

THE REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT'S 2020 COMMISSION

Louisiana Baptist Convention

“Opportunity Louisiana: For The Gospel, For Our State, For This Time”

Making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Ephesians 5:16 NIV

At the 2012 annual meeting of our Convention, Louisiana Baptists celebrated two centuries of ministry in the state. We had used the bicentennial year as an occasion to seek the Lord for a spiritual awakening. Next, came the time to put feet to those prayers. Dr. Waylon Bailey, president of the Convention, announced the formation of a commission to evaluate the ministries of Louisiana Baptists in order to prepare for the daunting challenges and the spiritual opportunities of the next several years. The president enlisted 400 Louisiana Baptist leaders, including church pastors and staff members, laymen and women, and denominational workers. This group, which represented churches of every size, ethnicity, and region of the state, were organized into twenty sub-committees that each analyzed a specific arena of ministry among Louisiana Baptists. They met numerous times (in person and electronically), including a two-day Summit in April for the whole Commission. Reports were filed by each sub-committee, whereupon the Steering Committee (chairs of the twenty groups) and LBC strategists reviewed their findings and recommendations. The President and the Steering Committee submit the following to the Louisiana Baptist Convention for its prayerful consideration.

Affirmation of the Mission

The Louisiana Baptist Convention, a voluntary organization of autonomous Southern Baptist congregations in the state of Louisiana, was founded in 1848. It has always been clear about its mission which “is to provide means through which Louisiana Baptist churches and members can cooperate in bringing persons to God throughout the world.”(*LBC Articles of Incorporation*). We exist to be used of God to reach lost persons with the saving gospel of Jesus. Evangelism and missions is our heartbeat. More recent statements articulating our common purpose read as follows:

Mission Statement

The Louisiana Baptist Convention exists to serve the Baptist churches in Louisiana as a catalyst for igniting a passion for Jesus and His kingdom, a consultant for strengthening the congregations, and a conduit for accomplishing cooperative missions.

Vision Statement

Our vision is to ignite a passion for Jesus among Louisiana Baptists that will result in dynamic, growing congregations who covenant together to extend the kingdom of God to the ends of the earth.

The 2020 Commission believes our mission is clear. The task before us is not to change the mission, or even to restate it more cleverly. The task is to fulfill the mission more completely. Therefore, the aim of our work was **“to develop and recommend a seven-year strategy for maximizing Louisiana Baptists’ effectiveness in gospel ministry.”**

Scripture and Theme

Making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Ephesians 5:16 NIV

The Scripture chosen to identify this study is compelling and *apropos* for Louisiana Baptists. Just like the Apostle Paul, we face serious and urgent challenges, some of which the report will identify. It is obvious even to the casual observer that many aspects of the society in which we live are characterized by growing ungodliness. People have rebelled against God and they, and our culture, are experiencing the negative consequences. The number of Americans who claim no religious affiliation is growing dramatically, and voices in open opposition to Christianity are becoming more numerous and more strident. Although we are thankful for victories that God gives us, the data gathered about Louisiana Baptists shows that we are losing ground in our effort to win our state to Christ. The days are evil indeed!

But Paul also saw in his culture a moment of opportunity to make a difference for the Lord. The Greek word *kairos* is sometimes translated “time.” (e.g., “redeem the time.” Eph. 5:16, KJV). However, the word does not indicate chronological time, but an opportune moment. “Making the most of every *opportunity*.” Our theme “Opportunity Louisiana” is attempting to convey a sense of urgency. We must act with intensity and precision. And we must act now.

Preliminary Declarations

Before we begin to list our conclusions, there are some considerations that give context to the recommendations:

- We recognize that God has given us His favor. We are grateful for the contributions Louisiana Baptists have made across the decades and we acknowledge with gratitude the many people of past and current generations who have labored faithfully in our common ministries. We, by God’s grace, will continue to serve through the varied ministries of the churches and the convention. We pray that they will continue to advance the cause of Christ in Louisiana and across the world.
- We recognize that our tasks are spiritual, and we will not be successful unless God blesses us with his power. “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.” (Ps. 127:1, NASB). We are not attempting to “outwit the world.” Strategies and studies are useful tools but they are no substitute for God’s Spirit bringing grace, mercy, and revival. We must continue to give ourselves to prayer for spiritual renewal in our state.
- We will not violate our convictions in order to be “successful.” As much as we would like to reach more people and prosper numerically, we will not compromise the truth. It does us no good to please men if we displease God.
- Our desire is for the kingdom of God, not just our Louisiana Baptist enterprises. We are thankful for every faithful gospel ministry in our state and are not in competition with them. We will cooperate with other Christians where we can and pray that Jesus will be honored through them as well as through us.

