PILOT MOUNTAIN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

NOW WHAT?

A Five-Year Plan for Living into Our Mission

A Time of Change

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ver the past three years, the Pilot Mt. Baptist Association has undergone a remarkable transformation. This change has been anchored in the conviction that everything the Association does should glorify God, bless our pastors, and help our churches.

Beyond making sure we followed through with these large, overarching goals, we had to also look deeply into the structures, strategies, procedures, and policies of the Association to determine what needed to change and how to do it. We left no stone unturned, and assumed nothing when it came to helping revitalize the PMBA.

Although there is still more to do on an organizational level, we have come a long way. This document represents the distillation of hundreds of hours of analysis, prayer, and ongoing discussions. What you have in your hands embodies a bold plan over the next five years for the PMBA to live more fully into its renewed mission. To truly grasp the scope of what we are planning on doing, We need to provide a backdrop for why this needed to happen and how we went about revitalizing an organization that seemed to be locked into a very precipitous decline.

Why We Needed to Change



ssociations have a rich and storied past in our history as a denomination. In fact, Associations preceded our national and state conventions. For example, the Philadelphia Baptist Association was founded in 1707

by five Baptist churches in Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey, and Delaware to be a witness and transforming association for Jesus Christ. This very organization had a huge impact upon Colonial America, especially in areas related to religious freedom.

In our own state, Shubal Stearns, a convert to the faith through the preaching of George Whitfield, migrated from New England and started Sandy Creek Baptist Church in 1755. Three years later in 1758 he was the driving force behind the creation of the Sandy Creek Baptist Association which included churches from the Carolinas and Virginia. During his tenure, Sandy Creek Baptist Church planted 17 churches and sent out 125 ministers of the Gospel. It could be argued that few men had the missional impact in the early days of our country as this diminutive, bold man of faith.

These pioneers blazed a trail before us that enabled the ministries of the Association to grow and expand. For many years since its inception, it occupied a special place in Southern Baptist life. During its heyday in the mid-late twentieth century, it typically took the lead in advocating denomination-wide programs, provided just-in-time services, and connected churches to local, regional, and world-wide mission opportunities. For those raised in Southern Baptist churches, the Association seemed to be a tried and true fixture in the collaborative ministry structures of the Convention, and because of its rich past it was naturally assumed that it would be around for years to come. But recently the Association has fallen on tough times. Whether it is because of the overall deterioration of many Baptist churches nationwide; an unwillingness on the part of Associations to change and adapt; the overall rapid secularization of our culture and the resulting mistrust in religious institutions as a whole; or all the above, many Associations find themselves in rapid free-fall. This increasing decline of Associations over the last twenty-five years has led many to merge, hire part-time staff, or simply close their doors. An initial evaluation of these trends could indicate that perhaps the Association has had its day in the sun, and now something else should take its place.

We saw this same perspective communicated through our churches back in 2014 when Jim Pollard, our former Director of Missions, conducted a survey on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the PMBA. Only thirty-eight of our eighty-seven churches participated in this survey. Because Jim Pollard retired right after the information was collected, no one had the chance to review the data. I was the first person two years later as the Interim Director of Missions to take a substantial look at this information. The following summary represents the essence of that report.

The good news we gleaned from the report was that the overall strength of our Association was our long-term ministries to the poor through our Community Impact Focus Group. Whether it was the hundreds of families we touched through the Hunger Initiative; the over three thousand underprivileged children we provided free toys for every Christmas through our Toy Store Ministry; or the over two hundred people we provided free dental and medical care for at the Dixie Classic Fair, the PMBA has a solid reputation as a comprehensive provider of compassionate ministries to the least of these in our footprint. However, these same churches indicated that despite our solid impact in the area of community-based ministry, all was not well with the PMBA. A deeper examination of the data exposed the startling fact that although the PMBA did good work, it lacked a cohesive and strategic vision for the future. The evidence for this could be found in the conviction of many pastors that the PMBA was weighed down with ministry structures that were no longer fruitful. The overall deterioration in effectiveness resulted in a downward trend in participation and financial support.

