

Happy Birthday Baptist Association!

Over the next several months, Southern Baptists will be celebrating in various ways the 300th Anniversary of the Baptist Association in America. There will even be a special event at the Southern Baptist Convention in San Antonio to commemorate the birth of the association and celebrate cooperative ministry. You are invited to join the party!

The first Baptist Association in America was birthed by a small band of Particular Baptist churches in Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in 1707 at Pennepek, Pennsylvania. Known as the Philadelphia Baptist Association, these Colonial Baptists acted upon their concern for doctrinal unity, their need for fellowship, and their zeal for evangelism, to form the body which set the stage and became the model for future associations, state conventions, and national entities. Better still, this young association “got it right” from the outset in terms of where the attention of Baptist associations must be focused. The *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association* remind us that the Association was organized to meet annually “to consult about such things as were wanting in the churches, and to set them in order.” As Baptist Historian Walter Shurden asserts, “*In the first half of the eighteenth century the Philadelphia Association focused on the needs of the churches and the ministry.*” This pioneering association of churches was clearly focused upon knowing the needs of the churches, cooperatively meeting those needs, and assisting the churches in their tasks of education, evangelism, and missions. They got off to the right kind of start and set a high standard still worthy of emulation.

The Mid-South Baptist Association is one of 1,200 Southern Baptist associations that share the heritage of the Philadelphia Baptist Association. It is appropriate that we should share in the celebration of the rich history of Baptist associations in America. It is also appropriate for us to work hard to faithfully emulate the example set by the first association in supporting the work of the churches. I believe we are working hard to become an association with *strategies* that are driven by the churches, *priorities* that are based upon biblical mandates, *resources* that are made available to support the churches, and a *consciousness* that our work is not about associations or denominations, but about the growth of the Kingdom through the work of the churches. With God’s help, we can stay on this path and continue to grow as an association that faces into the realities of Southern Baptist life, builds the relationships necessary for cooperative ministry, and maintains the relevance of associational work to the ministries of the churches.

The longer I live, the more chronologically-mature I become, and the more senior citizen benefits I enjoy, the more I am drawn to an assessment of the aging process popularized by a television commercial in the 1990’s—“*You’re not getting older, you’re getting better.*” The premise of the commercial message, apart from the intent to sell older people a magic potion, is that the accumulation of years can and should result in a richer, fuller, and more meaningful life. Every year that passes prompts me to personalize the question: “*Is my body just getting older, or am I getting better?*” It is helpful, and revealing, to ask a similar question of our own local Baptist body as we approach the 300th anniversary of the Baptist Association in America. “*Are we just getting organizationally-older or are we getting cooperatively-better at supporting the work and*

*ministry of the church?" We share with other Baptist associations the responsibility for getting better as we get older. May God grant us His blessing, His help, and His strength for the journey. *May God grow us older...and make us better...for His Kingdom's sake.**

Bro. Mike