The Southern Baptist Convention

Southern Baptists are not hierarchical, with a top-down organizational structure. Southern Baptists use the phrase “autonomous” and will only be called a “denomination” in the word’s most general meaning. Churches that practice believer’s baptism by immersion have been called “denominational” but this is temporary and different churches. This group of churches has never been called a “denomination” and does not believe in the idea of denominational structure. Churches that practice believer’s baptism by immersion are not members of denominational structures.

Churches

A church aligns itself with the SBC by formally identifying with the Convention and contributing to Convention work through a cooperating state convention or through the SBC Executive Committee. In fact, the SBC has no members. A person becomes a Southern Baptist by joining a local church or church-type mission that cooperates with the Convention. Each church or church-type mission that cooperates with the Convention makes a commitment to Convention work in the previous year.

Synergy and Cooperation

Why is it a fellowship of churches, associations, state conventions, and the Southern Baptist Convention that cooperates together? It is natural and biblical that churches would want the opportunity to identify with other like-minded churches. This allows churches to be a part of a larger enterprise, pooling their resources to establish and advance Great Commission work. This loose-knit network, structure creates a synergy, a multiplying impact, the whole being greater than the sum of the individual parts. These churches work together as a church family to express their convictions and realize their vision.

Flexibility and Freedom

Convention officers have no power to dictate the policies of congregational self-governance and self-support. Local churches select their own staff, choose their own ministers, adopt their own budgets, organize their own ministries, hold local elections, make their own decisions, set their own goals, own their own policies and bylaws, and establish their own membership requirements.

Local churches select their own staff, ordain their own ministers, adopt their own budgets, organize their own ministries, hold local elections, make their own decisions, set their own goals, own their own policies and bylaws, and establish their own membership requirements.

The Southern Baptist Convention does none of these, for it is not a church. It is an autonomous fellowship of churches that has no members. The SBC Constitution is clear: the SBC “provides no plan of control and makes no attempt to exert control over any Southern Baptist body.” The Convention does not ordain ministers, send missionaries, or establish churches, key components of Southern Baptist tradition and practice. It makes no policy, establishes no curriculum, or ordain ministers. It does not enter into formal relationships with inter-denominational councils or missionary initiatives.

Cooperative Diversity

Within the Body of Christ is a great diversity of gifts, temperament, races, and cultures. This is not a problem but a strength. From this range of qualities within their own fellowships and across the cooperative network, Baptist Churches learn from and complement one another. This is not a matter of moral or doctrinal compromise. You cannot believe and do just anything and remain a part of the Southern Baptist network. All Baptist bodies have a common commitment and, within these limits, there is room for cooperative diversity.

Through many Baptists work closely with other Christian groups on matters of social justice, evangelism in their local communities, the Southern Baptist Convention provides a forum for fellowship, breach, and cooperation with those organizations that share the values and mission of the SBC.

The Southern Baptist Convention exists to assist autonomous Baptist churches of all sizes and shapes to attempt great things for God, linking arms and working together in cooperation. Such cooperation provides the opportunity for groups of churches to achieve common Kingdom purposes.

The beauty of how Southern Baptists work together for causes they care about that each church association, state convention, ethnic and racial fellowship, and the entities that work to assist those working with others in a common cause, is the result of mutual respect and trust. While the SBC body is perfect, the faith of those who make up the Baptist body is not. Yet, this diversity, which leverages the strengths of the other in a way that amplifies the collective abilities of the whole. This family of Baptists is the Southern Baptist network.

Cooperating Baptist Organizations

The SBC maintains formal cooperative relationships with forty-one state and regional Baptist conventions in the United States and its territories. These state and regional conventions provide multiple services with, among, cooperating churches in their respective states or regions. Some of these services include ministers to assist churches in areas such as evangelism in their local communities, the Southern Baptist Convention provides a forum for fellowship, breach, and cooperation with those organizations that share the values and mission of the SBC.

At the national level, these ministries fall into seven general categories:

- Advocacy for religious liberty
- Bible study literature production
- Church health, disaster relief mobilization
- Educational development
- Evangelism
- Media ministry
- Ministerial service opportunities

Resources, Training, and Service Opportunities

The Southern Baptist Convention and its family of Baptist bodies provide resources and training to help Baptist churches and associations equip themselves to fulfill their mission and purposes.