Proposals

The recommendations included herein became apparent as we understood the needs we face, and evaluated the opportunity Louisiana Baptists have to make a real difference. Every suggestion from the sub-committees was heard but not all are recommended. The Steering Committee gave greatest consideration to strategies that are accessible to our pastors and churches, that invite the maximum involvement of our constituency, that have the greatest impact on *lostness* in the state, and that provide a clear pathway to advancing our goals.

Who needs to be reached? Two Audiences

We asked ourselves, “Who are the people in Louisiana who need to be reached?” Our study revealed two unmistakable demographic groups of greatest need: the younger generations and the non-Anglo people groups. The data about these groups is so compelling that we have identified them as the two major audiences for our near-term ministry initiatives.

The Next Generation

It is imperative that we reverse the trends that show we are losing ground in reaching the younger people of our state with the gospel. Our children’s sub-committee analyzed our statistics in our work with children. Since 1980 baptism of children is down 42%.

In regard to Sunday School, we have seen similar declines with a 42% drop in Preschool attendance and a 51% drop in Elementary age attendance. We are baptizing barely half the number of children in our churches as we did thirty years ago. Half of our congregations did not baptize one child last year.

The data regarding youth is just as startling. Average attendance of teenagers in our churches has dropped 41% since 1980. At the same time, the population of people aged 12-17 has seen a significant increase over the last 10 years. That age group now comprises almost 25% of the population in Louisiana. There are more teenagers and more churches than ever in history. Yet, on any given Sunday, only 12% of the population of teenagers can be found in anyone’s church, regardless of denomination. As with children, we are also baptizing half the number of teens as we did thirty years ago, and several hundred of the churches had no teen baptisms last year.

The college age population attending church reflects the same declining participation. Although we have seen encouraging responses to our convention conferences such as the Youth Evangelism Conference, the Pre-Teen Invasion, and the College Evangelism Conference, we have yet to see gains in church attendance and baptisms against the population growth. We are thankful that the Baptist Collegiate Ministries on Louisiana campuses are growing in their reach to students but much remains to be done.

It is axiomatic that the *next generation* is the key to gospel success for the future. The loss in attendance and baptisms in the LBC in the last several decades is almost entirely in the younger generation. The 2020 Commission believes reaching the next generation should be the priority of our strategies and efforts in the churches and the LBC. The recommendations in this report reflect that priority. In addition to the other recommendations contained herein, the Commission recommends the following as a *priority* initiative:

The LBC Executive Director will form a “Next Generation Task Force” whose assignment will be to 1) study the needs of the younger generation, 2) discover and develop strategies for engagement and ministry to this generation of Louisianans, and 3) promote implementation of these strategies among Louisiana Baptists. The Task Force will report regularly through the Executive Director to the Executive Board.

Every People Group

Of equal importance with reaching the next generation is the need to reach *every people group* in Louisiana. The LBC membership is predominantly Anglo. Only five percent of our membership is non-Anglo with only about 145 of 1600 churches having non-Anglos as their primary constituency. However, four of ten people residing in Louisiana are non-Anglo. These people groups are situated predominantly in the southern regions of our state where our churches are not as numerous or as strong. For the state of Louisiana, the church to population ratio is 1:2,764. In

South Louisiana (from a latitude 20 miles north of Opelousas to the gulf), it is 1:7,700. The ratio of Anglo to African-American SBC witness is 11 to 1 (we have one Anglo church for every 1,955 Anglos but only one African-American church for every 21,609 African-Americans). The ratio to Hispanics is 3 to 1, and to Asians is 2 to 1. These disparities are intensified in New Orleans, our largest city. These populations also have a growing ratio of younger people.

