

Better Together: Understanding and Celebrating the Cooperative Program

By Michael Cabell

My name is Michael Cabell and I serve as Assistant to the Executive Director for Convention Relations at the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

Come from a big family— my mother was one of twelve children. With dozens of cousins and a large number of aunts and uncles, our family gatherings were great.

Real football games – Huge family vacations – Great celebrations

Able to accomplish more because we were family.

This picture is from a day when the family was harvesting my grandfather's tobacco crop.

One of those special celebrations was celebrating my grandfather's 100th birthday. At the time of his 100th birthday he had more than 100 descendents!

I want to celebrate that your church is part of an even larger family! Your church is part of a family of over 47,000 Southern Baptist Churches. There are more Southern Baptist Churches in the United States than McDonalds, Burger King and Dollar General stores COMBINED.

Not only are you part of a big family, but this year your family is celebrating a special 100th birthday. 2025 is the centennial anniversary of the Cooperative Program – which is the strategy that Southern Baptist Churches use to fund missions and ministry all over the world. Today, I want to explain how it functions, help you understand its impact, and celebrate what your church is doing in partnership with other churches.

Jesus gave His followers the Great Commission which described WHAT He wanted them to do – make disciples in all nations. In the very last words Jesus spoke to His followers before ascending into heaven, He shared with them HOW they are to go about fulfilling WHAT He called them to do. If the Great Commission is the WHAT, the last words of Jesus as found in Acts 1 are the HOW.

Acts 1:8 – “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea and all Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth.”

This is a daunting task. How can one church effectively reach their Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth?

That is the question likeminded Baptist churches in Kentucky were asking in 1837 that led to the formation of our state convention. They were convinced that the best way for us to follow the commands of Christ was to cooperate with other likeminded Baptist Churches.

Eight years later, in 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention was formed and since then, Southern Baptist Churches have cooperated to fulfill the Great Commission.

This idea was not unique to KY Baptists or Southern Baptists. Rather, throughout Scripture we see abundant examples of cooperation. Paul recognized the power of partnership and commended the church in Philippi for their cooperation:

Philippians 1:3-5 “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”

FUNDING

While we partnered together as a state in 1837 and as a national convention in 1845, we were not thriving. The first version of the Home Mission Board went bankrupt. Many of our entities were struggling with debt.

Missionaries were coming off the field because we couldn't afford it.

Societal giving abounded as churches were bombarded with requests from missionaries or agency representatives. One Southern Baptist during this time said that if the church said yes to every missionary or entity appear, their pastor would only be able to preach twice a year

The solution came from the Bible and was birthed in Kentucky.

Best things in life come from Kentucky! Fried Chicken, Ale 8 and the Cooperative Program.

Early 1900's – FBC Murray Box Plan – Harvey Boyce Taylor introduced the church to a new unified giving strategy. He sat up a box in the rear of the church for all offerings to be placed into and would be divided to fund missionaries.

Taylor became a leader within in the Kentucky Baptist Convention and in 1913-1914 campaigned for the state convention to adopt a new way of giving. When KY Baptists met for their annual meeting in 1915, the convention adopted the Unified Giving Plan as a mechanism for KY Baptist churches to cooperate in funding missionaries and missions agencies.

On May 13, 1925 – 5,000 Southern Baptists gathered at the Ellis Auditorium in Memphis Tennessee... and this is what happened:

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Excerpt from Presentation on the Cooperative Program Presentation in 1925

“MAY GOD HELP OUR PEOPLE TO SEE IT! Your Commission believes that the very time has come when this entire Convention should commit itself, with a **unity of purpose** and consecration never known before, to the common task of the enlistment of our people and

the working out of this plan. We need to see that **any other course means only chaos and ruin.**"

In concluding this report, your Committee would reaffirm its belief that **the only way** of liquidating our debts and creating an adequate financial support of all of our institutions and activities under God **is to commit ourselves thoroughly** to our **Cooperative Program.**"

The idea was simple. Likeminded churches would come together to jointly fund ministry and missions.

HOW COOPERATIVE PROGRAM WORKS

Members give a percentage of their income to their churches.

Churches send their CP support to their state convention.

