal about the changes they see in the way church planting is done<sup>33</sup>. WHAT are the changes and

## HOW are they working?

1. More planning and preparation before planting.

Gene Strickland, Okaloosa Association: “New churches are being started with more stability, through more preparation beforehand.”

Ron Rowe and Art Taylor, Jacksonville: “Church planting is based on development and population growth. There are now numerous areas in all quadrants of Duval County that need new churches. We are having to find ways other than local church sponsorship.”

2. Selection of Church Planters

Gary Johnson, Miami: “Some new churches are planned; many sprung up by new planters on their own and a pastor helped them.

Everett Rafferty, Royal Palm: “Close contact (with the new church and planter) from the very beginning is important. We encourage a team approach...rather than just one person.”

3. Starting with a group of partners/sponsors.

Gary Gates, Brevard: “Six churches are joining together for co-sponsorship (of a new church).”

Wayne Harvey, Santa Fe River: “We have little difficulty finding churches willing to sponsor new churches. We have a Missions Committee with the sole responsibility of supervising and helping church planters.”

4. Church planters are changing their worship, evangelism and discipling methods to relate better to the culture of the people they are reaching.

From the author: In the 80's and 90's they began to change the music, worship style, dress and outreach activities to what would appeal more to the culture of the Baby Boomers (the people they were seeking to reach). Now the younger planters are changing their styles even more to appeal to the younger Gen-X people and to those with a post-modern mindset (without comprising their Biblical teaching, in most cases).

Unfortunately, many Baptists in churches with traditional styles

have difficulty understanding the need to use different methods for different generations. They don't understand that times and number of corporate worship services and styles of worship are not mandated by the Bible, but usually by tradition. This misunderstanding toward church planters continues to hinder their being accepted and supported.

#### **VI CHANGE FOUR: FUNDING CHANGED**

Over half the directors of missions felt that funding has increased. An example is the statement by Gary Gates of Brevard Association: "The association has included more monies in the budget (for church planting) over the years."

Some associations have done even more. Santa Fe River DOM Wayne Harvey says, "We match the state convention's financial investment in planters." DOMs have been creative. Some enlist funds from well-to-do donors or inheritances designated to church planting. Others promote individual above the tithe giving, such as the 5/52 plan. People are asked to designate \$5 a week above their tithe for a year to church planting.

We see God's people responding with funds when they believe strongly God's Kingdom will be spread through their giving. However, some DOMs added, "but It's never enough," says Tom Biles, Tampa Bay.

#### **VII CHANGE FIVE: Closer Partnership with Florida Baptist Convention**

Several associational directors, but not all, stated their feelings that their partnership with the state convention has become stronger: Chip Fox, Santa Rosa Association: "The state strategists from the Church Planting and Language Departments have come to help protect us, certify church planters, provide funds and training for church planters, as well as connections with other partners who can help in various ways. The association is providing more funding than it used to, but inflation has eroded the value of Pastoral Assistance provided by the Florida Baptist Convention."

One of the strongest benefits associations have from their FBC partnership is associational or regional church planting strategists to help the church planters, churches and association.

There has been a big change in the number of church planting strategists to help with English-speaking and Language Church Planting, as well as those reaching African Americans. In 1984 when I came to the Florida Baptist Convention, there were only two associational fulltime church planting strategists (jointly funded missionaries) and one part-time helping with English-speaking church planting. We had no regional strategists. The Language Missions Department of the FBC had only been organized since 1981. In 1984 there were only three associational church planting language missionaries (jointly funded), with one serving two associations<sup>34</sup>. Church planting in African American communities was assisted by (Anglo) Church Extension strategists. The FBC African American Division was not started until June, 1994<sup>35</sup>.

Now there are jointly funded (FBC/NAMB/associational) strategists serving as follows:

**African-American:**<sup>36</sup>

-4 regional, serving multiple associations plus three part time, serving three associations

**English-Speaking** (related to Church Planting Department, FBC)<sup>37</sup>

-4 Associational jointly funded church planting missionaries, all serving just one association.

-4 Regional jointly funded church planting missionaries, each serving several associations.

-4 Part time church planting strategists, two serving only one association each, and two serving several associations.

**Language Church Planters**<sup>38</sup>

-3 Associational church planting strategists, Haitian, some serving two associations or more.

-3 Associational and multi-associational strategists working with various language groups.