In summary, LBC churches tend to be Anglo, northern, rural, and older while the population of Louisiana is trending non-Anglo, urban, southern, and younger. If we are to impact *lostness* in Louisiana, including reaching the next generation, we must identify and implement strategies that engage the non-Anglo population. The 2020 Commission believes reaching every people group ought to be our priority. The recommendations in this report reflect that priority. In addition to the other recommendations contained herein, the Commission recommends the following as a *priority* initiative:

The LBC Executive Director will form a “People Group Engagement” Task Force whose assignment is 1) to evaluate the ethnic diversity in Louisiana and its implications for Louisiana Baptists, 2) create avenues for input and involvement in LBC life by non-Anglo leaders and congregations, and 3) lead Louisiana Baptists in effective engagement with and ministry among all people groups in the state. The Task Force will report regularly through the Executive Director to the Executive Board.

How can we best reach them? Four Avenues

There are a myriad of possible ministry actions that can contribute to reaching the lost people of Louisiana. The 2020 Commission has identified four areas of effort that hold the most promise for successful engagement of our Louisiana neighbors. The four avenues are:

- 1) *congregational revitalization*
- 2) *church planting*
- 3) *communication*
- 4) *collaboration*

Each of these areas holds particular promise in reaching our identified audiences. Although none of these is unheard of, we are convinced they are pivotal in maximizing our reach for Christ in Louisiana. We believe these strategies provide our greatest opportunities and utilize our greatest strengths for reaching more of the lost in Louisiana, especially the next generation and non-Anglos.

What are we recommending? Ten Actions

We are calling these actions **KAIROS** recommendations: “**Key Actions In Reaching Our State.**” These are momentous opportunities. In summary, the ten “KAIROS” recommendations call for specific *actions* through our four *avenues* to reach our two *audiences*.

KAIROS Recommendations

Revitalizing our Congregations

The strength of Baptist ministry in Louisiana is the local congregation. The churches are the engines that drive our accomplishments. For any strategy to be successful in advancing our work, it must engage the local churches.

It has been widely noted that a majority of our SBC congregations are “plateaued or declining.” This term generally means that the numbers of people being baptized and attending the

church has been static or lower across the last several years. It does not mean that the congregations are not accomplishing many good things for the Kingdom of God. However, the challenges before us demand that we honestly evaluate our efforts in maximizing our ability to reach the lost in Louisiana. The 2020 Commission noted declines in Bible study attendance, baptisms, giving, and mission support. We expect nearly 200 LBC congregations to die by 2020. Factors that contribute to the death of congregations include population losses, aging membership, internal conflict, and changing demographics. A significant component of reaching Louisiana with the gospel over the next seven years is “revitalization of our congregations.”

How can this be done? The Commission makes the following recommendations that identify challenges in the churches that must be addressed if we are to maximize effectiveness in gospel ministry:

KAIROS # 1: Equip churches with a proven Evangelistic Church Growth Implementation Process

Every congregation needs a plan of action for growth that is specific to their external and internal demographics. The LBC will assist congregations in developing and implementing this process. We especially encourage the churches to address the task of reaching children and youth, and of engaging all people groups in their communities.

Goals:

1. Congregations study and adopt an Evangelistic Church Growth Implementation Process by 2015. The LBC Evangelism and Church Growth Team will have the responsibility for encouraging, monitoring, and reporting on this project.
2. Congregations will achieve a 5% growth in attendance by 2016 and 10% by 2020.
3. Each congregation will aim to baptize at least one more child and one more youth per year than the current number.

KAIROS # 2: Assist churches with the development of a disciple-making process for the local congregation.

In order to be effective in reaching others for Christ, the churches must lead their members to be mature, committed disciples of Christ. Our aim is not just to increase numbers, but also to increase spiritual growth and vitality. Churches would be helped in this task by adopting a carefully articulated process that 1) defines what a disciple of Christ should be and 2) outlines a pathway toward mature discipleship.

Goals:

1. The LBC Evangelism and Church Growth Team will lead the development of a customizable resource for the churches that describes “making disciples.” Particular attention will be given to the training of children and youth leadership. This will be ready by 2015.
2. Congregations will study and adopt a specific, measurable disciple-making process by 2017. The LBC Evangelism and Church Growth Team will have the responsibility for encouraging, resourcing, monitoring, and reporting on this project.
3. By 2020, at least 50% of LBC congregations will be utilizing a specific, measurable disciple-making process.

