

2015 ANNUAL REPORT
GEORGIA BAPTIST CONVENTION

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RESOURCES
CONVENTION HISTORICAL SKETCH



Historical Sketch

The Baptist Convention of the State of Georgia

The Georgia Baptist Convention was organized June 29, 1822. Baptist work and witness in Georgia had been in evidence since the earliest colonial days, when Baptists engaged in mission work with Native Americans.

A series of meetings called the Powelton Conferences occupied the interests of Georgia Baptists at the turn of the 19th century. These meetings, held in 1801, 1802, and 1803, had been preceded by Baptist growth that had by 1810 led to the formation of five associations. At the Powelton Conferences, sentiment jelled in favor of continuing organized work by Baptists in Georgia. While five associations had been formed, beginning with the Georgia Association in 1784, there had been no clear-cut concept either for organized Baptist work or for a cooperative ministry with other denominations. Out of the Powelton Conferences there emerged a pattern of denominational work that led to the formation of the Convention in 1822.

The history of Baptist work in Georgia may be divided generally into the following periods: (1) Colonial days to the formation of the Georgia Association in 1784; (2) Organized work beginning with the formation of associations from 1784 to 1801; (3) Continued expansion of organized ministries from the Powelton Conferences to the formation of the Convention in 1822; (4) Convention-organized work, including the establishment of Mercer Institute at Penfield, 1833 to the beginning of the Civil War in 1861; (5) The post-war period to 1877, in which year the State Mission Board was organized; (6) Expansion of State Mission ministries to the establishment of the Executive Committee in 1919, which among other responsibilities, had oversight of the State Mission Program; (7) The period from 1919 to the end of World War II in 1945; and (8) Convention ministries from 1945 to the present. This general division of Baptist history in Georgia provides reference points in the life of the Convention.

The State Mission Board's formation in 1877 was a watershed in the history of Georgia Baptist life, for it provided a channel through which Baptists in the state could regroup and expand their ministries following the devastating effects of the Civil War.

Formation of the Convention in 1822 provided a method by which Georgia Baptists could express their historic interest in mission work and in Christian education. There had been earlier attempts to establish schools for Christian education, the earliest being Mount Enon Academy in 1807. However, the Convention organization was to establish not only Mercer Institute, but many schools and academies throughout the state. The plight of orphan children during and following the Civil War led to interest in what we now term benevolent ministries. Out of this interest emerged what became the Georgia Baptist Children's Home, the Georgia Baptist Hospital, homes for the elderly, and other expressions of benevolent concern.

Baptist work and life in general had been damaged severely by the war from 1861 to 1865. Resurging strength and religious interest were expressed in organized work by the State Mission Board. Continued Baptist growth in the state brought about the necessity of the creation of the Executive Board in 1919.

The Great Depression that began in the late 1920s affected all Georgia Baptists. Even though the hardest effects of the Depression had ended by the mid-thirties, it was followed in a few years by World War II. Thus, it was not until the mid-forties that Georgia Baptists entered a stage of growth in witness and

ministries that continues unabated to the present. The impact of the Cooperative Program, begun in 1925 upon the heels of the \$75-Million Campaign, was not felt in full force until the mid-forties.

The many ministries of the Georgia Baptist Convention are listed within the pages of the Missions and Ministries Guide and on the Convention web site. These ministries and accompanying financial data indicate a period of sustained growth in cooperative Baptist work beginning in 1955, with the administration of Dr. Searcy S. Garrison as Executive Secretary Treasurer of the Executive Committee.

From 1955 through 2011, the Convention engaged in Capital Improvements and Endowment Programs, that provided funds on a matching basis for agencies, institutions and causes. A new Capital Improvements and Endowment Program with a goal of \$20,600,000 was approved in 1998 to begin in 1999. Since 1955, new student center buildings have been constructed, the two conference centers acquired and placed in operation, and the Baptist Center constructed. Built at a contract cost of about \$5,500,000, the 200,000-square-foot structure is located on 25 acres of land, and was completed in 1975. When the program was ended in 2011, ownership of remaining funds were transferred to the institution or entity indicated as a beneficiary.