-5 Contract workers

This big increase in field staff to help associations in their church planting efforts had already begun in 1987 when eleven field staff jointly funded by the Home Mission Board, the Florida Baptist Convention, and in some cases, the local associations, were reported<sup>39</sup>. The major Home Mission Board continuing assistance to these missionaries and continuing to grow Pastoral Assistance for church planters was possible because of two things. First, a much higher state commitment of funds for Pastoral Assistance; second, eventually Florida Baptist Convention negotiated a change in the funding agreement with the Home Mission Board. Instead of their jointly funding the Pastoral Assistance for Florida mission pastors (church planters), those funds came to the state to help support field staff. Florida assumed all the cost of Pastoral Assistance in 1991<sup>40</sup>.

The next year the convention adopted a recommendation of its State Board of Missions for a new division of Cooperative Program receipts which included 5% for Pastoral Aid as a priority item<sup>41</sup>. This change in funding of Pastoral Assistance, and jointly funding more church planting field missionaries has continued to flow to the associations for supporting the largest number of new church plants in history for most associations in Florida.

To what can we assign the cause for these changes so strategic to church planting in the associations of Florida? For many of us, including this writer, all we can say is, to God be the glory, great things He has done! Many of us asked Him to do His work and He has done far more that we asked or even imagined!

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<sup>1</sup>*Florida Baptist Witness*, May 24, 2007, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>John L. Rosser, *A History of Florida Baptists*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1949), p. 26.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*, p.27

<sup>4</sup>*Christian Index*, December 13, 1844, p.1.

<sup>5</sup>John L. Rosser, op. cit., p. 27

<sup>6</sup>Edward Earl Joiner, *A History of Florida Baptists* (Jacksonville, Florida: Convention Press, 1972, p. 26

<sup>7</sup>John L. Rosser, op. cit., p. 29

<sup>8</sup>B. F. Riley, *A Memorial History of the Baptist of Alabama*, (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1923), p. 102.

<sup>9</sup>Donald S. Hepburn, *A History of Florida Baptists, 1854-2004*, unpublished manuscript of the Florida Baptist Convention, Chapter Two.

<sup>10</sup>John L. Rosser, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>11</sup>Edward Earl Joiner, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>12</sup>Edward Earl Joiner, op. cit., pp. 20-23.

<sup>13</sup>James C. Bryant, "James McDonald: Missionary to East Florida," unpublished manuscript, presented to the Florida Baptist Historical Society, May 5, 1984, pp. 2-3

<sup>14</sup>From written notes of Clifford Matthews, December 19, 1983

<sup>15</sup>*Florida Estimates of Population, 2006* (Gainesville: Bureau of Economic and Business Research, University of Florida, 2007), pp. 24, 25.

<sup>16</sup>Nevi Townsend, former DOM in Treasure Coast Association and FBC Church Planting consultant in conversation with the author, July 16, 2007

<sup>17</sup>Gladys Leach, *We Come From Many Nations*, (Graceville, Florida: Hargrave Press), 1998, p. 72.

<sup>18</sup>Stetzer, Ed, *Planting Churches in A Post-Modern Age*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2003), pp. 120-121.

<sup>19</sup>*Interview of Associational DOMs on Planting Churches, 1985-2006* was sent June 21, 2007 to 25 DOMs by the author. Seventeen responses came back.

<sup>20</sup>*Florida Baptist State Convention annual, 1974*, p.74

<sup>21</sup>Document available from the author.

<sup>22</sup>Rick Lawrence, in message to NWC Baptist Association Pastors, March 5, 2007.

<sup>23</sup>David Southerland, *Interview of Associational DOMs*, June 25, 2007

<sup>24</sup>Everett Rafferty, op. cit., June 21, 2007

<sup>25</sup>Tom Biles, *Interview of Associational DOMs*, June 22, 2007

<sup>26</sup>Ron Rowe, *Interview of Associational DOMs*, July 11, 2007

<sup>27</sup>Chip Fox, in phone interview, July 19, 2007

<sup>28</sup>Joiner, op. cit., p. 26

<sup>29</sup>Table 2, *Number of New Church Starts, 1985-2006*, compiled from monthly New Work Reports sent out by the Church Planting Department, Florida Baptist Convention

<sup>30</sup>*Florida Baptist Witness*, May 24, 2007, pp. 6-7

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid*, p. 7

<sup>32</sup>Interview of Association DOMs, op cit., 6-22-07

<sup>33</sup>All the comments in 1, 2 and 3 came from the Responses of the DOMs to the Interview of Associational DOMs, *ibid*

<sup>34</sup>Author's phone conversation with Hubert Hurt, retired director of the Language Missions Department, FBC

<sup>35</sup>*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1994, p. 151.

<sup>36</sup>Author's phone interview with Maxie Miller, Director, African American Division, FBC.

<sup>37</sup>Author's interview with Rick Lawrence, Director, Church Planting Department, FBC

<sup>38</sup>Author's phone interview with Frank Marino, Director, Language Missions Division, FBC.