Coupled with this waning effectiveness was the even more troubling perception by many that the Association seemed locked into the self-propagating cycle of pleasing certain constituencies, while being oblivious to trending opportunities of new and promising ministries. This did not bode well for the future as many leaders of these groups were growing older, with no discernible pipeline of up and coming leaders ready to fill their shoes.

All these insights brought us to the stark realization that the

number one weakness of our Association was a lack of relevance. The most sobering aspect of this conclusion was that it came from our committed churches. It would not be an exaggeration to state that if the deterioration of trust and interest increased, the PMBA would past the point of no return, and eventually would close its doors.

We were not alone in pinpointing the looming problem of relevance for the Association as an effective vehicle for missional activity. This past July, the national leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention delivered a 208-page comprehensive report was on the status of Associations in Baptist life. Obviously, there is a lot a data that can be mined from the input of the 448 respondents. Here are a couple of salient points:

• Only 65.6 percent of church leaders think that their local Baptist association is a strategic partner in helping their church to fulfill the Great Commission.

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• Only 58.5 percent of church leaders think that their church would be negatively affected if their local Baptist association ceased to exist.

This is astounding. The gist of this report revealed that many people believe that as an organizational entity, the Association has little impact and thus minimal value. How did we get to this point? The report goes on to reveal that a lack of clear associational vision and strategy was the central reason people had lost confidence in the Association.

As the leadership of the PMBA began to engage in serious deliberation back in 2015 about these very issues, it was clear that to ignore the accelerating decline of the Association would be disastrous. What was needed was both a renewed vision and the unified agreement to make it happen.

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REVISITING OUR MISSION

Four seminal events occurred that presented the leadership of the PMBA with the opportunity to right the ship.

First, the Association sold its building and property to a developer for almost three times what is was worth. This was significant because the PMBA had been in a financial slide for over six years, and had been previously approached several times with less generous offers. This offer provided

more financial stability and thus gave the Associational Leadership the room to take a deeper look at how it was doing ministry.

Second, after much debate, the Associational Leadership decided to delay any plan to build or purchase another facility. This was not an easy decision because many believed that the PMBA needed a new, or at the very least significantly upgraded building. During that ongoing debate, Northwest Baptist Church offered PMBA the use of their basement. This move not only created a better facility to house

the Bread of Life Food Pantry Ministry, it also provided a positive economical alternative for relocating the PMBA.

Third, the Leadership Network felt for over a year that the PMBA needed to be revitalized. This culminated in setting up a Leadership Retreat in February of 2016 to discuss repurposing the Association. Over twenty representatives from various PMBA ministries and roles attended this two-day retreat. Eventually the work of this retreat resulted in a new mission statement that says, "*The mission of the*

THE MISSION OF THE PMBA IS TO HELP MEMBER CHURCHES BUILD LIFELONG FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST

PMBA is to help member churches build lifelong followers of Jesus Christ."

Fourth, the vision that fueled this new mission statement was imagining what it would be like to have healthy churches work with new congregations and struggling ones to reestablish the PMBA as *"a collaborative and creative network of disciple-making churches."* This compelling picture was what eventually moved the Leadership Network to hire me as the Interim Director of Missions so that we

might accelerate the process of transforming this organization.

REFURBISHING OUR STRUCTURES

How do you change an organization that is over 130 years old? The temptation would be to simply tweak certain areas and leave less effective ones in place so as not to offend anyone. But that would be like a doctor who only treats symptoms with medication without dealing with root causes of a disease. Our situation was serious and to simply address surface issues

would give a false sense of security that could eventually lead to the demise of the Association.

Therefore, any substantial change we proposed had to go deep into the DNA of the organization, build up what was working, remove that which was ineffective, and start new compartments of innovative ministry. To do this, we had to simplify our organizational structures.

