

Baptist Trumpet Report for Local Associations 2023

“The *Baptist Trumpet* is designed to inspire and inform our readers. Each issue includes up-to-date news articles about matters that pertain to the religious community as a whole, inspirational articles and stories pertaining to our churches. We include regular reports about the activities of the other three departments of the BMA of Arkansas (Central Baptist College, State Missions and Youth Department) as well as the various departments of the BMA of America.” This is our mission statement that is included on our website to tell what we are about.

Over the past few years, we have been able to bring more stability to our financial situation through needed subscription rate increases. Even during that time, we shared that it was important that we do our best to increase our subscriber base to keep our per subscriber cost down. As we considered how to make that happen, we kept coming back to a problem that seems to be affecting the work of the BMA on every level — a decline in associational involvement from the local level to the national level. This results in fewer subscribers sharing the costs for producing and printing the *Trumpet* each week. I believe this decline in associational involvement is directly impacting the *Baptist Trumpet*.

Over the past year, we have been led to do our part in encouraging more involvement in our associated work on every level. The decline in active participation in our work is something that can no longer be ignored.

We released a four-page insert entitled, “Why Do We Associate?” in our April 19, 2023 issue. The goal was to help all who will read it understand that we can do more as we work together for the glory of God. We have also produced a booklet from that content that we want to share with anyone who has not read it or if you will share it with someone that needs to read it.

To follow up on the special insert, we shared an Associational Involvement Survey with pastors to see if we could get some feedback on where we stand and how we could improve and encourage more involvement. We had 55 pastors complete the survey, and I want to share a summary of the results with you.

While we did not ask for names, we did use some demographic information to help understand the responses that were received — 55% of those that responded were full-time pastors, 40% were part-time or bi-vocational pastors and 5% were retired from pastoring. The size of the church pastored also varied, with 53% averaging less than 50 on Sunday morning.

We also asked about the involvement of the pastor personally, and also the church, in the associational work. This is where I noticed something that confirms what I have seen in the ministry of the *Trumpet* since I have been here. Where 1 is not involved and 5 is highly involved, most pastors (64%) rated their church’s involvement at a 3 or 4, while most pastors (60%) rated themselves at a 4 or 5. This means that while the pastor may be involved in the associated work, their church is not involved at the same level.

Many of the survey responses said they would be more involved if their church members showed more interest in being involved. I would challenge you that the church will generally be as involved in the associated work as their leader allows and leads them to be. The thing I have noticed from talking to many pastors over the past few years, especially those that make the choice to discontinue their church’s church plan (or lead their church to do so), is that they don’t

understand the importance of keeping their people informed through the ministry of the *Baptist Trumpet*.

We also asked questions about how effective they rated their local association in serving member churches. Only 16% said their local association was effective (rated 4 & 5) in serving member churches, 56% rated their local association very low (rated 1 & 2) in their effectiveness of serving member churches and another 27% rated them at the mid-level of 3 in effectiveness.

We followed up these questions and asked for things that could be done on each level — local, state and national — that would encourage more participation. Here is a summary of the suggestions about each level:

- **Local Associations** — Most survey participants expressed a desire to have better connection and fellowship between churches and their members, and not just the pastors. Others also suggested that simply being contacted by someone in the local association for support and mentoring would be important. Another suggestion was to have a better vision for what can be accomplished together as an association and have clear communication about those goals. One suggestion that would be beneficial is to have an associational ambassador who is responsible for reaching out to the churches and pastors in the association.

- **State Associations** — Many survey participants suggested that more awareness of what is happening with State Mission projects would help. It was also suggested that better communication overall, especially about how to get involved, would be helpful by not assuming people know about all ministries. Contact with churches and pastors throughout the year would also encourage more involvement. Providing clearly stated goals for the association would help. Producing conferences and resources to equip churches and leaders was also suggested.

