

Seven Ways I Am Finishing Strong

By

George Bullard

Executive Director

Columbia Metro Baptist Association

GeorgeBullard@ColumbiaMetro.org

Although my retirement is less than 100 days away and the association has already conducted a retirement celebration for me, I can promise you I am not slowing down. I am as excited about ministry among our 100 congregations as I have ever been. I am working as hard as I can to fulfill the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment.

I want to share seven ways I am finishing strong. There are more. Seven is enough to share.

First, is *The Denominee Journey*. In August 2021, the association launched into a 16-month process with the Future Church Company ([check out their website here](#)) to clarify our *Future Story of Missional Ministry* as a succession process. It provides a bridge between my leadership and that of the next Executive Director. Our future story is beginning to take shape. Last month our Visionary Leadership Community approved early decisions.

Our new mission statement is now *Unleashing Future Missional Stories of Our Family of Congregations*. ([read article on Mission Statement here](#)) Our desire is to encourage, inspire, and come alongside congregations as they seek to answer the question – *What is our future story of missional ministry?* Our desire is that all congregations have clarity about the future to which God is calling them, and to proactively live into that future.

Second, *Collegiate Ministry* at Benedict College and Allen University. We are excited to share that the SC Baptist Convention has employed Lesley and JJ Joseph as collegiate ministry leaders for Benedict College and Allen University, as CMBA [recently reported](#). My desire during my tenure was to see the expansion of collegiate ministry to include these historically Black educational institutions.

Collegiate ministry without a commitment to Benedict and Allen is incomplete. You will hear more as we continue to partner with this ministry. Your church can be involved. We ask that you prayerfully consider your part. We are planning an event where your church can learn more about this.

Third, *Church Planters Network*. A key part of fulfilling a dream to plant 30 new congregational expressions in the Midlands during the current decade is the cultivating of church planters. We are currently hosting a Church Planters Network monthly as an online dialogue. Robbie McAlister and Ryan Dupree are working with me on this emphasis. We have around a dozen church planters involved in the dialogue.

To support our dream, we have recently asked the state convention to enter a strategic dialogue with us about a comprehensive strategy for the 30 new congregational expressions. We are awaiting their response as we need a collaborative partnership with them as well as one with about 30 sponsoring congregations within our association.

One of our newest emphases is on developing a Swahili-speaking congregation in the Midlands with people from three or more African countries.

Fourth, *Thriving Congregations* is an especially important focus in our association. We have 40 percent of our congregations who due to their patterns over the past two to three decades or more, may not exist with vitality and vibrancy in another decade or so. We are enthusiastic about collaborating with these congregations. Some are still doing well. Some or not. All are at risk. In the past year we have come

alongside a dozen of these congregations to engage them in renewal, revitalization, or replanting. At this moment we have active process taking place with a half-dozen congregations. ([Read about biblical encouragement for revitalization here](#))

I am leading a few processes, but it is necessary for me to hand these off to other people. Just this week we made a formal handoff to Robert Grant who is on our CMBA Team Huddle. With his almost five decades of experience in the strategy areas with which this congregation needs help, they will be well served.

Fifth, *Mission: Local*. During the past several months, I have written and talked about the need for us not only to have a global passion for fulfilling the Great Commission, but also a local one for communities and people left behind in terms of authentic evangelic Christian witness. One of our congregations is in a *Mission: Local* area, and it may be beyond what is popularly known as a *Replant*. Instead, we need to start over like it was an unentered mission field. ([Check out A Revolutionary Approach here](#))

Soon we will share with you about one of these mission fields in the Midlands and challenge you to prayerfully consider this *Mission: Local*. We will hold a Vision Tour of this area to allow you to experience this Great Commission opportunity.

Sixth, *Racial Reconciliation Conversation*. In lieu of the Martin Luther King Jr Worship and Fellowship in January, we just completed a racial reconciliation conversation with an all-star panel. See the article on this and links to the full recordings of the experience [on our website](#). Understanding the complexity of racial relationships is a high priority in our associational context, as well as our state, nation, and world.

We were blessed to have as a panel participant Dr. David Emmanuel Goatley, Academic Dean and Director of the Black Church Studies at Duke Divinity School. David is a lifelong Baptist and led the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention before coming to Duke.

Other panel members included: Alex Sands, pastor of Kingdom Life Church in Simpsonville and former president of the SC Baptist Convention; Philip Pickney, pastor of Radiant Church in Charleston; Ken Weathersby, retired from the SBC Executive Committee; Andre Rogers, pastor of Concord Fellowship Baptist Church also moderated the panel; and, I was privileged to take part in the conversation.

Seventh, the *CMBA Bylaws* and a *Policy and Procedures Manual*. Bylaws and policies are not the glamour work of Baptist associations. They are the necessary work. When I began as Executive Director in 2017, we had outdated bylaws and policies. I committed to move the association forward and, when the timing was right, to bring these documents up to date. A Bylaws Team is working diligently on this necessary legal document. Work is going on in the background to update the policy manual.

Both will be completed over the summer. I am pleased to leave behind updated documents for my successor.

Let us all keep moving forward as our Triune God goes before us!