We know from experience that the more bureaucratic an

organization is, the greater the likelihood for confusion and inefficiencies. The inverse of that is also true: The simpler, more streamlined an organizational structure becomes, the easier it is to follow its mission and thereby evaluate its effectiveness.

The hard truth that any declining organization must face is that it can do many good things, and even do them well, but still miss what is most important. Typically, this missional drift initially happens in an imperceptible,

slow manner. After a while, an organization becomes so inwardly focused that everything it does becomes attached to the visionkilling goals of self-propagation and self-promotion.

We sought to halt this degradation of mission by making sure that everything we do helps churches "build lifelong followers of Jesus."

Each of these simple ministry structures are designed to represent the basic ways the PMBA serves our churches. In some ways they represent aspects of our former organization. The key difference

is that they are now interrelated channels of ministry that orbit around the purpose of helping churches make disciples. An outline of what this looks like is as follows:

- In **Church Health**, we believe that vibrant churches are doing a good job at growing disciples who are following the Great Commandment and fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 22:34-40; 28:16-20).
- In Church Planting, we believe that disciple-making

churches will be involved in church multiplication (Rom. 15:20-22).

- In **Leadership Development**, we believe that disciplemaking churches will be led by healthy leaders who are moving into Christ-likeness (1 Cor. 11:1).
- In **Community Impact**, we believe that disciplemaking churches will reach out to the least of these in our communities and beyond with the love of Christ (Matt. 25:31-46).

This simplified organizational structure has already enabled us to reduce some thirty-four different, disconnected ministries into a much smaller and more impactful number. This method has also given us the clarity of thought and boldness of faith to know how to say yes or no to new opportunities.

REFOCUSING OUR STRATEGIES

Just creating more efficient structures was not all we needed to do to revitalize the Association. It

would be akin to having a beautifully designed automobile that lacked a transmission. We might look good, but in the end we would be incapable of going anywhere. Therefore, our next step was to establish missional strategies that would drive our efforts through these four channels of ministry.

Strategy is the path or process we choose that will lead to our desired outcome. It is all about how we fulfill our why. Part of the process of creating solid strategies is to identify our optimum roles and key responsibilities with



our churches that facilitates the fulfillment of our mission.

Our optimum roles are the ways we choose to interface with our churches. If the roles are not healthy then our ability to achieve objectives will be severely hampered. Optimal roles build the relational capital of trust which is essential for the kind of cooperative environment needed to work together. I have identified three basic roles that will make any Association successful in helping churches make disciples.

This first is a **catalytic agent**. In this role, the Association helps to get churches started in an area of ministry. In a way, the role of catalytic agent causes us to lovingly challenge churches that are unaware of ministry opportunities, or are in some sort of decline that causes them to be less effective in missional endeavors. When an Association takes on this role, it is a short-term approach designed to stimulate important ministry activity.

The second role is that of **reliable advisor**. This role is activated

when churches or pastors are in crisis or need help figuring out how to take the next step towards more fully embracing their mission. Churches and their staff will have trouble. New ministry opportunities will arise. When this happens, the Association can come alongside pastors and churches to offer solid counsel. The role of reliable advisor is probably the most circumstantially-based role and is a typically short-term approach.

The third role is a strategic ally. Here, our work is to fuel

a fellowship's already existing missional flame. In this role we don't initiate ministry, we simply amplify what already exists. This is the more long-term approach we take with our churches where they get what they need from us to improve or enhance what they are already doing. Eventually, this should become our major thrust as an organization.

Not only should we make sure we gain trust through optimum roles, we also must leverage *key responsibilities* to bring about the most positive impact possible. This means

> that just as the Association focuses on key areas of ministry, it also must hone in on key actions to maximize the strategic impact of each major area of ministry focus.

