

FILE 1162

FUNDING AN ASSOCIATION

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Historically, associations were rather spontaneous, grassroots expressions of Baptist ecclesiological life. At times denominational leadership has taken a hand in the creation of associations as administrative entities. In both cases we now find that many associations are too small and lack financial resources to address important missional objectives. In the past this has been dealt with by Baptist conventions providing subsidies. In the future it is probable that associations will need to seek to achieve financial independence. What I want to do here is to develop a case study which you might use in looking at the resources of your association.

A. Suppose that an association needs about \$100,000 per year to support a basic program for the churches (salary, benefits, office expenses, travel, and program funds). In actuality most Baptist associations get by on less, but I see this as a rather lean budget.

B. Generally, we have encouraged the churches to contribute 3% of their undesignated income to the association. This means that for an association to receive \$100,000 that the churches would need to receive three million dollars. This would figure out at about \$60,000 per Sunday.

C. Baptist churches tend to receive between \$15 and \$30 per Sunday from worshipers. You can think of the variables that impact this range. If we take \$20 as typical, then this would mean that the churches in the association would need to average about 3,000 in worship each Sunday. (This would multiply on out to about 6,000 resident members. Again regional differences impact this figure.)

D. Baptist churches tend to be rather small. Typically, about 75 are in worship. If this holds true on an average in an association, then for an association to have a total of 3,000 worshipers on a given Sunday it would need to have 40 congregations. Some will need many more congregations, some fewer, but it seems that 30 to 50 congregations would be needed to generate an associational income of \$100,000.

E. Where associations are not this large, in addition to seeking

subsidies from outside, several other strategies have been considered:

- *cut back the associational program
- *seek endowments
- *combine associations
- *call a missionary to serve multiple associations
- *seek a higher percentage from the churches
- *charge for services
- *help the churches improve the stewardship of the members
- *start additional congregations
- *help the existing churches to grow

F. To illustrate only the final strategy listed above, consider the following:

For Southern Baptists to reach 6,000 members in an area, the churches will need to have these kinds of demographics:

- *2% of population = 300,000
- *10% of population = 60,000
- *20% of population = 30,000
- *40% of population = 15,000

G. It follows, then, that effectiveness of evangelism is related to the financial base of an association.

H. The strategy that you adopt will depend upon your context and the vision of the association.

Hopefully, this exercise will be of assistance to you and the leadership of your association in making realistic decisions for the future.

While this exercise focused on the financial side of the life of an association, there are other important social, cultural and spiritual considerations that must be attended to in the formulation of a new association.