<sup>39</sup>1987 and 1988 *New Work Starts and Priorities* , a report distributed at annual meeting of the Florida Baptist State Convention, November, 1987.

<sup>40</sup>*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1991, p. 158

<sup>41</sup>*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1992, pp. 101-102.

**Table 1. Population Change for Counties in Florida, 1980 to 2006**

State and County	Percent changes						
	2006	2000	1990	1980	2000 to 2006	1990 to 2000	1980 to 1990
Florida	18,349,132	15,982,824	12,938,071	9,746,961	14.8	23.5	32.7
Alachua	243,779	217,955	181,596	151,369	11.8	20.0	20.0
Baker	25,004	22,259	18,486	15,289	12.3	20.4	20.9
Bay	165,515	148,217	126,994	97,740	11.7	16.7	29.9
Bradford	28,551	26,088	22,515	20,023	9.4	15.9	12.4
Brevard	543,050	476,230	398,978	272,959	14.0	19.4	46.2
Broward	1,753,162	1,623,018	1,255,531	1,018,257	8.0	29.3	23.3
Calhoun	14,113	13,017	11,011	9,294	8.4	18.2	18.5
Charlotte	160,315	141,627	110,975	58,460	13.2	27.6	89.8
Citrus	136,749	118,085	93,513	54,703	15.8	26.3	70.9
Clay	176,901	140,814	105,986	67,052	25.6	32.9	58.1
Collier	326,658	251,377	152,099	85,971	29.9	65.3	76.9
Columbia	63,538	56,513	42,613	35,399	12.4	32.6	20.4
DeSoto	33,164	32,209	23,865	19,039	3.0	35.0	25.3
Dixie	15,677	13,827	10,585	7,751	13.4	30.6	36.6
Duval	879,235	778,879	672,971	571,003	12.9	15.7	17.9
Escambia	309,647	294,410	262,798	233,794	5.2	12.0	12.4
Flagler	89,075	49,832	28,701	10,913	78.8	73.6	163.0
Franklin	11,916	9,829	8,967	7,661	21.2	9.6	17.0
Gadsden	48,195	45,087	41,116	41,674	6.9	9.7	-1.3
Gilchrist	16,703	14,437	9,667	5,767	15.7	49.3	67.6
Glades	10,796	10,576	7,591	5,992	2.1	39.3	26.7
Gulf	16,509	14,560	11,504	10,658	13.4	26.6	7.9
Hamilton	14,517	13,327	10,930	8,761	8.9	21.9	24.8
Hardee	27,186	26,938	19,499	20,357	0.9	38.2	-4.2
Hendry	38,678	36,210	25,773	18,599	6.8	40.5	38.6
Hernando	157,006	130,802	101,115	44,469	20.0	29.4	127.4
Highlands	96,672	87,366	68,432	47,526	10.7	27.7	44.0
Hillsborough	1,164,425	998,948	834,054	646,939	16.6	19.8	28.9
Holmes	19,502	18,564	15,778	14,723	5.1	17.7	7.2
Indian River	135,262	112,947	90,208	59,896	19.8	25.2	50.6
Jackson	50,246	46,755	41,375	39,154	7.5	13.0	5.7
Jefferson	14,353	12,902	11,296	10,703	11.2	14.2	5.5
Lafayette	8,060	7,022	5,578	4,035	14.8	25.9	38.2
Lake	276,783	210,527	152,104	104,870	31.5	38.4	45.0
Lee	585,608	440,888	335,113	205,266	32.8	31.6	63.3
Leon	272,497	239,452	192,493	148,655	13.8	24.4	29.5
Levy	38,981	34,450	25,912	19,870	13.2	32.9	30.4

Florida Estimates of Population, 2006, Bureau of Economics and Business Research, University of Florida