> In this newly enhanced organizational strategy, we identified four vital approaches to help us accomplish our overall mission. These approaches are represented by four key words that shape how we go about fulfilling our mission.

> The first word we used to describe our strategic focal points was **examine**. As we seek to promote

true Church Health, we look for ways to help church leaders assess where their congregation is in the process of making disciples. A growing group of disciples are aware of congregational needs. They know the components of what makes up a healthy congregation and seek to make the necessary changes to keep the church on track to fulfill the ongoing goal of being a fully-functioning body of Believers.

The second word we used to describe our strategic focal

EXPAND ENCOURAGE ENGAGE

EXAMINE

points was **expand**. Church Planting involves the strategic support of new congregations. A growing group of disciples are involved in multiplying congregations. Every church should be a world-missions outreach center. This means that churches are not only involved in such viable activities as giving to missions and organizing mission trips, but most importantly they are plugged into the process of starting new congregations here and abroad.

The best role the PMBA, the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, the North American Mission Board, the International Mission Board or any other missional agency can play is to directly assist churches in this Great Commission enterprise, instead of just simply doing it for them. The PMBA is dedicated to partnering with our churches and SBC entities in order to accomplish this Kingdom goal.

The third word we used to describe our strategic focal points was **encourage**. Often, organizations seek to build leaders by enhancing their skills and expanding their knowledge. Although this is important, we have come to believe that perhaps the greatest need for pastors is to for them to feel personally cared for. A growing group of disciples create the capacity to nurture and develop leaders within their congregations. The PMBA is dedicated to making sure that our leaders are on a healthy track that blesses their families, their congregations, and their communities.

The fourth word to describe our strategic focal points we use was **engage**. In Community Impact, we seek to impact brokenness in our communities with the love of Christ. A growing group of disciples are engaged in ministries of mercy. Because the love of God is the primary motivator for why we interface with those outside the faith, local churches often represent the "front lines" of helping the poor, disenfranchised and broken people of our communities. The PMBA seeks to support churches in these Kingdom endeavors.

RECALIBRATING OUR STEWARDSHIP

Once we get our structure and strategy in sync, we then seek to fund our ministries through *enhanced stewardship*. Stewardship is all about how we invest the financial resources entrusted to us by the Lord. If we are hindered in our understanding of the best way to spend money, or struggle in accessing our finances, the greatest plans we make will fall short. To get a firmer grasp on all aspects of our financial situation, we had to make some fundamental changes.

The first step we took to be better stewards of what we have been blessed with was to change our software system. In the past, it was said that an accountant couldn't even decipher our financial reports. Changing our financial software enabled us to get better and simpler financial reports, and gave us greater tracking capabilities.

The second major step we took was to get rid of all accounts and line items that no longer worked in our new structure. We had been burdened for a long time with having accounts with money in them that we never used. The drive to make the most of our money gave us the ability to streamline our entire financial system.

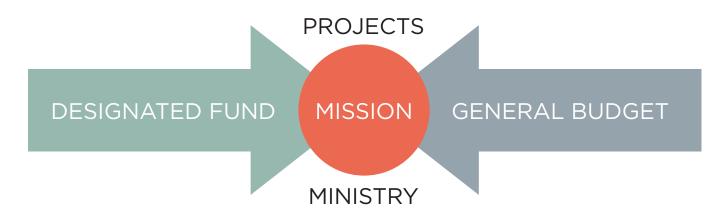
The third thing we did with regards to stewardship was to take all our savings and put them in a super Designated Account that served two purposes. It first helped us to create parallel accounts to our General Budget that are designed to provide real-time funding for special projects that would arise outside of our General Budget plans.

Instead of having projects and areas of ministry competing for the same funds, this new model of financial support allows us to combine the need for accountability with the responsiveness of adaptability.

