

SBCAL Historical Highlights

SBCAL Founder Harold D. Gregory was quite a pioneer associational leader of the 20th century. He served the Nashville Baptist Association, Nashville, TN, for 37 years. He authored the book, *Keystone of All Missions*, published by the Tennessee Baptist Convention, in 1949. The Lord used him as the Founder of what is now SBCAL, in 1960. He later served as President in 1972.

Below are excerpts from *The Mustard Seed: A History of the Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Directors of Missions, 1960-2002*; 1960-1986 History by Harold D. Gregory; 1987-2002 Update by Dr. Paul Stripling

...there was growing stress in the 1950s and 60s, for the Director of Missions because of the friendly rivalry of two major agencies of the Convention (The Sunday School Board and the Home Mission Board). These agencies, each vying for the time of the man in the middle, made life difficult for him and caused him to be compelled at times to choose between both excellent programs.

...the associations were struggling to find their proper relationship in the denominational structure. This happened because we were so busy promoting programs, we had not taken the time or trouble to define our fields of labor and how each would relate to the other...but the Directors of Missions did not have a forum for the discussion of this problem as it related to them.

Of course, Southern Baptist pastors had their conference and the large numbers attending with an annual offering usually to care for their expenses...but the Directors of Missions had no such National Conference. There seemed to be no question as to the need for their organization.

Considering the Need for a National Conference of Directors of Missions

In this period in the late 1950's and early 1960s, some of us who felt the pressure dared to discuss the problem. We needed an organization in which Directors of Missions would be able to consider specifically matters of importance to them. Because they had been so recently in the pastorate and enjoyed the inspiration of the Pastors Conference programs, they were hesitant to speak favorably of such a Conference. Others went with their wives to the National WMU meeting. Only a few felt a need for such an organization. Some close friends as denominational leaders expressed deep concern about such a move as though it might be a *union* of Directors of Missions. However, a small number who were familiar with the total picture felt very strongly the need for an organization where we could attend a meeting with our own agenda, instead of being invited to one that was already set. Very gradually, interest in the idea grew...One of the things that was sure, we would have to meet in conjunction with the Southern Baptist Convention. We would have to charge dues that would be minimal because of the low salaries of most of the men. Many did not even have their way paid to the Convention. Gradually the idea took shape, and after some discussion at Ridgecrest Home Mission Week in 1959, I resolved to try to follow through with getting such a Conference for Directors of Missions organized.

1960s

Early in 1960, Harold Gregory sent out a letter to about 500 Directors of Missions about another matter. Included was a postcard on which they might respond as to whether they favored organizing a Conference for Superintendents of Missions, as they were still known. He got a good response from the men, and about two out of three indicated they favored such a Conference. Some still expressed reservations, and even some that agreed to the idea were not strong in their conviction for it.

On March 22, 1960, I sent letters to four brethren in North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee. I requested they meet me in Chattanooga to plan a program for the meeting to be held in Miami, Florida, May 17, 1960. Only two of these were able to attend. J. C. Williamson of Dalton, Georgia, and Sam Welch of Chattanooga. We developed the program for the first meeting, and I sent out over 500 letter to Superintendents of Missions, announcing the meeting at 1:30pm, Tuesday, May 17, at First Baptist Church of Miami Beach. A complete program was attached along with a self-addressed postcard for replies.

We had 60 responses, with some 50 indicating they would attend.

Convention-Wide Conference for Superintendents of Associational Missions
Tuesday, May 17, 1:30-4pm
First Baptist Church
Miami Beach, Florida

Songs	Harold Souther, Kansas City, MO
Devotional "The Associational Missionary: Called of the Lord"	Richard Carlton, Cincinnati, OH
Prayer	
Presentation of Program	
Appointment of Nominating Committee to name Chairman, Secretary, and Program Committee	
Devotional Life and Study	Habits (if any)
	Marshall Mines, CA
Panel Discussion	Moderator, Harold G. King, TN
Relationships:	
To his family	J. F. Marchman, GA
To his community	A. A. Brady, OK
To the pastors	T. S. Roote, GA
To the churches	H. S. Sauls, AL
Special Message: "The Pisel Tree" and "Magic"	Dr. Paprika Snowflake, TN
Report of Nominating Committee	Harold Souther, Kansas City, KS
Special Music	Harold Souther, Kansas City, KS
"Time for Everything"	H. D. Standifer, TN
"Denominational Organizations and the Superintendent of Missions"	Alvis Strickland, B. S. S. B.
"Magnitude of Our Task"	William I. Barkley, Baltimore, MD
Benediction	
Adjourn	

Fourteen people from nine states were invited to be a part of the program. There were 43 present for the first session. Ray Dobbins presided in a splendid way, even though he was busy as Chairman of Arrangements for the Convention. Dues were set at \$2.00 per year to help with mailing information to the more than 500 potential members.

1963 Conference - Cancelled due to Gulf Shore Conference sponsored by the Home Mission Board in Gulf Shore, MS the week of Feb. 11, 1963. All agencies of the Convention were invited and participated. Input by the 700 associational missionaries present made them feel for the first time that they were a vital part of the total Southern Baptist program.

1965 Dallas, TX - The first Constitution was adopted: The name of the organization shall be Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Superintendents of Missions. The purpose...shall be to enable the Associational Superintendents of Missions to become better acquainted, to promote fellowship, and to share plans, ideas, and mutual responsibilities for the betterment of associational missions. Another highlight: Election of John White to editor of the CLOSED CIRCUIT. The first edition in 1965 of one copy, though undated, was well done by offset printing.