KAIROS # 3: Challenge Congregations to Regularly and Intentionally Promote Biblical Financial Stewardship.

The data reviewed by the 2020 Commission reveals that Southern Baptists (along with virtually all American church members) are contributing, on average, a smaller percentage of their incomes through the church than ever before. The average is barely over 2%. This multi-decade decline is startling given the relative financial prosperity that Americans have enjoyed during this period. Getting Christians to be faithful in stewardship is always challenging. The problem is compounded by out-of-control personal debt by many Americans. However, if we are going to have the resources to accomplish needed ministries, we must reverse the decline in stewardship. The 2020 Commission believes that congregations which have regular teaching and promotion of Biblical stewardship, particularly of tithing, are experiencing improvements in members' stewardship practices.

Goals:

1. The LBC will make available annually resources for the churches to use in teaching stewardship including the practice of tithing as well as overcoming indebtedness.
2. By 2016, every congregation will engage, at least annually, in stewardship teaching and promotion. The LBC Stewardship Strategist will encourage, monitor, and report on this endeavor.
3. By 2020, the number of Louisiana Baptist families committed to tithe will increase by 10%.

KAIROS # 4: Engage LBC congregations in Compassion Ministries

Understanding the physical needs of our neighbors, and attempting to help with them, provides Louisiana Baptist churches remarkable opportunities to share the love of Christ and reach people for faith. Compassion ministries are numerous and varied. They include feeding and clothing programs, ministries to prisoners and their families, abortion alternative services, tutoring classes, disaster relief, counseling, and so on. Many LBC churches already engage in one or more forms of compassion ministry. These ministries can be especially useful in opening doors of friendship and witness to overlooked people groups and their children and young people.

Goals:

1. Every LBC church will engage in at least one local compassion ministry on a regular basis.
2. The LBC will create a compassion ministries network in consultation with pastors, DOMs, and leaders of various ministries by 2015. The LBC ministry evangelism strategist will encourage, monitor, and report on this process.

Planting Churches for Everyone

The Church Planting sub-committee was aided in its deliberations by the NAMB emphasis "Send New Orleans" and, especially, by the recent LBC church planting study. The sub-committee concurs with the conclusions of the previous study, as stated:

Recent U. S. Bureau of the Census demographic population projections and data from the Center for Missional Research, North American Mission Board, point to the urgent need for impacting lostness in Louisiana through church planting.

With an estimated 2009 population of 4,488,442 and over twenty-five distinct language people groups, and a projected population of 4,702,687 for 2014, the urgency of impacting lostness grows each year. In 2008 the Louisiana Baptist Convention Annual Church Profile reported 1,624 affiliated church and church-type mission

congregations with a total membership of 578,918, and 10,371 recorded baptisms. That means Louisiana currently has one LBC affiliated congregation for every 2,764 Louisiana residents.

In a previous Evangelism Index study, the North American Mission Board indicated a lostness ratio of over 50% for Louisiana. One out of every two Louisiana residents surveyed indicated no “personal relationship” with Jesus Christ as understood by Southern Baptists. For Louisiana, this means over 2,244,000 people are without Christ. As the population of Louisiana grows, lostness will also grow unless evangelical Christians and, especially, Louisiana Baptists aggressively seek to fulfill the Great Commission through “making disciples” and planting vibrant, healthy, multiplying, New Testament congregations. The challenge is to impact every people group and population cluster in Louisiana with the gospel and provide a New Testament church in which every believer can grow to become a fully devoted disciple of Jesus.

We affirm the declaration by C. Peter Wagner as modified by Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird in *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers*: “The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches that in turn reproduce themselves” (p. 16). If we are to maximize effectiveness in gospel ministry, we must start churches for everyone. (from the LBC Cooperative Church Planting Strategy study).

KAIROS # 5: Partner with churches, associations and other Southern Baptist entities to plant healthy, culturally relevant, biblically sound, multiplying churches that seek to fulfill the Great Commission.