The Leadership Team proposed this new model last year's Annual Meeting. The core strategy we proposed was to create an investment plan over the next five years where the PMBA would invest up to a million dollars on top of our General Budget into projects that support areas to which we were already committed. It passed overwhelmingly, and we are now on track to see the PMBA do some great things over the next few years.

This move to a super Designated Fund secondly allowed us to change our ongoing dysfunctional tendency to underwrite General Budget items through designated giving. For anyone who has had to work with church budgets, you know that if designated giving gets out of hand, it can "rob" the General Budget. People who only want to support the favorite ministries don't realize that other ministry and administrative needs suffer in this kind of giving

By default, this dysfunctional tendency can also create unintentional "mini-foundations" that live on even after a ministry is practically shut down. The unfortunate impact of such an approach it that monies are frozen in place that could be used for other important work. Our new approach allows for designated giving but in a more measured and controlled fashion. Because of these shifts in our stewardship, we have already seen a lift in participation and even giving towards our General Budget.



Unveiling Our Five-Year Plan





nce we changed how we approached our structure, strategies, and stewardship, we were ready to live more intentionally and effectively into our mission and vision. To use a farming metaphor, 2017 has been

about clearing brush, plowing the field, and planting seed.

In 2018, we are now positioned to take advantage of the opportunity God has given us. The next five years are going to be about tending the soil, and reaping the harvest. Our plan is to look at each of the four areas of Associational emphasis and seek to maximize our efforts in ways that would directly bless our congregations and boost their missional capacity. To do this we will create five-year plans for each of these areas.

In Church Health, we will refer to this as *"Revitalizing Declining Congregations."* Simply put, although Church Health encompasses many factors we will put our primary energy into Church Revitalization and Prayer for Spiritual Awakening.

With regards to Church Revitalization, our goal is to have at least 50% of our congregations go through some type of revitalization process over the next five years. This past year myself and two member of the Church Health Focus Group attended Revitalize Training sponsored by the Baptist State Convention of NC. I also have created some additional training materials called *Revital-Coach* and *Back to the Basics* that served as an initial resource for struggling churches. I trained twelve consultants in this model, and currently one church is using these materials in their revitalization process.

Most recently I have been able to review Dr. Rob Peters' (the Senior Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church here in Winston-Salem) *ReFocus* materials. They represent the most comprehensive and practically helpful revitalization

materials I have ever sampled. This January, we are planning to help at least ten churches from our Association attend a learning cohort led by Dr. Peters. We anticipate doing this each of the next five years. Along with this enhanced focus on revitalization, we will continue to offer high quality Lunch and Learn Sessions; invest in discipleship retreats; and provide ongoing consultation to boost church health across our Association.

Not only do processes need to be improved, power also needs to be released for the church to fulfill its mission. A praying church is an empowered church. This past year the Church Health Team sponsored a day focused on understanding how prayer works in revival with Dr. Chris Schofield of the Baptist State Convention of NC. We will plan to continue to offer creative and interactive sessions like these to promote prayer in our churches.

In Church Planting, we will refer to our five-year plan as *"Establishing Multiplying Congregations."* Last year we sponsored five new works. As a result of our investment, four of these churches have joined our Association. Over the next five years we want to work with churches and other organizations to plant churches intelligently and effectively here and beyond.

The first aspect of this plan is to help newly established congregations expand their effectiveness. Once they are planted, these churches need a great deal of care to get them established. We want to help them stand on their own and even eventually reproduce. This doesn't mean that we will stop supporting them after our formal financial support is done. Rather, we will continue to provide ongoing assistance for each of these young churches to enhance their missional impact.

An example of this is that in 2018 we will be planning a mission trip to Calgary, Canada to support our North American Mission Board missionaries Dustin and Jill Connor. Because this is one of the SEND cities the NAMB has identified as a highly unchurched population, we could end up offering additional support to the faithfilled church planting goals they have in mind for Calgary and Edmonton.