1970s

1971 St. Louis, MO - Membership dues were raised to \$5.00 annually.

The 12th Conference was held in Philadelphia, PA on Sunday from 2:00-4:00pm, June 4, and Monday, June 5, 1972, beginning at 10:00am. This was the first time the Conference had met on Sunday. This kept us from conflicting with the Pastors Conference and Woman's Missionary Union Meeting. It also marked the first time that an advance block of reservations of 150 rooms had been made for members of this Conference. Harold Gregory was President.

1973 Portland, OR - The name of the publication was changed from the CLOSED CIRCUIT to the OPEN CIRCUIT.

1975 Dallas, TX - A committee recommended that "The Southern Baptist Convention Calendar Committee include a Day of Prayer for Associational Missions to be sponsored by the Brotherhood Commission." The Brotherhood Commission had declined to sponsor such a Day of Prayer. With this information, a motion was approved by the Conference for an Associational Emphasis Week as suggested by the Home Mission Board. The Home Mission Board Division of Associational Missions would prepare materials supplemented by each local association with their own material. Details still had to be worked out, but it was a beginning. This was a cause for rejoicing and praise to Almighty God.

1976 Norfolk, VA - The title of the Conference was changed to Directors of Associational Missions, and the OPEN CIRCUIT was changed for four issues per year to a bi-monthly. This gave greater continuity and sustained promotion of the Conference.

1980s

1980 St. Louis, MO - Five conferences (breakouts) were offered; choose two:

“Administration of Associational Missions” Tom Roote

“Being Pastor to the Pastor” Earl Crawford

“Working with the Bi-Vocational Pastor”

“Working with Pulpit Committees”

“Developing Financial Support for the Association” Cecil Ray

Companions of Directors of Missions could choose one of two conferences:

“Where Do I Go to Scream?” Mrs. Mickey Patrick

“Fashion Trends and How To’s” Mrs. Ester Pounds

Dues were increased from \$5.00 to \$10.00 annually.

1990s

Dr. J. C. Bradley, who served as the Director, Associational Administration Department of the Home Mission Board, and has been actively involved in the SBCADOM, became a marvelous associational futurist – a prognosticator of change – when making predictions of the association when speaking at Glorietta Baptist Conference Center, 1994. Associations, according to Bradley, will be affected by the growing movement to form compatibility-group fellowships, as well as an increase in the number of associations of similar kinds of churches, based on doctrine, program style, etc. Apparently, associations will become more “non-geographical” and more “world missions.” Associations will find their existence dependent upon the effectiveness with which they deliver the desired benefit to the churches.

1993 Houston, TX - First Annual Director of Missions Orientation

1994 Orlando, FL - Theme: Minister, Manager, Missionary; newsletter changed to EdgeU

1996 New Orleans, LA - Dues raised from \$15 (active members) and \$7.50 (retired members) to \$25 and \$12.50, respectively.

1999 Atlanta, GA - Creation of a SBCADOM web page was announced by DOM Viewpoint Editor, Gerald Jeffries, Director of Missions, Dixon Baptist Association, Missouri. He indicated that the entire newsletter could be received on the internet.

2000s

2001 New Orleans, LA - Dr. Ron Davis, Greenville Baptist Association, South Carolina, presented “The Emerging Association” following questionnaires he had mailed to Director of Missions, fall 2000. The three themes that surfaced helped to highlight an emerging association:

1. Vision and purpose driven
2. Mission and ministry focused
3. Flexible in organization

Davis stated that the Director of Missions of the future must be

1. Proactive
2. True leaders modeling leadership
3. Visionary
4. Teachers of leader

2010s Compiled by Dr. Ray Gentry

2011 Phoenix, AZ – Dr. Johnny Rumbough, Lexington Baptist Association, Lexington, SC, stepped in at the last minute due to a leadership void, and salvaged the 2011 Annual Conference. He and his association together “save” and stabilize SBCADOM over the next few years by carrying it on their back financially and otherwise.

2013 Houston, TX - The Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Directors of Missions (SBCADOM) voted to change its name to the Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders (SBCAL)

2015 Columbus, OH - Dr. Johnny Rumbough, Lexington Baptist Association, Lexington, SC, passed leadership of SBCAL to Dr. Ray Gentry, Southside Baptist Network, McDonough, GA

2017 Phoenix, AZ - Members voted to form a blue-ribbon study team to report back next year with proficiencies of an effective associational leader

2018 Dallas, TX - Members unanimously voted to accept the Study Team Report. The Study Team Report introduced 17 Proficiencies of an Effective Associational Leader, as well as a new descriptor for the leader based on these proficiencies: Associational Mission Strategist (AMS).

2020 (Virtual Annual Meeting due to COVID) - SBCAL produced the first national book on effective associational leadership in over 35 years: *The Baptist Association: Assisting Churches, Advancing the Gospel*, edited by Dr. Ray Gentry. Special thanks to Dr. Kevin Ezell and NAMB for funding the first printing of 2000 copies and for mailing them to AMSs across the nation. Included in the book is a chapter on each proficiency, as well as a history of associations, guidelines for AMS Search Teams, and many other helps.

2023 New Orleans, LA - SBCAL members adopted a record Ministry Plan that including funding full-time staff for the first time in its history: Dr. Ray Gentry, President/CEO and Allison Gentry, Director of Communications/Event Planner. They also voted to encourage associations to include SBCAL in their associational budgets, in addition to membership dues.

2025 Dallas, TX – SBCAL has a record membership of 750 and the highest total attendance at annual conference this century: over 450!. Praise the Lord! There are approximately 1100 associations in the Southern Baptist Convention. In addition, earlier this year, we hosted our first SBCAL Retreat in Pigeon Forge, TN. Approximately 250 participated.