

by Eddie Pettit

Southern Baptists are known by evangelicals as the ones with a great cooperative giving effort. The Southern Baptist Convention's method of giving has been studied by many denominations and those denominations are in awe at the way churches give and distribute money. The SBC concept of the Cooperative Program began in 1925, just a few years before the great depression. A way to help pool resources was needed so that the work of missions and ministry could be accomplished. It is such a novel approach, yet many others have tried and failed to develop a similar program in their denomination.

For starters, the Cooperative Program, (CP), is a voluntary program. There is no set amount, no set fee, and no mandates for giving. It is strictly voluntary. My church decides how much money they would like to give to help all SBC causes. They can choose a set dollar amount, or a percentage amount of their offerings. For many years churches were challenged to give on a percentage basis, thereby enabling all churches to have the same sacrifices, not the same amount of money.

Each year the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) meets in June and votes on a budget that dictates how the monies that go to the SBC will be spent. Those voting represent the convention, even though not all churches will be present to vote. The monies are divided into many areas, including SBC agencies, seminaries, the International Mission Board, and North American Mission Board.

The state convention also has a yearly meeting to decide how to spend its portion of the Cooperative Program monies. Each convention votes on the percentage of CP money that is used in its state and how much is to be sent to the SBC for distribution according to the SBC vote.

The Cooperative Program depends on trust. Each church believes that the SBC and the state convention will use its money for the purpose for which it was voted. This method represents cooperation at its best. For more than 80 years Baptists have been giving monies and reaching many people through this method.

In addition to CP, the SBC also has two major offerings to help missions work, The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® for North American missions and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® for international missions. These two missions offerings are in addition to the CP monies these agencies receive. By receiving CP monies for agency staff, 100 percent of these missions offerings go to support missionaries and their ministries.

In addition to the CP, the SBC cooperates in other ways. A team approach is employed. Each state convention works with other state conventions as a team. The team extends to the SBC agencies, working cooperatively to reach the world. Within each state convention there is cooperation between the state convention and the association, and between the state convention and the local church.

This cooperation can be understood as we explore the concept of disaster relief. SBC Disaster Relief is coordinated by the North American Mission Board (NAMB), but is manned by state conventions. NAMB does not own disaster relief units, has no feeding, chain saw, or mud-out teams. These are all owned or coordinated through state conventions. Using this approach, disaster response happens when we all work together to form a team of disaster relief volunteers. In fact, when a national disaster relief meeting is held, each state convention pays its own way to the meeting, and the decisions on how Southern Baptists will respond is a collaboration of all state conventions and the North American Mission Board.

A similar approach through the International Mission Board (IMB) enables these same state conventions to respond through the IMB. The NAMB process is still in operation, in cooperation with Baptist Global Response. Therefore, the same responders work both in the United States and overseas.

Within each state, the state convention manages its own disasters. If the state convention needs more help to handle their disaster, they call NAMB. NAMB will then call out other states to respond to the stricken state. This cooperation is possible because everyone sees themselves as members of a team. The game is bigger than the players, and more can be accomplished together than can be done alone.

Don and Teena Lykins, while living many miles from South Carolina, enjoy a cooperation with like-minded Christians in a way that many cannot understand. People in South Carolina pray for their ministry, travel there to assist in reaching people, and give money through the Cooperative Program that also helps support the work of reaching people in South Dakota.

While you may have never heard of Sisseton, South Dakota, your Cooperative Program dollars have been there for many years, and now by contacting Don you can travel there to assist him in developing a camp that will reach many kids for Christ.

What can you do? Don's dream is to build a camp where kids can hear about Christ, where people of different races can begin dialogue about kingdom life, and where groups of men can come to explore being Christian men. You can assist him in all of these. There are buildings to be built, perhaps funding these buildings yourself as a men's ministry group. Then there is the need for developing a camp program, a ropes course, outdoor activities, and staff to direct and run a camp.

There are opportunities for men's groups to travel there to hunt, and do evangelism using Dakota Sonshine as a place to stay and minister while you are there. Turkey (three of the four species are in the area), deer, and pheasant abound. Men can hunt, while witnessing to men on the reservation and in town. Baptist Men on mission to men in the Dakotas—now that is something to get excited about.

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