In 1973, the State Missions Program of the Convention was placed within a division system to facilitate Baptist mission ministries within the state. During the period of 1955-1980, a program of Public Relations was added to the Executive Committee's work; a chaplaincy ministry was implemented; a Book of Charters was published; a massive study of Christian Education (BEST 1965-1967) was completed; and a promotional program, known as the Denominational Emphasis Program, was implemented.

During 1977, construction was completed on the Baptist Student Center in Americus and a new cafeteria-classroom building at the Georgia Baptist Assembly in Toccoa. Renovations were made at the Norman Baptist Assembly, Georgia Baptist Assembly, and the Baptist Student Center in Milledgeville.

In 1979, a Department of Special Missions was created in the Division of Evangelism and Missions. In 1981, the Program of Language Missions was upgraded to department status with the rapid growth and involvement in this special ministry of the State Missions Program.

On January 1, 1981, Dr. James Norman Griffith became Executive Director-Treasurer for the Executive Committee of the Georgia Baptist Convention. Dr. Griffith, who had served 14 years as pastor of Beech Haven Baptist Church in Athens, succeeded Dr. Searcy S. Garrison. Dr. Garrison retired December 31, 1980, having completed a record tenure of 26 years as Executive Secretary-Treasurer.

In 1983, the debt on the Baptist Center on Flowers Road South was paid off. The 25-year building loan of \$6 million was paid off in less than eight years. Early repayment of the loan represented a savings of an approximately \$5 million in interest alone.

In 1984, the new Searcy S. Garrison Auditorium at the Georgia Baptist Assembly in Toccoa was completed. Built debt-free with existing funds, the new structure replaced the old auditorium and seats approximately 1,100 persons, including stage seating.

In 1987, a new Royal Ambassador Camp near Forsyth was named Camp Kaleo. It was constructed and opened its doors to thousands of young men and boys for missions education and training.

In 1988, Georgia Baptists provided a new building for the first Southern Baptist alcohol-drug rehabilitation center for men. The Penfield Christian Home dormitory in Greene County will accommodate 28 clients for a six-week program. Both Camp Kaleo and Penfield Christian Home were constructed primarily by volunteer labor through a growing ministry of Baptist Men in Georgia.

In 1977, the Georgia Baptist Convention accepted the invitation to establish a sister state relationship with New York. This agreement concluded on December 13, 1990. Under the leadership of Dr. James N. Griffith, Georgia became the leading state convention in partnership relationships in the Southern Baptist Convention. In March of 1990, the establishment of a Sister State Program with Connecticut in the Baptist Convention of New England was adopted. Since then, the Convention has partnered with several states and countries for missions outreach, including Alaska, Utah/Idaho, California, New York, Germany, Panama, Liberia, France, Moldova, Korea, Mexico, Russia, and Canada. The Georgia Baptist Mission Board values partnerships, but realizes the true strength of any partnership lies with the local church and/or association. To that end, the Community Missions and Disaster Response Department is committed to helping missional leaders develop a missional strategy unique to their church and connect them with mission opportunities.

Also in 1990, the Georgia Baptist Assembly in Toccoa completed a new hotel with 100 bedrooms and 11 conference rooms. The assembly will now accommodate up to 1,000 people.

In September 1992, Dr. James N. Griffith announced to the Executive Committee of the Georgia Baptist Convention his retirement, effective February 28, 1993. Dr. Griffith served into his thirteenth year with the Georgia Baptist Convention. Through his efforts, the Convention became the top percentage contributor to the Cooperative Program in the Southern Baptist Convention. The State Missions Offering expanded to more than three times its 1980 income level. Georgia's State Missions Program expanded and significant advances in church planting and language missions efforts were accomplished.

After Dr. Griffith's retirement, the Convention came under the leadership of Dr. J. Robert White in 1993. For 25 years, Dr. White served as a minister of youth, music and youth, associate pastor, and pastor of churches in Alabama, Indiana, Georgia, and Kentucky. He also served for many years in a leadership capacity within the Georgia and Kentucky Baptist Conventions.

