

2019 SBCAL Executive Director's Annual Report

Thank you for being with us today! And thank you for the privilege of serving as your Executive Director. I consider it a joy, an honor, and a great stewardship responsibility.

The SBCAL is the oldest and largest associational network in the SBC, founded in 1960. We are an autonomous network, organized by and for associational leaders. We receive no Cooperative Program funds. However, we do greatly appreciate several SBC entities who support us through their sponsorship of our Annual Conference each year.

Last year was our biggest and best Annual Conference in many years, with over 250 in attendance in Dallas. We had the great honor of having both SBC Presidential candidates come and bring greetings, and then allowing us to pray over them. The next day, at our Executive Team breakfast, we committed to invite whoever was elected to speak at this meeting. And we are honored tonight that SBC President J. D. Greear will be with us at our banquet.

My predecessors had great wisdom to include a liaison from various SBC entities on the Executive Team. Those connections have – and continue to – serve us well. That is why you will be asked to vote to amend our Bylaws to broaden the representation on our Executive Team to include any seminary or other SBC entity that contributes at least \$1000 a year to SBCAL. We as AMSs need to be heard by our seminaries and we need to hear from our seminaries if we want associations and the role of the AMS to be heard and appreciated.

We have heard from you that we need to be a year-round organization connecting, networking, and supporting AMSs, and associations in the SBC.

I believe SBCAL is your best advocate, friend, and voice in the SBC. We are your tribe. We are here for you. I hope you will become a member if you are not one already, and I hope you will encourage your peers in your home state to do the same.

SBCAL is at the forefront of a renaissance of the value of associations in the SBC. Associations have long been the best laboratories for our denomination to learn from and to later replicate. For example, after our Task Force developed the “Encouragements” document on abuse that the officers of state convention executive directors joined, I was blessed to hear words of appreciation from a denominational leader last month. His comments encouraged me, and I hope they will encourage you, as well. Here is what Augie Boto, VP of the SBC Executive Committee, said: *I want to also take this opportunity to express to you, Ray, how very much we here appreciate your leadership, and your sensitivity to the care that must be taken in addressing problems as they arise as well as in keeping Southern Baptists together in our work. The essentiality of associational work and influence has been overlooked in the past. I have bemoaned that, and am VERY happy to see that dial now turning back toward recognition and appreciation. Thank you for being a part of that return to a more traditional and much more healthy and productive operational state.*

Last year, with help from the WMU, we were able to recommend changing the date and name of Associational Missions Week from the third week of May to the third week of October beginning in 2019. The name is now Week of Prayer for Baptist Associations.

The biggest news of this year is the formation and work of a Vision Team to follow up on the work of the Study Team a year ago. At the 2:15pm Business Session you will be voting to adopt the Report, which you received by email in the May issue of *The Encourager*. You also have it on the flash drive in your AMS Conference bag. The Report includes *AMS Search Committee Guidelines*, a coaching component, *Gospel Coaching*, *Associational Mission Strategist Succession Planning*, a 1000-word explanation/overview of each of the 17 Proficiencies of an effective associational leader, and recommended updates of our Constitution & Bylaws to continue making SBCAL an even stronger voice for associations in the SBC. After the changes to the Constitution & Bylaws were approved, it was decided that now would be a good time to incorporate SBCAL. Therefore, the document in your program is slightly different than the one that was sent out in the April edition of *The Encourager*, due to attorneys being involved.

If you read the Report, you will notice also that I have been commissioned to be the General Editor of a new book on associational leadership. The heart of the book will be 17 chapters – one on each Proficiency – expanding the 1000-word papers you have in your possession. The association I lead, the Southside Baptist Network, in south metro Atlanta, has graciously given me a six-week sabbatical from June 23 – August 1, to work on this project. I would really appreciate your prayers and advice to make this the best resource possible. My goal is for it to be published by B & H Publishing, and for it to become a textbook in our seminaries, a resource for all of us to learn from each other, and a help to AMS Search Committees.

Thanks to Steve Bass, NAMB has graciously committed to record video training of the 17 Proficiencies, as well as working with us to offer live training this September at NAMB and also next year.

Thanks to Mark Dance, LifeWay is offering a pilot project in August of AMS Essentials, similar to the Pastor Essentials they have been offering for several years now. We are excited about that opportunity, as well.

If you are not a member, you will not be able to vote during the business sessions. If you want to join, you may do so at the Registration Table. I believe this Vision Team Report is another major step forward for our network and for associations in the SBC.

Some of you know, but many of you do not know, that three weeks ago our older daughter, April Gentry Witkowski, was diagnosed with Stage 4 breast cancer that had metastasized on her spine. She is only 35, married to Pastor Peter Witkowski of Amisville Baptist Church, Amisville, VA, near Culpeper, VA. They have three children, 5, 3, and 1. We would really appreciate your prayers for wisdom about treatments, for healing, and for God to be glorified in everything. Scripture says we are to weep with those who weep, and to rejoice with those who rejoice. The

Gentry's are grieving and weeping, and we would appreciate it if you hold us up and put April on your prayer list.

I am thankful for your support, and my prayer is that I will bring glory to Christ by serving you through my leadership of SBCAL.