

Baptist Associations Are Advanced Denominationalism

By

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In the 1995 movie, *The American President*, President Andrew Shepherd said the following at a press conference: “America isn’t easy. America is advanced citizenship. You’ve gotta want it bad . . .”

A similar understanding applies to Baptist associations. Associations are not easy. Associations are advanced denominationalism. You gotta want it bad.

As I have shared over the past four years, churches are the association. The association is not an organization with which you affiliate, such as a state convention or a national denomination.

Associations are a family. As we say on our website, CMBA is *A family of congregations in the Midlands of South Carolina*. We are churches-in-association with one another. We are the only entity in Southern Baptist life that churches join and are members. Churches affiliate with the SC Baptist Convention and the SBC. But they are members 365 days per year of the association.

In associational life, autonomous churches are interdependent on one another. As a family, we rejoice when our sister and brother churches are rejoicing. We mourn when they are mourning. We communicate with one another. We collaborate with one another. We seek to raise the capacity of one another for Great Commission services in the spirit of the Great Commandment.

We do not go about ministry alone. If we do, we risk missing some of the best synergy of relationships and efforts at Kingdom progress that will ever be available to us.

We do not talk about large churches vs. medium size churches vs. small churches. We talk about all churches being full size. Some have larger memberships and attendance than others.

Although a few Baptist associations around the country refer to themselves as a *network*, that is a wholly inadequate word to refer to the intimate family relationship possible in a Baptist association. Churches are often participants in many networks. The association is not just another one.

Also, some churches refer to having a *partnership* with their association. This is another wholly inadequate word to describe the primary denominational membership organism – the Baptist association. Churches often have many partnerships. The association is not just another one of these.

At its best, a Baptist association is truly a family, not just a friend or an acquaintance. Associations offer solutions for congregations because they understand them in their context, while other denominational entities offer scope and scale. Beyond the information national organizations primarily provide and the knowledge regional denominational organizations share, the association at its best offers the synergy of all information and knowledge that helps in prayerful dialogue with congregations to produce wisdom.

Most of all, churches in association have the power to bless one another. It is not about asking if your churches in association are being a blessing to you. It is about asking if you are being a blessing to your sister and brother churches-in-association.

Go forward and bless one another!