



## Q&A with George Bullard

*CMBA Executive Director George Bullard formally announced his intent to retire effective June 30, 2022, to the Visionary Leadership Community during its June 2021 meeting in Columbia. His retirement will conclude about 50 years in professional ministry and leadership at local, associational, state, national and international levels. During his almost five-year tenure at CMBA, Bullard has fostered missions and ministry cooperation among CMBA's almost 100 member churches, articulated vision processes for congregations in various stages of the church life cycle, mentored leaders, provided leadership during the sale of the Gadsden Street office and then its transition to virtual work, and has assembled a team of experienced contract workers to assist churches, among other ministry accomplishments.*

*Acknowledging a full year of continued work and ministry ahead of his official retirement date, Bullard recently shared his thoughts on his ministry life and time at CMBA.*

### **In addition to being called by God, what factors led you to accept the role of DOM with CMBA?**

"I grew up in the home of a Baptist minister who served three times during his ministry as an associational director. I had served on the staff of two associations prior to coming to South Carolina the first time in 1985. Additionally, I had served on our SBC national missions agency in the Associational Missions Division, and both in South Carolina and North Carolina I served myself or directly supervised the state convention staff person who related to associations.

I believe the Baptist association is our most important dimension of SBC denominational life.

I was serving on the Administrative Team (now Visionary Leadership Community) of CMBA when the former director announced his retirement, and the search began for his replacement. I was approached by two people who asked me to consider submitting my resume for the director role. It fit with prayer and dialogue my wife and I were already having.

I was completing 20 years as a church and denominational consultant throughout North America. I desired to stop flying to meet with clients and do something to continue ministry in the Columbia area.

I wanted to contribute what I knew about congregations and associations to the CMBA where I had lived most of my adult life. I felt I would help CMBA congregations make significant progress at becoming more vital and vibrant congregations."

### **You have such a varied history and experience in so many levels of ministry and leadership. Can you speak to what it's been like to pull from these areas and apply back to the local church and associational settings through this last role before retirement?**

"I guess you could say that my first 45 years of congregational and denominational service had prepared me for applying multitudes of learnings to churches where I would not be just traveling in to help them for a few days, but would be in ministry with them for multiple years.

It has been great to develop relationships with congregations where I could come alongside them when the doors of opportunity opened, and help them take their next steps in ministry."

**Our Family Stories** is a series of stories provided by the Columbia Metro Baptist Association about the people and congregations of the family of Baptist congregations in the Midlands of South Carolina.

Financial gifts from the almost 100-member congregations make these articles possible.

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## **Can you speak to the larger role and importance of a DOM, and the opportunities that exist for this ministry leader today, in 2021?**

"I have worked as a staff person and consulted with national, regional, and local denominational entities in 50 different denominations throughout North America. The conclusion I have come to is that the local, contextual denominational entity – regardless of denomination – is the most important for creating and sustaining vital and vibrant congregations who are fulfilling the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment.

Associations are 'organisms' rather than 'organizations.' They are based on the relationship among a family of congregations. Regional and national denominational dimensions can develop strategic frameworks, but only the local dimension can develop in-depth strategies.

Therefore, the role of the director of Baptist associations is the most important role in our denominational structure. Associational directors must broker contextually relevant resources to congregations. They must simultaneously be a person who builds positive relationships with congregations and a person who is an insightful strategist who has the wisdom to know what tools fit what churches in what contexts."

## **What are some things that CMBA churches are doing well?**

"CMBA is offering a wide selection of resources and services to our congregations congruent with our One Priority which is *to start and strengthen congregations to serve as vital and vibrant missional communities.*

I am most especially gratified for our involvements in starting new congregational expressions. We could do more in this area if we had more willing church sponsors. Second, we have worked hard to build a church revitalization strategy. This is tough work. In general, churches want help but are reluctant to accept help that changes anything major.

I believe through Our Family Stories and Our One Priority Podcasts that we tell the stories of churches, ministers, and present resources to churches. Many churches tell us we did a good job supplying helpful information during the pandemic.

Through our CMBA Team Huddle we have pulled together resource people like David Waganer, Robert Grant, Robbie McAlister, Ryan Dupree, Andre Rogers, Cathy Locklear, and Chris Reynolds who can address just about every need a congregation might have.

I believe we have proven the case that the association is an added value to congregations – particularly those who see themselves as part of a family of congregations who love and support one another, and encourage one another in ministry."

## **What are some opportunities you see for CMBA churches moving forward to better reach the Midlands with the gospel?**

"An opportunity that is also a great challenge for CMBA is the racial and ethnic diversity of our associational area. We are radically different than Lexington Association to our west. Secondly, we have great economic diversity that must be addressed. It is difficult to get congregations not in economically depressed areas to engage in ministry in areas of great economic need. Third, we are a great diversity of rural areas and metropolitan areas. Lower Richland County and Fairfield County are both rural to small town areas with unique needs.

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Fourth, we still have much work to be done to help pastors, staff persons, and congregational leaders to understand the distinct role of the association, and to create a sense of family relationship whereby congregations want to work together – instead of separately – to see the Great Commission carry out in and from the base of CMBA.”