

**George Bullard: Leaving a Mark at CMBA**

*As CMBA celebrates the retirement of Executive Director George Bullard on June 30, 2022, readers are invited to explore a previous article highlighting his* [*ministry legacy*](https://columbiametro.org/george-bullard-a-ministry-legacy/) *leading up to his time at CMBA.*

*In this edition, George reflects on the work and ministry of the last five years spent with CMBA and his hopes toward unleashing the future missional stories of the CMBA Family of Churches.*

**In addition to God’s leading, what interested you in pursuing the opportunity to accept the Executive Director position of CMBA five years ago?**

In 2016 I reached age 66 and the benchmark of two million miles of flying to engage in kingdom ministry as a church and denominational consultant throughout the North America. Betty and I began praying that God would open a door of opportunity to continue to serve Him that did not require getting on an airplane. That year CMBA began searching for a new director and several people asked for permission to recommend me.

I had served earlier on the staff of two Baptist associations, and with two state conventions and our SBC national missions agency in roles primarily related to associations. Also, my father had been an associational director three times during his ministry and I saw him having the greatest joy in working closely with congregations.

Additionally, I hoped to put into practice what I had learned about effective Baptist associations through my ministry travel. The opportunity to work closely with around 100 congregations appealed to me spiritually, strategically, and emotionally.

**What was this transition like for you? How about bringing the variety of ministry, coaching and leadership experience back to the local church level in this way?**

The transition was easy. I knew how to lead a Baptist association and immediately began addressing the opportunities and challenges. It took some time to figure out how to approach the diversity of congregations within CMBA. About the time I figured out the sweet spot of service, the pandemic hit half-way into my five years of service. That changed all the rules of relating, but also opened unique opportunities for service alongside congregations.

I was not able to fully apply my consulting and coaching experience with the CMBA congregations. Although I had lived in the area most of the time since 1985, few pastors and congregations knew me and my depth and breadth of experience. I had to develop credibility with the congregations before they would allow me to serve them.

**You have led CMBA in a variety of innovative ways. Could you speak to the ideas you had in leading the decision to sell the Gadsden Street office building in 2019? How did this position CMBA for the future?**

Selling the Gadsden Street office building was for me an easy decision. I took some time to be sure our leadership caught the vision of doing this. First, churches are the association. The association is not a place to which people go – such as an office building. “Association” is the sense of family that emerges out of the relationship of congregations with one another. Therefore, a building hinders this understanding.

Second, we did not need the building anymore. It was made for six staff people plus a conference room. We only had two staff persons. Third, the cost of operating the building, and the renovations and repairs needed would focus our finances and time on a building rather than on congregations and their kingdom ministry.

Lastly, the pandemic became the perfect illustration as to why a building was not needed. To relate to churches we needed to go both virtually and face-to-face with churches. We practiced this concept when the Visionary Leadership Community began to hold its almost monthly meetings in a different church each time. Again, the association is the churches.

**How about your vision in assembling the independent contract workers that serve CMBA churches and at the organizational level? It’s safe to say most associational offices today do not have similar personnel and the experience they collectively bring made available to their churches.**

Our congregations have very diverse needs. To fulfill their needs would take myself plus three full-time staff persons. Even then we might not have the diversity of skills our churches need. And our churches are not providing the income to the association to support this staffing pattern since so few give on a percentage basis of their tithes and offerings anymore.

Further, the help once available from the state convention is not present with their staff size of half what it was 25 years ago.

Therefore, I chose to use independent contractors which we call “mobilizers” to help us in various areas of need. This allowed us to have skills and services available to our congregations which are much broader than the typical association of our size.

We pull together the nine members of the CMBA Team Huddle once per month to talk about how we serve our congregations, and to plan strategies and events that will inspire, benefit, and encourage our congregation in their missional endeavors.

**In terms of affirmation to CMBA churches – what would you share about the “wins” and “opportunities” you’ve seen in the last five years?**

CMBA has congregations of all shapes and sizes. Many have a neighborhood or community outreach, some a regional or city/county wide outreach, and some an outreach to a particular people group. Some churches engage in ministry with a clarity of God’s vision for them and an intentionality of actions. They are growing in quantity and quality. They are partnering with other congregations to create a synergy of ministry efforts. We have sought to highlight many of these congregations through our One Priority storytelling so that all can learn of the open doors of opportunity they have found.

At the same time, we have 40 percent of our churches who are “at-risk” congregations. These are congregations who are at risk of either dying during the next ten years or declining to a subsistence level of functioning. There is an opportunity to help these congregations revitalize or replant. The challenge is to empower these congregations become captured by God’s vision for their future.

We have true mission fields within our associational fellowship area where communities are under-evangelized and lack proactive ministry by a congregation. In these communities are many lost, unchurched, underchurched, and dechurched people. One pilot project in which we are engaging is the Mission Field Alpha project in the Woodfield Park community near the northern side of Fort Jackson.

One of the greatest opportunities is for the planting a new congregational expressions. Our associational fellowship area is growing significantly and continuing to be more diverse than ever in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomics, and lifestyle. We need multiple congregations who will be willing to accept a kingdom challenge to plant a new congregation targeting a community or people group.

**Looking forward – what excites you about CMBA’s future possibilities?**

I believe in the past five years we have activated CMBA to a point where the next executive director can lead this family of congregations to soar with faith into a future of ministry beyond which we currently experience. I hope the next executive director will be able to build on the last five years, add their gifts and skills to the mix of leadership within the association, and further focus our strategy on ways that honor God.

As I retire there is a new dimension of controversy with our national denomination. What excites me is that our association does not have to solve that problem. God has given us a mission field in which to serve. We must serve it with a deep and broad commitment to fulfilling the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment.

**What would you share with CMBA churches about your retirement plans?**

In retirement, Betty and I are moving to Simpsonville, S.C., which is where she grew up. We are following our daughter’s family who are moving to Greenville. We will make the transition during July.

In retirement I will continue a slower pace of ministry to expand my family time. The theme of my ministry with be *ForthTelling Innovation*. I will function as a Strategic Thinking Mentor for Christian leadership, congregations, and denominations. I will also do some virtual and a little face-to-face mentoring of individuals and groups.

As I complete 54 years of Christian ministry, I want to do some writing about what I have experienced during these decades of ministry. I have a goal to write seven books on various aspects of ministry. I also have a blog at <https://georgebullard.substack.com/> and a Facebook group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/forthtellinginnovation>.