**Table 1. Population Change for Counties in Florida, 1980 to 2006**  
(Continued)

State and County	Percent change						
	2006	2000	1990	1980	2000 to 2006	1990 to 1980	
Liberty	7,772	7,021	5,569	4,260	10.7	26.1	30.7
Madison	19,814	18,733	16,569	14,894	5.8	13.1	11.2
Manatee	308,325	264,002	211,707	148,445	16.8	24.7	42.6
Marion	315,074	258,916	194,835	122,488	21.7	32.9	59.1
Martin	142,645	126,731	100,900	64,014	12.6	25.6	57.6
Miami-Dade	2,437,022	2,253,779	1,937,194	1,625,509	8.1	16.3	19.2
Monroe	80,510	79,589	78,024	63,188	1.2	2.0	23.5
Nassau	68,188	57,663	43,941	32,894	18.3	31.2	33.6
Okaloosa	192,672	170,498	143,777	109,920	13.0	18.6	30.8
Okeechobee	38,666	35,910	29,627	20,264	7.7	21.2	46.2
Orange	1,079,524	896,344	677,491	470,865	20.4	32.3	43.9
Osceola	255,903	172,493	107,728	49,287	48.4	60.1	118.6
Palm Beach	1,287,987	1,131,191	863,503	576,758	13.9	31.0	49.7
Pasco	424,355	344,768	281,131	193,661	23.1	22.6	45.2
Pinellas	948,102	921,495	851,659	728,531	2.9	8.2	16.9
Polk	565,049	483,924	405,382	321,652	16.8	19.4	26.0
Putnam	74,416	70,423	65,070	50,549	5.7	8.2	28.7
St. Johns	165,291	123,135	83,829	51,303	34.2	46.9	63.4
St. Lucie	259,315	192,695	150,171	87,182	34.6	28.3	72.3
Santa Rosa	141,428	117,743	81,608	55,988	20.1	44.3	45.8
Sarasota	379,386	325,961	277,776	202,251	16.4	17.3	37.3
Seminole	420,667	365,199	287,521	179,752	15.2	27.0	60.0
Sumter	82,599	53,345	31,577	24,272	54.8	68.9	30.1
Suwannee	38,799	34,844	26,780	22,287	11.4	30.1	20.2
Taylor	21,471	19,256	17,111	16,532	11.5	12.5	3.5
Union	15,028	13,442	10,252	10,166	11.8	31.1	0.8
Volusia	503,844	443,343	370,737	258,762	13.6	19.6	43.3
Wakulla	28,393	22,863	14,202	10,887	24.2	61.0	30.4
Walton	55,786	40,601	27,759	21,300	37.4	46.3	30.3
Washington	23,073	20,973	16,919	14,509	10.0	24.0	16.6

Note: Data for 1980, 1990, and 2000 include census corrections.

<sup>s</sup>  
Florida Estimates of Population, 2006, Bureau of Economics and Business Research, University of Florida

**Table 2, ANNUAL NUMBER OF NEW CHURCH STARTS IN FLORIDA,  
1985-2006 REPORTED BY BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONS TO THE FBC**

YEAR*	ANGLO	%	LANGUAGE	%	AFRICAN AMERICAN	%	TOTAL
1985	33	57	21	36	4	7	58
1986	32	64	14	28	4	8	50
1987	29	55	23	43	1	2	53
1988	24	39	31	50	7	11	62
1989	33	40	43	52	6	7	82
1990	26	35	44	59	4	5	74
1991	44	37	68	57	7	6	119
1992	43	44	48	49	6	6	97
1993	40	40	49	49	12	12	101
1994	35	37	42	44	9	9	95
1995	23	22	52	50	28	27	103
1996	26	24	47	43	26	24	109
1997	44	38	47	41	25	22	116
1998	45	38	42	36	30	26	117
1999	45	31	53	36	48	33	146
2000	58	33	71	41	45	26	174
2001	36	26	78	56	26	19	140
2002	45	28	78	49	36	23	159
2003	40	27	56	38	51	35	147
2004	45	31	54	38	44	31	143
2005	45	40	51	45	17	15	113
2006	45	38	57	48	16	14	118

\*All years follow the associational year. For example, 1985 includes October, 1984 through September, 1985



## A CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING OF SELECT BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONS WITH FLORIDA CHURCHES

***Jerry M. Windsor***

*Secretary-Treasurer*

*Florida Baptist Historical Society*

### 1772-Stonington

This association was begun in Stonington, Connecticut and is the same association that aided the Key West Baptist Church in 1843. At the outbreak of the Civil War, the Stonington Association severed relations with the Key West Church in that there were slave owners in the Key West Church.

### 1835-Suwannee

Organized in 1835, the Suwannee Association was the first Baptist association of churches in Florida. The association became anti-missionary in 1845 and in 1847 adopted the name 'Suwannee River Primitive Baptist Association'. The association was constituted at Providence Church in Columbia County.

### 1843-Florida

R. J. Mays, Joshua Mercer, S. C. Craft, H. Z. Ardis, W. B. Cooper, H. S. Linton and James McDonald were early leaders. Garwood (p.441) states that originally it included all missionary churches in Florida and some in Georgia. In 2005 the association had 45 churches and two missions. The current churches are from the Tallahassee-Crawfordville area in North Florida. The association was begun at Ebenezer Church in Jefferson County.

#### 1847-Alachua

James McDonald was founding moderator. Begun at Ft. Clark with 13 churches. In 2005 there were 36 churches and two missions. The current churches are in the Brooksville area of southwest Florida.