The state convention uses a portion of the money for missions and ministry in the state.

The remaining portion is forwarded to the national convention for national and international missions.

Each church voluntarily gives a percentage of the money it receives to missions and ministry. We are supporting it together.

Just like in your church – instead of one person pay the pastor's salary, another paying for VBS and another paying the light bill, instead we combine our money together to do things together we could not do alone.

The beauty of this method is that all churches can participate:

Even small churches can have an incredible impact. **Michael Jordan vs Cleveland Cavaliers scored his career high of 69 pts and his teammate Stacy King scored 1 point.**

Being interviewed by a reporter, Stacy King said "I will always remember the night when Michael Jordan and combined to score 70 points." And that is the fact of the matter that even if your church can only give a small amount, it is contributing toward the Great Commission through the Cooperative Program.

Small church that gives out of widow's mite... no indoor plumbing...yet gives to CP.

In total, SBC Churches have given over \$20 Billion to CP since 1925.

Last year your church gave _____ to missions through the Cooperative Program. In your church's lifetime, you have given _____ to missions through the Cooperative Program.

I want to celebrate with you the impact your giving makes:

Our State

Mission Statement: Kentucky Baptist Convention was created by churches, for churches, to help churches, reach Kentucky and the world for Christ.

How State Conventions Serve Churches

Our convention staff works as lead missionaries on behalf of the churches to help us coordinate more strategically for the sake of the mission. They know the pulse of the state and the region and point out opportunities for the local churches. It is not a top down approach. Each church is autonomous and no convention staff member tells any churches what to do. What we do is to identify needs, serve churches, and connect them to partnership with one another.

WORK IS DIVIDED INTO 4 TEAMS

MISSION MOBILIZATION

Helps churches have a stronger missions ministry.

Disaster Relief – thousands of people helping in the aftermath of tornadoes and floods. Poland/Ukraine. SB's have the third largest disaster relief organization in the US. BRENDA

Missions Service Corp – Commissioned missionaries to serve throughout our state.

Refugee Ministries – When refugees come to KY, this missionary helps churches partner together to care for them. For example, 1,500 Afghani refugees come to KY and it is too much for one church to care for them. So the KBC helps churches partner to minister to them. In all, we cared for 1,000 of these refugees and gave 800 of them food from SBC's World Hunger fund. Involved 80 churches. A small group of them are meeting for worship.

Missions Strategist – Some churches have struggled to think outside of their own walls, so a missions strategist serves churches by meeting with them to help them discover new ways to do missions. First mission trip, community day of service, take them on a vision trip to Brazil or NY to meet missionaries and see how they can serve.

Church Partnerships— A church has a need and we partner other churches to help. New roof – a church wants to do a mission trip so we connect churches to meet that need.

Help Local Associations – Local Baptist Associations need help from time to time so KBC provides funding to help them.

KY CARE (Churches Assisting Rebuild Efforts) – Each church or pastor who received damage from the tornado got \$5,000-\$10,000 from the KBC to help them in their rebuilding efforts. Over \$1.3 million was distributed in 2023.

EVANGELISM

Evangelism Strategists meet with churches to help them determine better ways to evangelize their community. They use a tool called an E-MAP to help them assess the needs for their church.

Baptist Campus Ministers serve students on 35 college and university campuses. Not every student is at a Christian school like you are so it is important that we share with them. 70+ got saved last year! I was with students at WKU doing spiritual surveys and so impressed by their boldness in sharing their faith.

Church Planting group has 3 team members devoted to helping churches plant churches. About 30-50 churches plants in process each year.

Reach Evangelism Conference – to help train and encourage pastors/church leaders to be about the business of evangelism.

Multi-Ethnic Evangelism – 100 churches worshipping in 20 different languages.

Revivals – Hope for West KY – Over 300 people saved

CHURCH CONSULTING AND REVITALIZATION

Helping the church with all their ministries.

Regional Consultants train pastor search team, help with deacon ministry, help pastors/churches with decisions, etc.

Specialist Consultants help with specific ministries like Worship, Women's Ministry, Sunday School/Discipleship, Financial issues

Equip Tour to train church leaders.