Georgia Baptists adopted a recommendation to name the original hotel at the Georgia Baptist Assembly for Dr. Bernard King for his long years of service and diligent efforts on behalf of Georgia Baptists. Camp Kaleo's property was enlarged and the new activities building was named for R. Eugene Dailey in honor of his service to Georgia Baptists.

In September 1993, William Thomas Neal, III, became editor of The Christian Index. Former editor R. Albert Mohler, Jr. resigned to become president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In November 1994, under the leadership of Dr. J. Robert White, the Georgia Baptist Convention while in session in Macon, passed an historic resolution on race reconciliation. This resolution appeared in the Associated Press and ran in newspapers across the nation. The Resolutions Committee was chaired by Dr. Tracy L. Brinson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Hinesville, Georgia. In this resolution, Georgia Baptists resolved to "seek reconciliation between black and white Americans by seeking forgiveness for the sins of our heritage and ourselves and...to acknowledge our heritage of sin in this area and ask for forgiveness of God and of our black brothers and sisters in Christ, knowing that our repentance and confession of sin is mandated by Christ's command and necessary for forgiveness and reconciliation to take place and...to model a positive witness for Christ through racial reconciliation."

As of 1996, Georgia Baptist institutions included a massive Health Care System; one university; four colleges; homes for the elderly; a children's home ministry with multiple facilities; a state newspaper, The Christian Index; two large assemblies; and a Baptist Center in Atlanta.

In 1997, the Structure Study Committee completed their report. The Committee had been appointed on March 15, 1995. After nearly two years of diligent effort, this committee gave their report at the 1997 GBC

annual meeting in Atlanta. Purpose, values, and vision statements were adopted.

The first four Regional Consultants were placed in Northwest Georgia, West Georgia, East Central Georgia, and Southeast Georgia in June 1998. Ministry Resource Consultants for East Georgia, Southwest Georgia and Northeast Georgia were placed in 1999. Central Georgia and West Central Georgia were placed in summer of 2001.

In 1999, the names of Georgia Baptist Assembly and Norman Baptist Assembly were changed to Georgia Baptist Conference Center–Toccoa and Georgia Baptist Conference Center –Norman Park, respectively.

Also in 1999, the Georgia Baptist Convention staff developed and adopted the phrase “Serving Christ by Strengthening Churches” as the “Main Thing.” This means that everything Convention employees do must relate back to “Serving Christ by Strengthening Churches.” This was to help ensure that the Georgia Baptist Convention staff stays true to its purpose and mission.

In March of 1999, the Executive Committee established a study committee to explore the feasibility of retaining the Baptist Center facility on Flowers Road in DeKalb County or relocating. A year later, that study committee, chaired by former GBC president Frank Cox, recommended that a search begin for potential building sites, and the Executive Committee voted to employ a real estate development firm to assist with the study and search. At the annual meeting in Savannah in 2000, the Executive Committee approved the recommendation of the study committee to move the Baptist Center from its location in DeKalb County.

In July 2001, a called meeting of the Baptist Center Study Committee presented a recommendation to the Executive Committee authorizing the Executive Director and members of the study committee to move forward in the purchase of property for the relocation of the Baptist Center. The Executive Committee approved the acquisition and purchase of acreage in Gwinnett County.

In September of 2001, the Executive Committee also approved the decision for the Georgia Baptist Convention to make a transition out of the hospital arena and explore other avenues of helping fund unmet healthcare needs.

In August 2002, under the direction of Dr. White, the relocation plans moved forward. Dr. White, along with Vice President for Operations Dr. J. Michael Williams and Vice President for Ministries Bobby Boswell, engaged professionals for the planning, development, construction, and relocation of the Baptist Center. They secured appropriate financing for the project. The Baptist Center Study Committee completed the purchase of 25 acres along I-85 in Gwinnett County. The Executive Leadership Team and the state missionaries studied the facility needs of Convention workers with the assistance of Seibert and Son, Inc., a local architecture firm. The architectural firm Smallwood, Reynolds, Stewart, Steward and Associates, Inc., was approved as the project’s architect.

In September 2002, the Administration Committee approved financing for a total of 33.972 acres on Sugarloaf Parkway.