#### 1847-West Florida

Association was begun with churches in Florida and Alabama. Joshua Mercer was an early leader. In 2005 there were 16 churches and one mission. The West Florida association is in the Chipley-Vernon area of northwest Florida. In the early days, before the Florida Baptist Convention, this association was in the Alabama Baptist Convention.

#### 1847-Suwannee River Primitive Baptist Association

This was a name change for the Suwannee Association begun in 1835. The name also reflected the change in their theology of missions. Missionary Baptist churches passed in and out of this association in the early years.

#### 1857-Santa Fe River Missionary Baptist Association

Organized in 1857, the association had 32 churches in northeast Florida in 1862.

#### 1867-South Florida

Organized in 1867 by 12 churches south of the Withlacoochee River. In 2005 the association had 59 churches and 10 missions. These churches are in the Lakeland-Bartow area of south-central Florida. Samuel C. Craft was one of the early leaders.

#### 1870-Wekiwa

Little is known of the early history of the association, but by 1882 it had 21 churches. This association was in the Apopka area.

#### 1872-New River

In 1880 they had 13 churches. In 2005 they had 24 churches and one mission. These churches are in the Starke area of central Florida.

1872-Elim

There is controversy as to exact dates. In 1886 the association had churches in Alabama and Florida.

1873-Suwannee

Early records were lost. In 1885 the association had 20 churches. In 2005 there were 38 churches and one mission. This Suwannee Association is in the Live Oak, Jasper area of north Florida.

1876-Geneva

The Geneva Association had churches in north Florida and south Alabama when it was organized. Only two Florida churches were members in 1891. It became a member of the Alabama Convention. In 2005 the association had 35 churches in the Geneva-Hartford area of South Alabama.

1876-Manatee Missionary Baptist Association

Organized in 1876 by six churches. In 1897 the name was changed to Peace River.

1876-Sandy Creek

The only associational minutes available are the 1882 minutes.

1877-North St. John's River

Seven churches withdrew from the Santa Fe River Association to form the St. John's River Baptist Association in 1877.

1879-Beluah

Organized in 1879 by a group of churches from Santa Fe and Alachua Associations. In 2005 the association had 32 churches and four missions, primarily in the Lake City area of north Florida. In 1882 the association met with Elim Baptist Church in Columbia County. Thomas W. Getzen served as moderator for 25 years.

#### 1879-Harmony

Organized by seven churches which withdrew from Santa Fe Association. In 2005 there were 23 churches and three missions. The churches are primarily in the Chiefland-Newberry area of north central Florida.

#### 1879-St. Mary's River Missionary Baptist Association

This association was begun in 1879 by churches in Florida and Georgia that were adjacent to St. Mary's River. In 1901 the name of the association was changed to Jacksonville Association. The first session was held at Hebron Baptist Church in Camden County, Georgia.

#### 1879-Midway

This association is mentioned in the 1879 and 1881 minutes of the South Florida Association.

#### 1879-St. John's River

Organized in 1877 as North St. John's River Baptist Association by seven churches in Clay and Putnam counties. In 2005 there were 47 churches and five missions. The churches are primarily in the St. Augustine-Palatka area.

#### 1882-Hamilton

Organized with eight churches in 1882 the association dissolved in 1905 after the churches joined other associations. Three of the original eight churches were in Georgia.

#### 1885-Hernando

Organized with nine churches from the South Florida Association in 1885. In 1888 the name was changed to Pasco Baptist Association.

#### 1885-Marion

Organized in 1885 by 13 churches in Marion County which withdrew from Alachua to form a new association. The churches are primarily in the Ocala area of central Florida. In 2005 the association had 59

churches and six missions.

#### 1887-Pensacola Bay

In 1887 all the Southern Baptist churches in Escambia, Santa Rosa and Walton counties were invited to become a part of the new association. In 2005 there were 66 churches and nine missions in the Pensacola Bay Association.

#### 1888-Rocky Creek

Organized with eight churches in 1888 it dissolved in 1925. Rocky Creek Association was in the panhandle of northwest Florida.

#### 1888-Pasco

Organized in 1885 as the Hernando Association the name was changed to Pasco Association in 1888. In 2005 the association had 32 churches and nine missions. Most of the churches are in the Dade City-Hudson-New Port Richey area of central Florida.

#### 1889-Indian River

Organized in 1889 with six churches from Wekiwa and St. John's River Associations. These churches were in the Titusville area.

#### 1890-Graves

Organized in 1890 with seven churches in northwest Florida.

#### 1891-Layfayette

Organized in 1891 by nine churches in north Florida. Foot washing was an ordinance in articles of faith from 1891 to 1927. In 2005 there were 26 churches in the association. The churches are primarily in the Cross City-Branford-Mayo area of north Florida.

