

ARIZONA SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION COUNCIL REPORT

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Executive Director

Much has changed in the last six months since the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Things have changed in our country and things have changed in our churches. It is safe to say that nothing will be the same after this crisis is over. One thing that has not changed, however, is our mission of working together to make disciples of all peoples in Arizona and around the world. It is the same purpose that was expressed by Mrs. G. H. Woodson almost 100 years ago on September 20, 1928 when nine Southern Baptist Churches met in Globe, Arizona to organize a new state convention.

“The object of this convention shall be Missionary, educational, and beneficent, the promotion of harmony of feeling and concert of action among Baptists, and the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Arizona and throughout the whole world. And to this end we pledge our support.”

We believe that this purpose is best expressed and this mission most successfully advanced when we join together to accomplish it. We believe we can do more together than we can do by ourselves. In other words, we are better together! There is a kind of synergy than results from working together that not only gives us more power collectively, but also makes our churches more effective individually in their own ministry settings. That is why we exist as a convention. This is a critical time to renew that sense of purpose and express it in a fresh way to the next generation.

Denominee Report and Recommendations

When the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention began in 1928, a structure was formed to enable the churches to accomplish their purpose. Structures and methods have changed over the years from programs that were rolled out by the national convention to state convention staff who helped implement them. Today, we live in a new era where churches have many choices about the way they do ministry and information is readily available at the click of a mouse

button. Churches are diverse and their ministry needs are unique. The role of the convention is no longer as the provider of ministry related programs, but a facilitator of processes that can help churches accomplish their mission. For that reason, we have been working with an organization called Denominee for the past year to help us understand the new role of our convention today and for the future.

We believe the best role for our convention as an entity is to be a catalyst to enable our churches to experience greater effectiveness in accomplishing our mission through the synergy of working together. This will take place through cultivating relationships, convening leaders, curating strengths, and expanding vision. The results will be developing disciple-makers, strengthening leaders, multiplying churches, and transforming communities. The key question we want to ask churches in this process is, “What is the next step you need to take to accomplish your mission and how can we help you take it?” This will mean focusing less on events and more on connecting with churches directly. Our convention staff will focus on helping churches take their unique next step. We still want to gather to talk about how we can be more effective in ministry, but we want that be in response to the needs expressed by churches and leaders. It will take time for us to adjust to this new approach, but it has the potential of energizing our work in a new way. It is almost like re-starting our convention!

A New Name for a New Day

Since we are changing the way our convention relates to the churches in doing the work we are called to do together, it is time for us to consider a new way of identifying who we are. The Denominee Team is recommending that we begin using the name “Arizona Mission Network of Southern Baptists.” We work together as a network of churches to accomplish our mission. Our network is made up of Southern Baptist Churches, but our identity is not defined by the southern region of our country. Our mission begins in Arizona but it extends to all nations. We are a network that is held together and focused on the Great Commission. The expression of that is working together to reach our state with the gospel, helping each other to make disciples, and sending missionaries around the world. That is why we believe Arizona Mission Network of Southern Baptists is the best way to identify ourselves as we move forward together. We are asking that the Convention Council affirm this proposed name change to be presented at the annual meeting in November and voted on in the 2021 Annual Meeting.

2020 Annual Meeting Pivot

Due to concerns related to COVID-19 and space limitations of social distancing, we have made a change to the way the annual meeting will be conducted this year. While the originating location for the meeting will be Calvary PHX church, the meeting will be broadcast to three regional locations which will be interactive to allow messengers to vote, ask questions, make motions and nominate officers for election. These locations will be Stoneridge Church in Yuma, Mountain View Baptist Church in Tucson, and Greenlaw Church in Flagstaff. The Pastors Conference will be broadcast to these locations as well, however, only the Convention Business session will be fully interactive. This change allows us to accommodate more people who can attend and participate in the meeting closest to where they live. We are encouraging people who live near these regional locations to take advantage of this opportunity so it will relieve space concerns at the Phoenix location. The Mission Fair will be virtual so there will be no booths or tables set up at the Phoenix location. Meals will not be served in any of the locations.

