

“The Economy and the Association”

Everybody is talking about the economy...and it is no secret that the U.S. economy is in a period of serious challenge and volatility. It is felt at all levels and in all arenas of our economic structure. Rising costs of living, declining home values, slumping economic indicators, and volatile investment markets create more than just a bit of uncertainty for individuals, businesses, and service providers. Even churches and associations of churches are among those entities that must manage the realities of a slumping economy.

I am joining in the conversation...with this month’s *Mid-South Baptist* article, even though I am reluctant to use this space to talk about money and associational finances. God has richly blessed the churches of this association and the churches of this association have generously shared those blessings through faithful gifts that allow our Association to assist churches in fulfilling the Great Commission in their communities and around the world. **We are blessed and grateful.** So, I am not writing this article because we are fearful about finance. I am not writing because we are panicky about predictions of the financial future. I am not even writing to ask our churches to “give more” to the Association. I am joining this “economic conversation” because I believe the challenges we face as an Association should be clearly identified and talked about “out loud,” so that we can negotiate and manage those challenges together.

The good news is...the economy of the association is not “broken” as evidenced by the continuing generosity of participating churches and the fact that our “receipts” or “contributions” are still slightly higher than our “expenses.” For the last three months, however, church contributions to MSBA are approximately \$37,000 (24%) below budget projections. Year to date, church contributions are running 11.42% under budget and approximately \$19,000 behind last year’s actual receipts. Fortunately, these church contribution shortfalls are offset by contributions from investment accounts held by our Mid-South Baptist Foundation. This is a blessing for the Association, but merits a watchful eye given the ups and downs of a volatile investment market.

The best news is...The “bottom line” for our associational economy is that we are committed to and trusting in God’s economy. We believe God will provide what we need, when we need it. His blessing is not controlled by existing economic conditions and our ultimate trust is in His provision. We, as an association of churches believe, “*Our God shall supply all our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*” We also believe that “*much is required of those to whom much is given.*” Therefore, we will seek to honor God by exercising the best possible stewardship over what God provides.

Our commitment to the churches of MSBA...is that we are prepared to practice the best possible stewardship of associational resources. Here are the ways in which we will live out that commitment: (1) We will continue to *meet our obligations while controlling our fixed expenses* as much as possible. That could mean that we will delay some facility improvement and staffing plans. It may mean that we renegotiate some of the service contracts necessary for operation of the Association. It does mean that we manage our expenses carefully. (2) We will stand by our commitment to *operate according to cash flow*. As we face economic challenge we will make necessary adjustments on a month-by-month basis and work hard to be sure that “we do not spend what we do not have.” (3) We will *maintain a “church first” philosophy in our spending*. We will prioritize our expenses and work hard to minimize any impact on the Association’s ability to provide resources to assist churches. In other words, financial challenge will not distract us from our commitment to focus on providing resources to assist churches. The work of an association is comprised of the work and ministry of the churches and we will attempt to manage our resources in a manner that supports the work of the churches. (4) Finally, and most importantly, we will *continue to pray for God’s blessing upon the churches* and His guidance in our management of His resources. We will “praise God, from whom all blessing flows” and we will trust God to “supply all our needs through His riches in glory.” We will honor God with prayerful stewardship and careful management. AND...we will continue to praise God for the great things He is doing through his churches in the Mid-South!

Bro. Mike