#### 1892-Manatee River

Organized in 1892 by six churches from Manatee Missionary Baptist Association. In 1902 it disbanded and its churches joined the South Florida Association.

#### 1897-Peace River

Organized in 1876 as the Manatee Missionary Baptist Association the name was changed to Peace River in 1897. The name was changed to attempt to avoid name confusion with the Manatee River Baptist Association. In 2005 there were 27 churches in the Peace River Association and three missions. The churches are primarily in the Arcadia-Port Charlotte-Punta Gorda area of southwest Florida.

#### 1900-Middle Florida

Organized in 1900 this area was the birthplace of the Florida Baptist Convention in 1854. In 2005 the association had 32 churches and three missions. The churches are located primarily in the Madison-Mayo-Greenville area of north Florida.

#### 1900-Mount Olivet

Begun in 1900 the organizational minutes are the only record of its existence.

#### 1902-Jacksonville

Organized in 1879 as St. Mary's River Baptist Association, the name was changed to Jacksonville Association. In 2005 there were 138 churches and 44 missions.

#### 1903-New Santa Fe

Organized with six churches in 1903. In 1906 the name was changed to Central.

#### 1905-Bethel

Organized in 1905 with 13 churches in Holmes and Jackson counties in west Florida. These churches later joined the Holmes County Association or the Jackson County Association.

#### 1906-Central

Organized in 1903 as the New Santa Fe Association, the name was changed to Central in 1906. It dissolved in 1925.

1907-Santa Rosa

Organized in 1907 with six churches from Elim and Pensacola Bay Associations. In 2005 there were 35 churches primarily in the Milton-Jay-Pace area of northwest Florida.

1909-Miami

Organized in 1909 with seven churches in Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties. In 2005 there were 137 churches and 138 missions.

1909-New West Florida

Organized in 1905 as Bethel, the name was changed to New West Florida in 1909 and back to Bethel in 1911.

1911-Tampa Bay

Organized in 1911 by 18 churches which withdrew from South Florida Association. In 2005 there were 121 churches and 41 missions.

1912-Black Creek

Organized in 1913 with six rural churches in Clay County. In 2005 there were 41 churches and four missions. The churches are primarily in the Jacksonville-Green Cove Springs area.

1912-Smyrna

Organized in 1912 by nine churches from the Pensacola Bay Association. It joined the churches of Santa Rosa Association to form the New Santa Rosa Association.

1912-New Santa Rosa

Organized in 1912 the association ceased to exist in 1924 when most of its churches joined the Santa Rosa Association.

1914-Little River

Organized in 1914 by four churches who had withdrawn from Beulah Association because of "Biblical principles" they rejoined the Beulah Association in 1916.

#### 1914-Seminole

Organized in 1914 by 17 churches. In 2005 there were 31 churches and eight missions. The churches are primarily in the Deland-Sanford area of south central Florida.

#### 1916-Caloosa

Organized in 1916 by six churches that had withdrawn from Peace River Association. In 1918 they re-united with Peace River Association.

#### 1922-Okaloosa County

Organized in 1922 with 18 churches from New Santa Rosa and Graves associations. It became Okaloosa Association in 1926.

#### 1924-Holmes County

Organized in 1924 with 18 churches mostly from Bethel Association. In 2005 there were 29 churches and one mission primarily in the Bonifay-Graceville-Westville area of northwest Florida.

#### 1925-Jackson County

Organized in 1925 with about 30 churches mostly from the West Florida Association. In 1945 the name was changed to Chipola Association.

#### 1925-Lake County

Organized in 1924 with twelve churches. In 2005 there were 36 churches and eight missions primarily in the Eustis-Leesburg area.

#### 1925-Southwest Florida

Organized in 1924 with 15 churches in Manatee and Sarasota counties. In 2005 there were 21 churches primarily in the Sarasota-Venice area of southwest Florida.

#### 1926-Okaloosa

Organized in 1922 as Okaloosa County Baptist Association it adopted its new name in 1926. In 2005 there were 29 churches and one mission primarily in the Crestview-Baker-Laurel Hill area of northwest Florida.

1932-Orange Blossom

Organized in 1932 with 19 churches. In 2005 there were 41 churches and six missions. The churches are located in the Fort Meade-Avon Park-Sebring area of southwest Florida.

1932-Pinellas County

Organized in 1932 by eight churches. The name was changed to Pinellas Baptist Association in 1950.

1934-Northwest Coast

Organized in 1934 by ten churches. In 2005 there were 46 churches and two missions. The churches are in the Panama City area of the Gulf Coast.

