

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS 2018
(Associational Missionary)
mobilebaptists.org

Allowing the Spirit to Take Off and Put On

Paul presented to the Ephesians (and Mobilians) an important lesson in Ephesians 4:22-24, “to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, ²³ to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, the one created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth” (CSV).

The need to set aside the old things, also called the “old nature” or even the “old man,” is necessary for every believer. Setting aside old processes and styles also is necessary for churches to grow and survive.

Eight Characteristics of a Church in need of Revitalization

An article in the July 26, 2018 edition of *The Alabama Baptist* shared some information applicable to MBA churches. Churches willing to honestly evaluate will find one or more of these characteristics that need to be changed for growth to occur.

1. Plateaued or declining attendance
2. Lack of evangelistic fruit
3. Church does not reflect the community
4. Missing generations in attendance or leadership
5. An idealized vision of the past
6. Preoccupation with other churches
7. Competing agendas within the church
8. Allowing a person or group to exercise control

It is of utmost concern the number of church members who refuse to be inconvenienced in order for their church to grow. They will call a preacher to save the church and then complain because he is trying to reverse the decline. The church is in decline because it is not reaching the community. It is unreasonable to think the church can grow without changing the causes of the decline.

Current research indicates 75% of SBC churches are plateaued or declining. *Those national figures are consistent with Mobile Country churches.* Your Executive Committee has identified five biblical emphases that are normal for healthy churches. Much of the MBA training, consulting and events assist in one of these primary areas. These need to become normal activities and events in the life of each church and each believer.

- **BIBLICAL PRAYER**, 1 Timothy 2:1-4 - Our goal is for every MBA church to participate in active, intentional prayer through prayer services, prayer teams and prayer walking.

- **EVANGELISTIC MINISTRIES**, Luke 19:10 - Our MBA goal is to pray for and share Jesus with every person in Mobile County.
- **CHURCH DEVELOPMENT**, Acts 16:5 - Rejoice at the resources available to help every church to grow that is willing to pay the price to grow!
- **CHURCH PLANTING**, Acts 2:46-47 - Our goal is provide enough churches in various sizes, languages and styles to attract the population of Mobile.
- **PARTNERSHIP MISSIONS**, Matthew 28:18-20 - Our goal is for every MBA church to send at least one more than ever before each year in a local, state, national and international partnership mission trip.

GOOD News

The March 22, 2018 edition of *The Alabama Baptist* shows the churches of the MBA as leading the state in the number of Baptisms. Our Evangelistic Ministries Emphases has helped move us from near the bottom of that list 12 years ago. We also see progress in the Church Planting Emphasis with three new works meeting on Easter Sunday 2018. We will vote on another work for watchcare at the Annual Meeting. The Biblical Prayer Emphasis has seen progress as churches continue to prayerwalk Mobile County.

Constitution and Bylaws (C&BL) Updates

Please do not wait until there is a problem to discover the church C&BL is outdated and weak.

The updated document should include clear guidelines for membership, business meetings and for the facility to relate to SBC/MBA. Smaller membership congregations are being targeted by unethical independent and other denominations to lose their facilities. The C&BL is the legal document for the church. It should include a statement defining members in good standing. When conflict occurs it is too late to think about updating.

Disaster Relief Response and Preparation

A September 10, 2017 article documented how Christians provide more disaster aid than FEMA. The SBC is the largest volunteer Disaster Relief (DR) Organization with 90,000 trained volunteers. Your disaster donations are most effective through SBC DR. One hundred percent of your donations go to alleviate spiritual and physical suffering. I have witnessed many times an SBC volunteer put down a chain saw or stop mud out to share, cry and pray with a homeowner.

Please accept this reminder to be prepared for the next event in Mobile. Please visit dr.mobilebaptists.org to remind yourself about the resources available to be prepared and involved. Remember our strategy is to get churches open promptly so they can serve as evangelistic ministry centers in the communities.

Please download and update the availability of your facilities as a feeding center, cooling station, housing, or for storing/distributing supplies.

Intercession for the MBA Staff on Your Prayer List

Jesus gave the example of praying for other believers in John 17. Your associational staff face challenges every day as we consult with church leaders and members. We need wisdom and direction as we consult in church conflict, staff changes, growth options, building needs, disaster relief and every other component of church life. Please add us to your Wednesday night prayer list. Please pray that financial needs will be met.

In the next two to five years, we will see the retirement of Bobby, Ronnie, Chuck, and Thomas.