The second aspect of this plan will involve helping to replant dying congregations that are not capable of revitalizing. During the last four years the PMBA has been a partner in helping two dying congregations replant into vibrant new fellowships. Over the next five years we want to replant five new churches from existing churches in the PMBA. We have already make inroads with NAMB to gain additional insight and training in this area so that we can be on the innovative of this crucial ministry,

In Leadership Development, we will refer to our five-year plan as "*Building Healthy Leaders.*" This last year we provided all types of free resources, helped pastors attend church health conferences, and offered a first-rate Pastor's Appreciation Banquet. All of these offerings were designed to offer encouragement for our pastors.

In the spirit of continuing in that mode, this year we are expanding our ministry of encouragement by offering an affordable Marriage Retreat May 18-20 at The Cove. We are looking to take at least fifty couples to that special event. Few people understand the stress that even a very healthy ministry puts upon the marriages of our spiritual leaders. This conference will be the first of its kind in the history of the PMBA and will pave the way for similar conferences in the future,

Coupled with this is our major push to create multiple regionally-based support groups for pastors in our footprint. We will call these Impact Groups. These groups will not only provide a safe place where pastors can learn and grow, but will also give them the platform to do collaborative ministry together. We have just hired a parttime Impacts Group Coordinator to help us drive this objective. Our goal is to have at least seven groups up and rolling by the end of 2018.

We will also look to create more learning opportunities for leaders through innovative programs that sharpens their skills. Many of our pastors have participated in *Tarheel Leadership Network*, a leadership development program facilitated by the Baptist State Convention of NC in cooperation with its director Dr. Stephen Corts of Center Grove Baptist Church. We will continue to support such programs and look to expand beyond that with new retreats or conferences.

In Community Impact, we will refer to our five-year plan as "*Growing Kingdom Ministries.*" For many years, Community Impact has been our most fruitful ministry of the PMBA. Over the next five years we are planning to diversify our poverty initiatives; increase our strategic partnerships with other key ministries; train more congregations in multi-housing ministry; and recruit and train a new generation of laborers for disaster relief.

Our goals for 2018 in Community Impact are to plan up to at least two major disaster recovery trips to Puerto Rico; conduct one major training session for churches in multihousing ministry; increase the number of people we feed; and increase the number of families we touch through Toy Ministry. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

I CORINTHIANS 15:58

What You Can Do



s you can see, we have been busy to say the least! We have worked hard to create an organization that is a blessing rather than a burden to our congregations. We are now positioned to do some things that many

leaders in other Associations only dream of.

Yet some people have been confused about why we need money. As mentioned earlier, everything a church gives goes directly into our General Budget which supports our day-to-day operations. Our Designated Fund is specially earmarked for unique opportunities that aren't necessarily part of our regular budgeting process. We have seen that when you combine a solid plan with the flexibility to address new opportunities as they arise you have the potential to do extraordinary work. What we need from some of you that are already giving is to pray about your church increasing its contributions. I know that this is a difficult thing to consider, but I hope that I have been able to demonstrate to you that your future investments will be used wisely and effectively. Because we now have an organization that is on the right track, you can be assured that your gracious contributions of time, talent and treasure will not be wasted.

If you at one time gave but lost confidence in us, then this document should give you substantial reasons to jump back on board. The transformation we have undergone over the last few years is almost miraculous. When I have shared with other denominational leaders what we have been able to do, they are both astonished and encouraged. I want you to feel the same way.



Finally, no matter what you are able to give, everyone can take get plugged into our various ministries in a way that will bless your congregation. The opportunities that are before us are incredible. God doesn't call people to insignificant endeavors. He calls us into the wild adventure called the Kingdom of God. We are always on the lookout for new members who can bring their own gifts into this movement.

Please prayerfully consider what God would have you do. We are convinced that 2018 is going to be a phenomenal year of ministry that will lead us into ever-expanding opportunities over the next five years. Thanks for all you do to help us fulfill God's vision for the PMBA!



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