- **National Associations** — On the national level, it seems that many feel like they do not have a voice in decisions that are made because everything is already decided before they arrive at the meeting and the national meeting seems to be a formality. It was suggested that leaders make sure there is accountability to the churches and to be careful not to move away from accountability in favor of a “corporate” structure. An investment in helping/advising churches for spiritual growth and outreach in their communities was suggested, along with more visits by department directors and/or missionaries in the churches. Another suggestion was to provide some resources for pastors via a website that includes history, doctrinal studies, an archive of Sunday School publications, books and research for some issues they may deal with in their ministry, such as Calvinism, Rapture, Baptist History, et al., Associations vs. Convention, Bible versions/translations and qualifications for pastors, missionaries and leaders.

In all levels of the associated work, we need to have an understanding that most of the churches in our association are rural churches with bivocational pastors that have a difficult time attending meetings due to work schedules and the length of the meetings. There were many suggestions about prioritizing the business that needs to be taken care of since that is the reason they are being sent, but at the same time enjoying times of preaching and worship together was important. Some type of training and networking events (i.e., something like the Leadership Cruise was mentioned) at every level was also suggested to help build those close relationships with people that are serving in similar roles.

You might ask why I would share all of this information at a time when I should be sharing about the ministry of the *Baptist Trumpet*. The health and involvement in our associated work directly affects the ability of the *Trumpet* to have an effective ministry of informing and inspiring the people in your churches. We strongly believe it is important for us to do all we can to encourage more involvement in our associational work on every level. We do this with every issue we produce by sharing what we are doing as we work together through the Baptist Missionary Association.

If you want to know what your state missionaries are doing or if they have any special needs you can help meet, read their weekly reports in the *Baptist Trumpet*. Do you want to hear updates about Central Baptist College and the exciting things that are happening on campus? Read their weekly report that appears in the *Baptist Trumpet*. Do you want to hear about the many different ways the Youth Department (Student Ministry Matters) is equipping student ministers across Arkansas and beyond to reach the next generation with Christ? Read the article featured each week in the *Baptist Trumpet*.

These are ways we seek to keep you informed about the work of the BMA of Arkansas departments each week, but we also started a new four-page insert — BMA of Arkansas: Transformed. The purpose is to share stories of those that have been transformed because of the ministry of each of our departments. It is included every other month.

Each week in the *Baptist Trumpet*, we also feature the latest news and information for the national work. Information about conferences, ministry updates and other important information is shared to keep you and your people informed about our associational work. We also have the special four-page BMA Global Ministry Insert that is featured every other month.

I have asked for your help before, but I hope you hear the heart of what we are about at the *Baptist Trumpet* through this report. We exist to help further the Baptist Missionary Association on every level. We need you to be a part by doing three things:

- If your church does not have a church plan, will you let us set you up on a free two-month trial? All we need is a list of names and addresses. We want your people to understand what they are missing. I have said it before, and I truly believe it — the best church member is an informed church member.

- If your church has an active church plan, will you be diligent to add all active members to the list? Many churches require people to ask to be added to the list, but most new members do not know enough to ask. What better way to help them understand what the BMA is doing than allowing them to read about it each week. There is no doubt that we will share more information than it is possible to share via a church newsletter or announcements each week.

- Finally, many that need to hear what I shared today are not here. Will you be an ambassador for the BMA on every level and also for the *Baptist Trumpet*? I would love to come to your church and share about all we do, but it is essential that we have advocates who will encourage others to subscribe to the only weekly newspaper in the BMA.

We have also had some discussions about producing some regional Connect Arkansas rallies across the state as a way to provide an opportunity for local associations to fellowship together, allow you to hear from your state ministries and missionaries and also provide some type of equipping training for pastors and members. We hope to be able to share more about this in the coming weeks, but if you have suggestions on how we can get this going, please let me know. We

will be looking for host churches in different regions and would also love to have suggestions on what you would be looking for on the equipping and training side of the event.

As I close, I will make the commitment to continue to produce an informative and inspirational paper each week. We want to be an asset to your ministry if you will let us. If you have any suggestions on what we can do to make the *Trumpet* better, we want to hear from you.

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to serve you through this ministry.