Ministers

In Southern Baptist life, licensing and ordination are matters of church self-governance. There is no doctrinal control or ordination list. The list of Southern Baptist ministers on mission is maintained by the Executive Committee. This list is available from the reports of the churches and associations that cooperate with the Convention. It is a list of ministers who work or have worked in SBC-supported missions.

At the national level, these ministries fall into seven general categories:

- International missions
- Native missions
- Educational developement
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The SBC Annual Meeting

Each year, representatives (called messengers) from churches that cooperate with and support the SBC convene for a two-day annual meeting. During the annual meeting, Baptist messengers adopt the SBC allocation budget, elect officers who govern its board, and elect other officers of conventions and messengers, resolve bylaw revisions, consider resolutions, and other business that is being worked on during our cooperative efforts as Southern Baptists.

Each Baptist church that identifies itself in “hearty cooperation” with the Convention, as described in SBC Constitution Article III and 18, contributed to Convention work during the previous year and may elect as messengers to the annual meeting. Messengers are encouraged to participate fully in the annual meeting, voting on all matters according to their consciences.

All registered messengers may make a motion during the general business sessions. Motions usually address questions of Convention government or sequences relative to one of its entities. Many motions are referred to the appropriate entity or the Executive Committee for review before bringing them back to the Convention at the following annual meeting. The Convention assigns a specific五分钟 time limit to the discussion of any resolution or business item. The convention bylaws of each entity are fully under the control of its respective board of trustees, but the platform and governance for the Convention can be found in the sidebar links at SBC.net/VirtualAnnualMeeting.

Resolutions differ from motions in that resolutions are non-binding statements that express the collective opinion of the messengers at a specific SBC annual meeting on a given subject. Covering a wide range of theological, social, and practical topics, resolutions address a wide variety of matters about important moral, ethical, and public policy issues; speak to the broad cultural moral issues of the day; and provide helpful tools for our churches and entities to speak with authority in the public square about the biblical application of timeless and timely matters. Pre-registered messengers may submit proposed resolutions prior to the SBC annual meeting. All resolutions are posted and can be read in our entity at SBC.net/resolutions.

Its Entities

When the Convention is not in session, eleven Convention ministry entities and the SBC Executive Committee fulfill specific ministerial mandates assigned by the Convention or by others. The Executive Committee is charged by the Convention bylaws to provide administrative support to the Convention and is receive advice and direction from the respective boards of trustees. The Executive Committee is the executive entity of the Convention in all its affairs not specifically assigned to an executive committee, board, or agency at the direction of the Convention.

The Executive Committee is charged to serve as the fiduciary, fiscal, and executive entity of the Convention, in partnership with WMU, to promote and execute the Cooperative Program. The Cooperative Program raises over $500 million annually to support Southern Baptist missions and ministry through the two mission boards, the SBC Executive Committee, and Woman’s Missionary Union. The Executive Committee allocates these funds to missionaries, church plants, ongoing church revitalizations, and other Southern Baptist needs around the world.

Its Executive Committee

In addition to the eleven entity ministers to the Convention, the Executive Committee also includes eight individuals from across the states who are elected to their positions by the states. These eighty-six individuals meet three times each year to prepare and review the Convention budget, act in an advisory capacity on all questions of cooperation among the states, and fulfill myriad other duties as spelled out in SBC Bylaw 18 and the EC’s six ministry statements. These eighty-six individuals meet three times each year to prepare and review the Convention budget, act in an advisory capacity on all questions of cooperation among the states, and fulfill myriad other duties as spelled out in SBC Bylaw 18 and the EC’s six ministry statements.

The Cooperative Program: Like a Mighty River

The Cooperative Program is a United method of raising and distributing funds for the missions and ministry of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Cooperative Program is like a mighty river that flows from the churches in each state to the SBC to the Southern Baptist Convention entities for distribution. The river collects offerings from the churches in each state, which are used to fund the Southern Baptist Convention entities such as the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, the International Mission Board, the Southern Baptist Convention Women’s Missionary Union, and other Southern Baptist entities.