1935-Baptist Purity Association

The organizational meeting of the Baptist Purity Association was at Mt. Othram Church in Crisp County, Georgia in 1935. There were Georgia and Florida ministers and churches in this organization. The term 'purity' apparently came from the fact that at the Lord's Supper one was to drink 'cold water' and not wine or grape juice. They believed in the gift of tongues, foot washing and female pastors. They were opposed to 'snuff' and 'baseball games'. They did not believe in war, capital punishment or Sunday labor.

1938-Northeast Florida

Organized in 1938 by nine churches in the Jacksonville area. In 2005 there were 29 churches and one mission. The churches are in the Jacksonville area of northeast Florida.

1938-Palm Lake

Organized in 1938 by seven churches in the Miami area. In 2005 there were 48 churches and 60 missions. These churches are in the southeast area of the state.

#### 1945-Chipola

Organized in 1925 as the Jackson County Baptist Association the name was changed to Chipola in 1945. In 2005 there were 41 churches and three missions. These churches are in the panhandle of northwest Florida.

#### 1948-Gulf Stream

Organized in 1948 by nine churches on the lower east coast of Florida. In 2005 there were 77 churches and 82 missions.

#### 1950-Shiloh

Organized in 1950 with 12 churches. In 2005 there were 33 churches and six missions. These churches are primarily in the central Florida area of Plant City.

#### 1950-Pinellas

Organized in 1932 as the Pinellas County Baptist Association the name was changed in 1950.

#### 1951-Apalachee

Organized in 1951 at Greensboro in north Florida.

#### 1951-Gadsden

Organized in 1951 with six churches in Gadsden County in north central Florida. In 1961 the name was changed to Gadsden County.

#### 1953-Brevard

Organized in 1953 with seven churches in Broward and Volusia counties in southeast Florida. In 2005 there were 45 churches and ten missions.

#### 1954-Big Lake

This association was in the Clewiston-Okeechobee area.

#### 1954-Ridge

The organization of the Ridge Association was at First Baptist Church, Waverly in 1954. Messengers in the association were chosen through churches and church organizations. No church could have more than 15 messengers. These churches were in the Auburndale-Winter Haven area of Florida.

#### 1957-Taylor

The Taylor Baptist Association was organized at Lakeside Baptist Church in Perry, Florida, October 18, 1957. Early leaders were James W. Howell, Alva Horton, Francis W. Cruce, Jesse R. Ward and T. D. Lide. These churches were primarily in the Perry area.

#### 1957-Halifax

Halifax association was begun in 1957 at First Baptist Church, New Smyrna Beach with fourteen churches. Early leaders were M. D. Jackson, John L. DuRant, Henry V. Adams, Jr., and C. Norman Bennett. These churches are in the Daytona Beach area.

#### 1958-Choctaw

The organizational meeting for the Choctaw Association was held in Destin, Florida in 1958. There were eight churches including those in the Destin-Ft. Walton Beach-Niceville area of northwest Florida.

#### 1958-Royal Palm

The Royal Palm Association was begun in 1958. The churches were from the Ft. Myers-Naples area of southwest Florida.

#### 1961-Gadsden County

The Gadsden County Association was organized in 1961 at the Thomas Memorial Baptist Church in Quincy. Churches came from the Florida, Apalachee and Rocky Creek Associations. Twelve churches began the association and some of the early leaders were L. B. Thomason, Reneau B. Dominey, Thomas E. Cuttino and A. E. Lightfoot. The churches were primarily in the Quincy, Florida area of north Florida.

### 1968-Florida Keys

The Florida Keys Association was begun at First Baptist Church, Marathon. Early leaders were Edwin Tharpe, Lee Graham, Carl Hunter, J. C. Lewis and William Hartley. Begun with five churches and 2,555 members in 1968 the association had nine churches, three missions and 2,565 members in 2005.

### 1978-Greater Orlando

The name “Greater Orlando Baptist Association” was adopted on October 18, 1977. Early leaders were James Fortinberry, Tom Draper, Joseph E. Boatwright, Ernest Campbell, Charles Horton, Harold Epperson, Jim Henry, Elvin Hall, Rafael de Armas, Robert Loy and J. C. Mitchell. In 2005 the association had 95 churches and 63 missions.

### 1978-Manatee Southern

Manatee Southern Baptist Association was begun in 1978 at Tenth Street Church in Palmetto. Early leaders were Roy Reynolds, Tony Chastain and Robert Allen. In 2005 the association had 29 churches and four missions.

### 1985-Big Bend

The Big Bend Association was begun in 1985 by churches in the Gulf Coast of north Florida. In 1993 there were eleven churches. Most of these churches became members of the Florida Association in 2000.

### 1987-Suncoast

Suncoast Association was begun in 1987 and the churches are in the St. Petersburg area. In 2005 there were 50 churches in the association and 28 missions.

