

# **Voices: Baptist associations are important now and in the future**

November 9, 2020

In May, I started a new ministry position as the director of missions for the Heart of Texas Baptist Network, a local association of Baptist churches across Brown, Comanche, San Saba and Mills counties. It was my local association when I was the pastor of First Baptist Church in Gustine.

The overwhelming response to this move has been some form of, “Do you know how hard a job that is?”

There doesn't seem to be a lot of optimism about the future of our local associations, but I think the pessimism is wrong.

If anything, this year has shown us the desperate need for our associations and the unique ministry they offer. Associational ministry is vital now more than ever.

This cultural moment has given the association a chance to help our churches in two powerful ways.

## **Unity**

First, this moment of division, anger, fear and hate must be met with the unity of the church marked by love for God, one another, our communities and our enemies to the ends of the earth.

We need churches coming together showing God's kingdom is greater than the divided nation we all inhabit, God's love is greater than the hate threatening to engulf us, and God's grace and power are greater than the fear that grips us.

Our communities need churches uniting around the truth and beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Your local association is an organization dedicated to fostering this unity, centering our churches on the gospel of Jesus, loving our communities, and helping one another be faithful to the mission God has given his church.

The association can help churches unite around the gospel they share and bridge the divides of this cultural moment.

## **Fellowship**

Second, the association can help connect pastors and staff to one another—others who have shared the unique burden of these last few months. Pastors and staff need one another. Almost everybody I know in ministry is exhausted right now.

My personal involvement in our association began because I was lonely. I served a small, rural church miles away from another town, and I needed the fellowship of other pastors. I needed to be reminded I am not alone. This isn't unique to me.

I think of two reminders of the loneliness of ministry found in Scripture. Elijah (1 Kings 19) and Paul (Acts 18) were reminded by God they were not alone as they sought obedience and faithfulness to the ministry God gave them. We constantly need that reminder, too.

We are not alone. God has many in our city or area seeking the same Savior and advancing the same kingdom in the power of the same spirit.

Your local association can build these relationships and can be a constant reminder you are not alone in your calling and ministry. There are others walking the same path of faithfulness who can encourage you, help you and pray for you.

# Ministering to each other

One of my favorite ministries in our association is our weekly breakfast for pastors and staff. It is a chance for them just to hang out, talk and share their lives. They don't have to worry about being "on" or having something profound to say. They can talk about nothing or go into the depths of their struggle.

It has been an amazing time for me to see their hearts and as loved by God, not because of what they do for him, but because of what he has done for them in Jesus.

Your pastors are human. They struggle, question and hurt just like you do. They need places where they can open up and be ministered to. Your association can meet this need.

In associational life, we constantly are asking the question, "What is the association for?"

This cultural moment has shown us clearly two needs the association can meet in the days ahead. We can help churches unify around the gospel for the good of their communities and the world, and we can be a place where pastors and staff can be reminded they are not alone.

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