Shepherding the Shepherd event to serve pastors.

Church Cohorts – Mega Church, Bivocational Pastor, County Seat Pastor, etc.

EXECUTIVE TEAM

Provide leadership to KBC

Receive and distribute CP funds

Communications help churches with social media, video production, etc. Kentucky Today 501 (c) 3 umbrella coverage

Promote our work together. Assure work is happening and resourced like it should.

Keep **records** on churches

Lobbyist to help push pro-life and Christian laws

Ministry Transition

Serving at a church that is part of the KBC is beneficial to you:

Life insurance, Disability Insurance

College/Seminary Scholarships – COTC Scholarship -- \$125 credit hour up to 12 hrs semester. FT/PT

Tuition Discounts

Counseling Scholarship

Shepherding

Transition Assistance

AGENCIES – KBC Approves the Trustees

KBC elects the trustees for each of these organizations, provides CP funding, and operates under a covenant agreement with our state convention.

CCBBC – President Goodman “We want to put students in ministry, not put students in debt.”

Oneida – 300 students, last year every graduate had become a Christian. Local students pay less in tuition today than they paid in 1901. In 1901 they paid \$1 a month. Now they attend completely free because of your partnership through the Cooperative Program.

Sunrise – Cared for 1,282 children last year through orphan and foster care.

WMU – KY Changers

KBF – Funding the Great Commission

Crossings – 24,000+ students and camp and nearly 1,000 professions of faith

SBC

NAMB 11,000 church plants since 2010, Send Relief and Evangelism training.

Seminaries - 6 of the largest 8 in US are SBC Seminaries. Nearly 20% of all US seminary students attend one of your Southern Baptist Seminaries.

IMB 3,600 missionaries, 878,000 gospel conversations and 141,000 decisions for Christ.

ERLC religious liberty, advocates for the life of the unborn, helps Southern Baptist is cultural issues

SBC Executive Committee – Annual Meeting, promotes and distributes CP, convention leadership

Why Cooperative Program Better than Independent?

Staying Power 43% vs 7%

A study found that 43% of independent missionaries are unable to make a long term commitment to their mission field while the IMB reports only 7% of their missionaries return home prematurely. When you send a missionary through the IMB they are much more likely to be on the field 10 years from now.

Single Priority –

A missionary friend in Japan told me he spends 30% of his time on fundraising. That is time he is not able to spend on sharing the gospel. Thankfully, our IMB missionaries do not carry the same burden. Because of the Cooperative Program, they have a single priority which is sharing the gospel with lost people.

Steward Protection – All of our missionaries are accountable to Southern Baptists in theology, practice and spending.

Strategic Placement – Your international missionaries are not going to easy places. They are being sent to populations where less than 2% of them are believers.

Closing Illustration -- William Carey and Andrew Fuller Hold the Rope

William Carey – Shoe Cobbler – 1700's England—Studied Maps—Became convicted over lost around the world.

Went to a minister's meeting where he shared his desire to take the gospel to parts of the world where it was not known. One older minister said, "Mr. Carey, when God chooses to convert the heathen, he will do so without consulting you or me."

Carey did not give up and continued promoting his missionary desires. While speaking in Northampton England in 1787, there was a young minister named Andrew Fuller. Following the service, he approached Carey and was delighted that their views were so much alike.

5 years later Fuller attended the minister's meeting at Friar Lane Particular Baptist Chapel, Nottingham, on Wednesday, 30th May 1792, at which Carey delivered his celebrated missionary sermon on the subject: **"Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."** That led to the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society. Andrew Fuller was nominated Secretary of the new Society.

Carey compared their work to miners and told Fuller, **"I will go down if you will hold the rope."** Fuller would later write, **"Before he went down we engaged that while he lived, we would never let go of the rope".**

William Carey traveled to India as the first sent by the British Baptist Missionary Society. His 40+ years of work in India cemented him as the father of modern Baptist missions.

William Carey went while Andrew Fuller and the Baptist Missionary Society held the rope.

Some of us will go.... and some of us need to hold the rope.

Let us be forever dedicated to holding the Cooperative Program rope so that missionaries around our state, nation, and world can have the opportunity to share the gospel.