Future Focus Committee (FFC) Update

Please pray for the FFC, the needed gift of property and the timely sale of the two current facilities. Our latest summary:

1. The FFC has a unanimously approved assignment from the October 2014 Annual Session to sell and combine the IMC and MBA office buildings. Expenses must stay within the amount received from the sales.
2. IM and FFC committees have decided we can sell the IMC facility before the donation of the relocation property. The efficiency at the Port of Mobile now allows ships to unload and load in as little as 12 hours. Additional security measures also reduce the number of seafarers who can get off the ship. In a recent week we had two seafarers the entire week and seven seafarers another week. The decreased use of the facility makes us re-examine the best stewardships for the \$36,000+ a year in insurance and utility overhead expenses to maintain and operate that facility.
3. We are awaiting the Lord to provide a donation of the 3.5 to 5 developed acres, or an existing 8-10,000 sf facility. The current anticipated income from the sale of both buildings is not adequate to build on undeveloped property.
4. The best-case scenario still is to know the new location so we can finalize building size, time frame for temporary location(s) and better negotiate the price of both MBA buildings.
5. It is unnecessary to hinder ministry effectiveness with long term or multiple temporary locations.
6. We cannot divert the limited proceeds from the buildings sales to rent temporary facilities for an indefinite amount of time.
7. Multiple MBA congregations have been contacted about temporary housing. Churches with adequate space wisely will require rent and cannot commit for more than a year. Availability depends on when we start/end.
8. Committee members have approached, and need to continue to approach, individuals, MBA and other congregations to donate 3.5 to 5 acres or existing 8,000-12,000 sf building. Options so far have not been viable due to location or refurbishing needed.

9. EACH OF US needs to please continue praying, looking and talking to find the person who will be the answer to the prayers for a new location.

CWP Plan for Financial Self-Sufficiency

We already see significant progress from the April 2018 approval to move CWP toward financial self-sufficiency. The CWP report updates the new dorm is in place, the new meeting space is underway and the Finance Committee is recommending a balanced 2019 MBA Budget. Each CWP Director for the last 14 years has helped us move toward financial self-sufficiency. Steady progress over those years has allowed us, with confidence, to anticipate complete financial self-sufficiency by 2023.

CWP will continue as a ministry of the MBA. Financial self-sufficiency promotes excellent stewardship of MBA missions' dollars.

Orientation Guide for Church Staff and Churches Exploring MBA Membership

Please visit mobilebaptists.org for a copy of our Orientation and New Member Guide. It presents an overview of MBA ministries, staff, philosophy and strategy. It also includes a membership application for churches wishing to explore membership with the MBA. Please download a copy for your staff and share a copy with potential member churches.

Why Do We Have an Association of Churches?

There are many MBA church members, and even some pastors, that do not understand why we have an association. Obviously, if they don't know why we exist, and what we do, they question why their church should support us. However, it is not appropriate to dismiss the relevance and effectiveness of the association without at least trying to be informed and involved.

Please help us communicate with church leaders and members about cooperative local missions through an association. Encourage them to attend Executive Committee meetings, or at least read the reports on our web page. Please include news and information in your Newsletters and Church Bulletins. Please encourage your people to "Like" us on Facebook and sign up for the News Alerts and online Newsletters on the web page.

I am confident that people who take the time to investigate will be amazed and supportive of the careful stewardship, relevant training and effective ministries provided by the MBA.

Supporting SBC Missions and Missionaries

Many "missions" groups want money from Southern Baptists, but do not want to follow our theology, strategy or accountability. The MBA has chosen to endorse only mission trips that work with IMB and NAMB missionaries.

As Southern Baptists, we should primarily support Southern Baptist missionaries and missions causes. This policy ensures working consistently with our theology, polity, accountability and effective missions' strategy. As funds get tighter we need to be more selective to primarily support SBC missionaries. There are guidelines in the annual report for examining Para-church ministries.

If you are considering support for a Para-church ministry, please allow the Mobile Baptist Association equal time to present the advantages and effectiveness of Cooperative Missions funding. Autonomous churches may choose to support whomever they desire. But good decisions are made with good information.

Protecting Church Financial Procedures

John 12:6 informs us that Judas, yes THAT Judas was the treasurer for Jesus' Disciples. It says, "he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he helped himself to what was put into it."

Recent figures indicate that 15% of churches have been impacted by a trusted leader who embezzled money from the church. These are just the ones who were caught. Wise stewardship requires each church to establish financial guidelines to protect against the growing number of offering collectors, counters, church staff and treasurers who are stealing money from the church. Here are some ways to protect your staff and members from the temptation to take ministry money for personal use.

1. Insist on a yearly independent audit or review of the church financial records in your congregation.
2. Insist on accountability processes so that no single staff member or individual (or members of the same family) are ever solely responsible for collecting, counting, depositing and spending church funds.
3. Insist on specific documentation for all staff reimbursements, expense accounts and purchases.
4. Insist on at least two counters, who are not related, and deposit cash immediately.
5. Insist on monthly, or quarterly, public financial reports that specifically document ALL income and ALL expenditures.