The Cooperative Program provides the funds necessary to support the Southern Baptist Convention’s missions and ministry efforts. The Cooperative Program budget is allocated to the Southern Baptist Convention entities based on a formula that reflects the mission and ministry priorities of the Convention. The Cooperative Program budget is allocated to the Southern Baptist Convention entities based on a formula that reflects the mission and ministry priorities of the Convention.

In addition to gifts received through the Cooperative Program, the Southern Baptist Convention also receives designated gifts through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and the Lottie Moon Easter Offering as well as gifts to the International Missions and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. These offerings are used to support the Southern Baptist Convention’s missions and ministry efforts.

States fund state and multi-state agencies and forward a portion of their gifts to the churches through the Cooperative Program.

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The Baptist Resolution Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is responsible for overseeing the annual business and making recommendations to the SBC annual meeting. The Resolution Committee is composed of delegates elected from state Baptist conventions. These delegates meet each year to discuss, debate, and adopt resolutions to be presented to the SBC annual meeting.

The executive committee of the Southern Baptist Convention is primarily responsible for managing the Convention's activities and facilitating the annual meeting. The Executive Committee is composed of seven members who are elected at the annual meeting. The Executive Committee is responsible for overseeing the Convention's finances, making budget recommendations, and facilitating the annual business.

The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. It is composed of more than 14,000 churches and has a membership of over 15 million. The Convention is headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee, and is governed by the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee.

In addition to the resolutions adopted at the annual meeting, the Southern Baptist Convention is also responsible for providing financial support to various entities and individuals. These entities include Southern Baptist Theological Seminaries, LifeWay Christian Resources, Baptist Press, and the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.
Baptist that motions identifies are questions of Convention governance or requests relative motions the general business sessions. Encouraged to participate fully in the annual meeting, Convention Article III, and contributed to Convention doing through our cooperative efforts as Southern Baptists. Each Baptist church that identifies itself in ‘Hearty cooperation’ with the Convention, its Executive Committee in SBC Convention Article 18, and contributed to Convention work during the previous fiscal year may elect and send messengers to the annual meeting. Messengers are encouraged to participate fully in the annual meeting, voting on all matters according to their consciences. Any registered messenger may make a motion during the general business sessions. Motions usually address questions of Convention governance or sequences relative to one of its entities. Many motions are referred to the appropriate entity or the Executive Committee for review. The Executive Committee in turn brings back to the Convention at the following annual meeting. The Convention assigns responsibilities for the governance of each entity is fully under the control of its respective board of trustees. Decisions made for the Convention can be found in the sidebar links at SBC.net/boards.

Resolutions differ from motions in that resolutions are non-binding statements that express the collective opinion of the messengers at a specific SBC annual meeting as a given subject. Covering a wide range of theological, social, and practical topics, resolutions reflect popular concern and importance about moral, ethical, and public policy issues; speak to the broader cultural arena; and provide helpful tools for our churches and entities to speak with authority in the public square about the biblical application of timely and timeless matters. Pre-registered messengers may submit proposed resolutions prior to the SBC annual meeting. All resolutions are posted and can be read in our entity at SBC.net/resolutions.

Its Entities
When the Convention is not in session, eleven Convention ministry entities and the SBC Executive Committee fulfill specific ministerial roles assigned by the Convention. The entities assigned by the Convention in its sixty-four “ministry statement” given to the entities by the Convention to the SBC.net/aboutus/legal/organizationmanual.asp. Governance of these entities is by law, contract, or trust, and includes about an equal number of pastors and church members serve as the body of Christ and are responsible for managing the entity’s ministry.