While it will cost more to conduct the meeting in this way, it is worth the expense to make it possible for our messengers to participate safely and conveniently. If there is a positive response to having regional locations for the annual meeting, it could be something we offer again in the future. In any case, we hope doing the annual meeting in this way this year will be well received and will make it possible for many to participate who would not otherwise.

Helping Churches in Crisis (2020 Arizona Mission Offering)

When the COVID-19 crisis began, we knew that churches would be hit hard financially. We wanted to create a safety net to help churches in crisis. As a result, we decided to dedicate the 2020 Arizona Mission Offering to Helping Churches in Crisis. We have received over \$127,000 to date for this offering. 100% of these funds are being used to help churches with building payments, utility bills, or ministry staff support. Three representatives from the Convention Council Missions Team are serving as the Helping Churches in Crisis Team and are reviewing each grant request as they are received. So far, we have made grants to 26 churches totaling over \$62,000.

Our goal for this offering is to help preserve gospel witness and Kingdom influence in communities across our state. We hope every church in our convention will participate in this

offering. We have recently produced three compelling stories of churches that have already benefitted from this offering and are making them available on our website and social media. You and/or your church can give to this offering at www.azsbc.org/helping-churches-in-crisis. If you know of a church that needs help in one of the areas listed above, please direct them to the grant request form available on the same web page.

2020 Cooperative Program Giving

Arizona Southern Baptists have demonstrated their generosity and faithfulness once again in the midst of one of the most difficult years our churches have ever experienced. Giving to the Cooperative Program through August, 2020 is \$26,000 over the 2019 level. While August Cooperative Program receipts were \$40,000 less than the \$288,000 per month average, we are still over \$32,000 ahead of the budgeted amount for Cooperative Program giving through August. We are thankful for the sacrificial giving of our churches which demonstrates their heart for missions in Arizona and around the world through the Cooperative Program!

2021 AZSBC Budget

The proposed 2021 AZSBC budget is \$615,660 less than the 2020 budget. While we do not anticipate Cooperative Program giving from our churches to be less in 2021, the budget reduction is mainly due to changes in funding from the North American Mission Board and Lifeway Christian Resources. Although the budget shows a reduction of over \$600,000 from NAMB, \$500,000 of this reduction represents funds that were allocated for church planting previously but not spent. The reduced number is more realistic compared to what will actually be spent this coming year for church planting. Evangelism funding from the North American Mission Board was not reduced and will remain the same for 2021.

Lifeway Christian Resources has ceased the Ministry in Partnership funding which was providing the AZSBC with approximately \$54,000 per year for Personnel costs. We have made adjustments to the Personnel budget for 2021 to compensate for this loss of income. The budget for *Portraits* was reduced by over \$11,000 to reflect the reduction of issues from 6 to 4 in the coming year. Finally, we increased the percentage we are giving to national and international missions through the Southern Baptist Convention by .5% which resulted in an increase of over

\$16,000 in mission giving. This budget takes a cautious but optimistic approach to the year to come as we trust the Lord for His provision for the work we feel He has called us to do.

Conclusion

When Pastor Ashley Evans called our convention to a year of prayer in 2020, no one (including him) could have anticipated what would happen this year with the COVID 19 pandemic, racial tensions, and polarizing division in our country. Churches have experienced great difficulty due to limitations on meeting and ministry. Pastors have struggled with critical decisions and criticism about those decisions. Families have worked through sickness, financial trauma, and grief. Communities have suffered great losses in education, jobs, and economic stability. Missionaries have been separated from family and stranded from their places of service. In short, we have been driven to our knees to cry out to God in the midst of our distress. We have had two statewide online prayer meetings to bring us together to pray with and for one another. We have been praying for different churches every day of this year so that every church in our convention could be covered with prayer. I want to express my appreciation to Pastor Ashley for his service these past two years as our convention president, but even moreso for his spiritual leadership and sensitivity to God's leadership for this trying time. Let's continue to pray with and for one another through the rest of this year of prayer as we face difficult decisions and uncertainty in the future. I am confident that the God who has brought us victoriously through this past year will lead us through this next year in His plan and for His glory!