

An Association is Congregations in Fellowship on Mission in Their Context and Beyond

By

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The annual session of the Columbia Metro Baptist Association is on Thursday, October 7th at 6:00 p.m. at Cedar Creek Baptist Church, 1920 Cedar Creek Road in Blythewood. The primary purpose for gathering is fellowship, and to celebrate that we are a family of congregations in fellowship and on mission in our context and beyond. At our best, our association is about relationships with one another. The family image illustrates this relationship at its finest.

Only a couple of items of essential business take place at these annual sessions. These items are the election of officers and the approval of the budget. This year we will also have a report from the Executive Director Search Team, and a recognition and celebration of the ministry of Cathy Locklear as a faithful ministry staff member with CMBA for 22 years.

For this year, Rev. James (J) Thompson, pastor of Cedar Creek is our Moderator, and Rev. Craig Bailey, pastor of Winnsboro First Baptist Church is our Vice-Moderator. Our Clerk is Cookie Adams of Kilbourne Park Baptist Church, and our Treasurer is Brenda Sheets of St. Andrews Baptist Church.

During the average year less than 20 percent of our member congregations attend the annual session. Baptists do not attend this type of gathering as they did in years past. This has been true for many years. This is a fact I wish as Executive Director I could change, but it is a reality.

It is our hope that the desire to honor Cathy Locklear will bring out a higher percentage of our congregations. Will you come honor Cathy? Will you come celebrate our life together as a family of congregations in the Midlands of South Carolina?

Our association also does not have strong representation from our member congregations on the Executive Board which we call our Missional Leadership Community. Few congregations have chosen their representatives on this group, and even fewer attend the twice annual meetings of the Missional Leadership Community.

This is so sufficiently true that we have decided to name our annual session this year as a joint meeting of the Missional Leadership Community and the Annual Session of CMBA. We hope by combining these meetings we can accomplish more together despite the pandemic's negative impacts on our ability to meet together for live, face-to-face gatherings during the past 18 months.

To handle the ongoing work of CMBA, we have expanded the Administrative Team known as the Visionary Leadership Community. Previously it was a group of 12 people who did not include the officers of the association. We have expanded participation to 21 people and have included the CMBA officers on this group. This has resulted in broader and more open involvement in the month-to-month decision-making of CMBA.

We have done this as an experiment, and now hope the practice of this will allow CMBA under the next Executive Director to bring our official documents in line with our practice. We headed this way, but again realized the inability to get people together for multiple, in-depth face-to-face gatherings to work toward a consensus meant we had to delay the official process.

Another initiative has been to greatly expand the customized services available to our congregations. When I began my ministry among you in the summer of 2017, we had a limited ability to serve our congregations. Over the past four years we have developed the CMBA Team Huddle which currently includes nine people with various skills and abilities available to congregations.

The members of this team beyond myself are Andre Rogers, Kyndra Bremer, Julia Bell, Ryan Dupree, Robbie McAlister, Robert Grant, David Waganer, and Chris Reinolds. This is a group of people with great passion for Christian ministry. Recently we started sharing about them and what they offer through a series of "Spotlight" articles. These will continue through the end of October. See them at <https://columbiametro.org/about/our-ministry-team/>.

It is a great privilege to serve our almost 100 congregations in a context filled with opportunities for missional engagement. It is a joy to be a family of congregations in fellowship on mission in our context and beyond.