Goals:

1. Promote church sponsorship, by developing resources and by providing “eye opening” moments for potential sponsors.
2. In partnership with associations, NAMB, and church sponsors, continue the LBC recruitment, assessment, and training process for church planters.
3. By 2020, double the non-Anglo LBC congregations (for a total of 300) with special attention given to New Orleans and the southern region of the state.
4. Utilizing the regional church planting benchmarks, plant 300 new churches by 2020. The LBC Church Planting Team will be responsible for encouraging, monitoring, and reporting on this goal.
5. In order to provide needed additional funding for LBC church planting, increase the Georgia Barnette State Missions Offering by 5% each year between now and 2020.

Creating Communication That Connects and Compels

No facet of contemporary life has changed as dramatically as the arena of communications. With the advance of the Internet and cell phone availability, it seems everyone can know everything and communicate with everyone—and do it instantaneously. The SBC Radio and Television Commission, started 70 years ago, seems archaic by comparison. But just as Baptists endeavored to reach the lost through technology then, we must do so now. In 2012, over 184 million people had Facebook accounts. Twitter boasts over 554 million users. It has been a catalyst for political movements and even national revolutions. We can no longer deny the power of social media to change the world and influence the discussion in our society. The 2020 Commission believes communication is an arena where Louisiana Baptists can be benefitted by unified efforts. Many of the twenty sub-committees identified enhanced communication, especially via the web, as a necessary strategy to maximize effectiveness in their

assignment. The new communication platforms bring rapid changes and considerable expense, but Louisiana Baptists cannot afford to ignore this strategy if we are going to reach the population of Louisiana for Christ.

KAIROS # 6: Launch Operation Highways and Hedges, a multi-year, multi-platform media strategy designed to provide every person in Louisiana the opportunity to say yes to a relationship with Christ.

Goals:

1. Roll out phase one in Southwest Louisiana in 2014. Continue by segments until the entire state is involved, by 2017. Encouraging, developing, monitoring, and reporting on this strategy will be the responsibility of the LBC Communications Team.
2. By 2020, involve churches in all regions of the state in a continuous evangelism strategy utilizing mass media. Encouraging, developing, monitoring, and reporting on this strategy will be the responsibility of the LBC Communications Team.

KAIROS # 7: Provide training for leaders and churches in the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Vine, etc. Provide content for churches and ministries which will make their websites more engaging and useful.

Goals:

1. Offer periodic training in social media beginning by 2015.
2. Provide regular “turnkey” content for websites and other applications, beginning 2014.

Collaborating for Maximum Impact

“Congregations working together” is a hallmark of Southern Baptist life. It is one of our greatest strengths. We even have an article in our confession (The Baptist Faith and Message) entitled “Cooperation” which reads in part: “Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ’s Kingdom.” The 2020 Commission believes there are strategic opportunities for more effectively reaching the lost in Louisiana by intentionally increasing our collaborative efforts as churches, associations, and convention enterprises. We have identified three KAIROS recommendations involving collaborating for maximum impact.

KAIROS # 8: Create Mentoring and Ministry Networks.

Several sub-committees noted that expertise exists among various Louisiana Baptist churches that should be marshaled and organized to improve the whole. For example, churches needing help with children’s ministries could be benefitted by being in a network that includes experienced children’s leaders from other congregations. Similar kinds of inter-church mentoring could address effective youth ministry, pastoral leadership, worship, partnership missions, etc. These are not new ideas. Groups have existed for years for Ministers of Education, Youth Ministry, Church Administration, etc. Also, the state convention and the associations have regularly arranged conferences for addressing mutual needs and opportunities for joint endeavors. What is needed appears to be a new commitment to collaboration by Baptists, for Baptists in Louisiana. The 2020 Commission agrees we are *under-utilizing* our human resources and our opportunities to collaborate. We recommend that leaders across our state take a fresh look at creating opportunities for strengthening our work through mentoring and ministry networks.

Goal:

LBC strategists, in consultation with DOMs and church ministry leaders, will recommend strategies for identifying, reshaping, or developing needed mentoring and ministry networks in their areas of assignment. Progress reports will be made to the LBC Executive Board in 2014.

KAIROS # 9: Increase financial support through the Cooperative Program and the special mission offerings.