The Executive Committee in addition to the eleven ministry entities, messengers to the Convention elect eighty-three individuals from across the nation to serve on the SBC Executive Committee (EC). The president, secretary, and treasurer are assigned to the Executive Committee, a total of eighty-six members. The Committee, as assigned by the Convention in all its decision, is assigned to another board or entity. The EC is composed of members from sixty-one and the role regions and includes about an equal number of pastors and church staff from many church types and sizes, and layers upon a wide variety of professions. These eight-six individuals meet three times each year to prepare and review the Convention budget, act in an advisory capacity on all questions of cooperation among the entities of the Convention and among the SBC and the state conventions, conduct the general work of promotion and public relations of the Southern Baptist Convention, and work with the entities in regard to their respective ministry projects, and other official duties as specified in SBC Bylaw 16 and the EC’s ministry statements.

Its Funding
The principal means by which Southern Baptist churches make their respective state convention ministries and the missions and ministries of the SBC is through the Cooperative Program. In 1925, recognizing the need to consolidate financial appeals to the churches that host of the states within the states and across the nation, the Cooperative Program was organized. The Cooperative Program includes the Southern Baptist Convention, its state conventions, invited the state conventions to partner with it, with the states, and to do all that it can to assist states, and state conventions, with its Cooperative Program mission. On the level, local churches participate in a local association of churches. The “Lodges,” component of the Cooperative Program ministry (see Acts 1:8). On the state level, churches participate in common missions, ministries, and fellowship in an attempt to evangelize and serve the spiritual needs of those in the “Lodges.” At the national level, churches participate in the Great Commission, to be done by all parts of the earth” component of missions and ministries.

Churches give to state and SBC ministries from the Cooperative Program. The state conventions receive gifts from the churches. Messengers from the churches in each state each year, and the percentage of Cooperative Program gifts from churches in each state is used for state-sponsored ministry. The percentage is forwarded to the national Convention for the Southern Baptist Convention’s ministerial budget. The percentage forwarded varies from state to state. Historical data of Cooperative Program gifts, may be found at SBC.net/aboutus/legal.

The Cooperative Program: Like a Mighty River
In addition to gifts made through the Cooperative Program, the SBC also receives designated funds for Global Hunger Relief Offering® for North American Missions. The Cooperative Program also receives designated funds for Global Hunger Relief Offering® for North American Missions. The Cooperative Program also receives designated funds for Global Hunger Relief Offering® for North American Missions. The Cooperative Program also receives designated funds for Global Hunger Relief Offering® for North American Missions.
Cooperating Baptist Organizations

The SBC maintains a formal cooperative relationship with forty-one Baptist colleges and academies within the United States and its territories. These state conventions participate in SBC causes voluntarily. Each autonomous Baptist church, association, ethnic fellowship, and state convention, and auxiliary—retains its sovereignty and is fully autonomous.

Synergy and Cooperation
Why is there a fellowship of churches, associations, state conventions, and denominational organs, and what cooperation does that entail that cooperates together? It is natural and biblical that churches would want the opportunity to identify with other like-minded churches. This allows churches to be a part of a larger enterprise, pooling their resources to establish and advance Great Commission work. This loose-knit network creates a synergy, where the impact of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. For this reason, churches qualify to send messengers to the SBC to vote for their state convention delegates at the annual meeting.

Individuals
Individuals do not “join” the Southern Baptist Convention. In fact, the SBC has no members. A person becomes a “Southern Baptist” by joining a local church or church-type entity that aligns with the Convention in its cooperative endeavors. Each church can tell its membership the requirements and expectations.

Ministers
In Southern Baptist life, licensing and ordination are local church prerogatives. There are no denominational ordination lists. The list of Southern Baptist ministers on the SBC’s ministerialSEARCH is a compilation of ministers who have indicated their cooperation with the SBC by listing their names in the annual Executive Committee report. Since the SBC is not a denominational body, it has no directory of licensed ministers; nor does it maintain a list of “certified” ministers. Ministers belong to the local church, and the local church sets the standards and practices for ordination service. The list of Southern Baptist ministers is simply a compilation of those ministers who have indicated their cooperation with the SBC, and it is maintained by the local churches.

Resources, Training, and Service Opportunities
The Southern Baptist Convention and Kingdom Cruisers cooperate to leverage strengths and resources in order to provide mission and service opportunities. Local churches choose their own staff, ordain their own ministers, adapt their own budgets, organize their own ministries, maintain their own legal status, enjoy their own property interests ... and establish their own membership requirements.
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