2018 Budget Update

The Budget and Finance Committee has approved the proposed 2019 MBA Budget. We need your help to communicate with Finance Committees the need to tithe to missions.

We have reduced MBA budgets \$186,917 since 2008. As you recall, we lost \$54,000 in subsidies from NAMB for IM and CDD positions. Health insurance costs have increased \$26,000. We already have reduced the level of care we formerly provided by a plan with higher deductibles and out of pocket expenses. We have reduced insurance costs by having a part time Director of International Ministries and a retired Interim Director of

CWP. We have not been able to provide raises for the last eight years. We have reduced office days to four, ten-hour days. We are praying and working to sell both facilities and combine them into a more efficient facility with lower overhead expenses.

We would be severely challenged if so many churches had not faithfully increased their missions giving to the MBA. We need additional churches to consider redistributing their missions tithe to the MBA. We average 1.2 percent of church missions' gifts coming to the MBA. Please discuss with the Finance Committee increasing the MBA percentage of your church's mission's tithe.

1. MBA Gifts to Cooperative Program and MBA

In 2016, 78 MBA churches completed an Annual Church Profile (ACP).

Those 78 churches reported a total income of \$42,364,085.

Their total giving to Cooperative Program (CP) was \$1,547,389 (which is 3.2%).

Those 78 churches gave \$396,293 to the MBA (which is 1.16%)

In 2017, 68 MBA churches completed an Annual Church Profile (ACP).

Those 68 churches reported a total income of **\$31,923,337**

Their total giving to Cooperative Program (CP) was **\$1,438,603** (which is 3.2 %).

Those 68 churches gave to the MBA **\$373,108**. (Which is 1.2 %.)

Therefore, overall the data is not conclusive since representation of the churches is incomplete

2. SBC Recommendation for Supporting Cooperative Missions

The SBC has long recommended that churches give a missions tithe of 7% to CP and 3% to the local association. Recent adaptations include asking churches to *increase* their missions giving to 5% to CP, 3% to Association and 2% to other (Great Commission) missions' interests. This new formula acknowledges that many churches are giving to societal missions at the cost of Cooperative Missions.

Mobile Baptists, our local struggles will be over if our churches adopt the SBC recommendation for funding local missions *within what our churches are currently tithing to missions*. (Reallocation results in no increase in church budget's bottom line and no change in overall missions giving). We could address capital needs at CWP and the IMC, underwrite new churches and provide unprecedented levels of ministry.

3. Processing CP and MBA Gifts

Your church determines how much it gives to the Cooperative Program and MBA. Those funds go from your church to Montgomery/ALSBOM (Alabama State Board of Missions) then on to Nashville/CP (Cooperative Program).

The best-case scenario is for our people to tithe to their churches and our churches to tithe to Cooperative Missions. This will easily cover the shortfall. Some churches are making the wise choice to reduce their gifts to Para-church ministries in favor of SBC

ministries. Others will continue to be SBC in name only with no Cooperative Missions giving. (It is puzzling why congregations want to be called Southern Baptist but are not willing to primarily support local, national and international SBC missions and entities).

4. How to Adjust Your Church Missions Tithe (Remittance Sheet)

It is easy to make any adjustments to the amount of mission tithe you give to the MBA. All you have to do is designate the change in your monthly mission deposit (called a Remittance Sheet) to the State Board of Missions. Changing the allocation percentages allows the total amount you tithe to missions to remain the same. The bottom line of your church budget also will remain the same. The allocation of your missions tithe is all that will change.

Other churches are moving to generic missions offerings to allow them to designate a portion of those offerings to Annie Armstrong and the Impact Mobile Offering. They recognize the loss of subsidy came from NAMB and that an offering is an appropriate way to respond.

The Finance Committee is not making a recommendation how your church should respond. This is a local church decision. They are willing to help you be aware of information so you can decide how your church will respond.

Please study the impact we are having locally and determine what support level your church can provide to the MBA.

Impact Mobile Associational Missions Offering

Our Executive Committee affirmed a goal of \$20,000. This is one way for churches to teach about Associational Missions and help church members know why we give and work cooperatively. The emphasis dates are during Associational Missions Week each May, but we can adapt the materials to reflect ANY date that works better with your church calendar. Please use this opportunity to teach the importance of Cooperative Missions and the impact we are having in Mobile County and across the planet. Please notice the Impact Mobile Brochure in your packet or get a copy online.

Thank You

Cooperative Missions is hard work. Every hour you spend in a committee meeting helps us to make an eternal difference in Mobile County. So does answering the phone at the MBA office, mowing the grass at the IMC, teaching English to Internationals, participating in disaster relief, or painting at Camp Whispering Pines. Thank you to those of you who sacrifice to make Cooperative Missions possible.

In the Lamb,
Brother Thomas Wright