Since 1925, the Cooperative Program has served as the chief conduit for all Southern Baptists churches to give financial support for the wide array of ministries of the state and national conventions. This unified funding mechanism has maximized efficiency, consistency, and breadth of accomplishment while minimizing competition, expensive solicitations, and uneven support for ministries. By the 1930s, confidence in the Cooperative Program caused the churches to reach a level of more than 10% of the churches' aggregate undesignated receipts to be contributed through the CP. That level of support lasted into the early 1980s, fueling an era of great expansion nationally and internationally. However, in the last thirty years, the Cooperative Program percentage has plummeted to just over 5% in the SBC. Various initiatives have been recommended to reverse this downward trend. So far, none has had sustained success.

The 2020 Commission believes a concerted effort ought to be made to re-engage our churches' confidence in and support of the CP as our main channel of funding our common mission, and our most strategic collaborative opportunity. In addition to effective and compelling communication, a key strategy should be the enlistment of Louisiana pastors who will advocate among their peers for increased percentage giving through the Cooperative Program. Appropriate attention should be given also to encouraging maximum participation in the International, North American, and State mission offerings.

Goals:

1. Request the new LBC president to initiate a purposeful conversation among Louisiana church leaders regarding advocacy for the Cooperative Program.
2. Challenge every LBC congregation giving less than 10% through CP to increase their percent of undesignated receipts for CP by at least 1% by 2017, and 2% by 2020.
3. Challenge every LBC congregation giving less than 5% through CP to increase their percent of undesignated receipts for CP to at least 5% by 2020.
4. Increase the number of LBC congregations giving through the CP and special mission offerings by 10% by 2017 and 20% by 2020.

KAIROS #10: Lead Louisiana Baptists to maximize their collective influence in the arena of moral and cultural concerns, especially in strengthening families.

The decline in the belief and practice of biblical morality in our culture continues apace both in the United States in general and in Louisiana in particular. Harmful attitudes concerning marriage, public education, the value of human life, sexual ethics, family structures, and so on are degrading the culture and are destructive to children, women, and families.

Working for God-honoring solutions is incumbent on the states' churches. There is no arena of ministry more suited for collaboration than the battle for public righteousness. We must unite our efforts to achieve the most impact. In recent years, Louisiana Baptists have formed

the Public Affairs Office under the ministry of the Executive Board. This new endeavor affords Louisiana Baptists the vehicle for addressing public morality, speaking to the legislative process, collaborating with like-minded groups, and rallying the churches.

Additionally, with the leadership of the Louisiana Baptist Children's Home and Family Ministries, initiatives that reach children in distress (such as foster care and adoption strategies) are being pursued.

The 2020 Commission recommends the following goals:

Goals:

1. Continue to expand the interaction between the LBC Office of Public Affairs and the State of Louisiana Administration, Judiciary, and Legislature.
2. Create a network for informing and involving Louisiana Baptist members and congregations about legal, social, and moral issues that need Christian engagement. The Office of Public Affairs will report on progress.
3. Continue to develop strategies that help Louisiana Baptists minister to children in distress. The Louisiana Baptist Children's Home will keep the LBC informed on progress.

Our Dream for Louisiana Baptists

A good question to ask ourselves about any planned endeavor is, "What does success look like?" What do we want Louisiana Baptists to look like in 2020? Perhaps this:

Every congregation will understand and engage all the people in its geographical reach.

Every congregation will have a clear plan for "making disciples," especially the young.

Every congregation will model Biblical stewardship.

Every congregation will minister to the needs of its community.

Every congregation will aid in starting new churches.

Every congregation will communicate the gospel message in a compelling way.

Every congregation will collaborate with other Louisiana Baptists in ministry.

Every congregation will give generously to support cooperative missions.

By 2020, the convention as a whole will reflect a greater participation by younger generations and by all people groups. We will be making a greater impact through the comprehensive use of social media. We will be more actively caring. We will be stronger numerically and financially. We will bless the generation to follow with a valuable heritage and a vibrant structure that will serve them well as they assume the reins of Baptist work in Louisiana, for the glory of God. Let's make the most of the *kairos*, for the gospel, for our state, for this time.

Respectfully submitted,
The Steering Committee of
The President's 2020 Commission
Dr. Waylon Bailey, President