### 1987-Walton County

Walton County Association was named in 1987 and was formerly the Graves Association. This association is located in the Defuniak Springs area of northwest Florida. In 2005 the association had 30 churches and two missions.

1992-Sumter

The first annual Sumter associational meeting was in 1992. The churches are located in the Bushnell-Wildwood area of central Florida. In 2005 there were 15 churches.

2003-Treasure Coast

The Treasure Coast Association was begun in 2003 with churches primarily in the Fort Pierce-Port St. Lucie area of the state. In 2005 there were 53 churches and 15 missions.

**Associations with Florida Baptist Churches**  
**Table 1**  
**Chronological List**

1772	Stonington	1911	Tampa Bay
1835	Suwannee	1912	Black Creek
1842	Florida	1912	New Santa Rosa
1842	Ocklocknee	1912	Smyrna
1847	Alachua	1914	Little River
1847	Suwannee River Primitive	1914	Seminole
1847	West Florida	1916	Caloosa
1857	Santa Fe River	1922	Okaloosa County
1867	South Florida	1924	Holmes County
1870	Wekiwa	1925	Jackson County
1872	Elim	1925	Lake County
1872	New River	1925	Southwest Florida
1873	Suwannee	1926	Okaloosa
1876	Geneva	1932	Pinellas County
1876	Manatee Missionary	1934	Northwest Coast
1876	Sandy Creek	1934	Pinellas
1877	North Saint John's River	1935	Baptist Purity
1879	Beulah	1938	Northeast Florida
1879	Harmony	1938	Palm Lake
1879	Midway	1945	Chipola
1879	St. John's River	1948	Gulf Stream
1879	St. Mary's River	1950	Pinellas
1882	Hamilton	1950	Shiloh
1885	Hernando	1951	Apalachee
1885	Marion	1951	Gadsden
1887	Pensacola Bay	1953	Brevard
1888	Pasco	1954	Big Lake
1888	Rocky Creek	1954	Ridge
1889	Indian River	1957	Halifax
1890	Graves	1957	Taylor
1891	Lafayette	1958	Choctaw
1892	Manatee River	1958	Royal Palm
1897	Peace River	1961	Gadsden County
1900	Middle Florida	1968	Florida Keys
1900	Mount Olivet	1978	Greater Orlando
1902	Jacksonville	1978	Manatee Southern
1903	New Santa Fe	1985	Big Bend
1905	Bethel	1987	Sun Coast
1906	Central	1987	Walton County
1907	Santa Rosa	1992	Sumter
1909	Miami	2003	Treasure Coast
1909	New West Florida		

**Associations With Florida Baptist Churches**  
**Table 2**  
**Alphabetical List**

Alachua	1847	New Santa Fe	1903
Apalachee	1951	New Santa Rosa	1912
Baptist Purity	1935	New West Florida	1909
Bethel	1905	North Saint John's River	1877
Beulah	1879	Northeast Florida	1938
Big Bend	1985	Northwest Coast	1934
Big Lake	1954	Ocklocknee	1842
Black Creek	1912	Okaloosa	1926
Brevard	1953	Okaloosa County	1922
Caloosa	1916	Palm Lake	1938
Central	1906	Pasco	1888
Chipola	1945	Peace River	1897
Choctaw	1958	Pensacola Bay	1887
Elim	1872	Pinellas	1934
Florida	1842	Pinellas	1950
Florida Keys	1968	Pinellas County	1932
Gadsden	1951	Ridge	1954
Gadsden County	1961	Rocky Creek	1888
Geneva	1876	Royal Palm	1958
Graves	1890	Sandy Creek	1876
Greater Orlando	1978	Santa Fe River	1857
Gulf Stream	1948	Santa Rosa	1907
Halifax	1957	Seminole	1914
Hamilton	1882	Shiloh	1950
Harmony	1879	Smyrna	1912
Hernando	1885	South Florida	1867
Holmes County	1924	Southwest Florida	1925
Indian River	1889	St. John's River	1879
Jackson County	1925	St. Mary's River	1879
Jacksonville	1902	Stonington	1772
Lafayette	1891	Sumter	1992
Lake County	1925	Sun Coast	1987
Little River	1914	Suwannee	1835
Manatee Missionary	1876	Suwannee	1873
Manatee River	1892	Suwannee River Primitive	1847
Manatee Southern	1978	Tampa Bay	1911
Marion	1885	Taylor	1957
Miami	1909	Treasure Coast	2003
Middle Florida	1900	Walton County	1987
Midway	1879	Wekiwa	1870
Mount Olivet	1900	West Florida	1847
New River	1872		

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