In 2003, Shorter College dissolved its relationship with the Georgia Baptist Convention. Also in 2003, Bill Neal retired from his post as editor of The Christian Index after a long and fruitful career within Baptist life. Former GBC president Gerald Harris was selected as the new editor of The Christian Index.

In 2002, the Georgia Baptist Convention staff took up the challenge issued by Dr. White of “Healthy Kingdom Churches Empowering Kingdom Growth.” The organization started work on aligning the ministries of the convention to parallel with the ten qualities of a healthy kingdom church as outlined in Dr. White’s book, “Healthy Kingdom Churches.”

In August 2003, the Georgia Baptist Convention sold its building and property on Flowers Road South in northeast Atlanta to Mercer University for \$12 million. The five-story building on its 25-acre site adjoins the Atlanta campus of Mercer, which has its main campus in Macon.

In 2004 plans progressed for the relocation of the Baptist Center to Gwinnett County. A groundbreaking service was held on March 16, 2004, at 6405 Sugarloaf Parkway, Duluth for the new five-story, 150,000-square-foot building to house the 180 Atlanta-based Georgia Baptist Convention staff members. Georgia's First Lady, Mary Perdue, was among the guest speakers for the groundbreaking, along with the executive leadership of the Convention.

Dr. White remarked, "We are very pleased about our relocation to Gwinnett County. The progressive county and this state-of-the-art facility will combine to make our new location a dynamic one for the 21st century ministry that spans Georgia and literally reaches around the world. We have a great heritage, but our greatest days are ahead, and the most efficient facility possible is needed for these future years."

During the year, plans for the new facility were drawn up by a local design firm and approved by Dr. White, along with the final purchases of the parcels of land at the Duluth site. Along with the Duluth site, the Executive Committee in their meeting on September 14, 2004, learned of an opportunity to purchase 90 acres of property on the opposite side of Lake Louise from the Georgia Baptist Conference Center in Toccoa. Members adopted a recommendation to pursue purchase of that property. At the Convention meeting in College Park in November 2004, the messengers approved this recommendation. Also at the November 2004 Convention meeting, the Georgia Baptist Developmental Disabilities Ministries requested withdrawal from the Georgia Baptist Convention. The messengers in attendance gave approval for this group to become independent from the Convention.

On December 16, 2004, construction of the new Baptist Center began on 43.8 acres at Sugarloaf Parkway in Duluth.

During 2005, the Supreme Court of the State of Georgia ruled that the actions taken by Shorter College trustees in 2002-03 were to be reversed and Shorter College was returned to Georgia Baptists. Dr. Harold Newman was named president and Dr. Nelson Price was elected as acting chairman of the board of trustees.

At the 2005 Convention meeting, a recommendation from the Executive Committee to dissolve the Convention's relationship with Mercer University was voted on and passed by the messengers. A successful dissolution to the relationship took place in 2006. Mercer University and the Georgia Baptist Convention have had a relationship since 1833, when the Mercer Institute was organized in Penfield, Georgia.

Also in 2005, the first grants were given by the Georgia Baptist Health Care Ministry Foundation. These grants were funded by the sale of Georgia Baptist hospitals around the state and aided in the new mission of the GBHCFM "to become a hospital without walls."

In May of 2006, after spending 31 years at the Flowers Road South address, the Georgia Baptist Convention offices were moved to its new location in Duluth, Georgia.

On September 12, 2006 The Georgia Baptist Convention formally opened its doors at the new headquarters in Duluth, Georgia. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was conducted on the front steps of the building. Dr. White, executive director, Wayne Hamrick, GBC president, members of the Administration Committee, and elected officials from the county were present. The Honorable Sonny Perdue, Governor of the state of Georgia, was the guest speaker.

The \$42 million Georgia Baptist Missions and Ministry Center with its 55-foot cross that rises out of a lake is located on one of the busiest intersections at the corner of Sugarloaf and Satellite Boulevard in Duluth. The tract of land is a total of 43 acres.

A few months later, a replica of Judge Roy Moore's Ten Commandments was placed in the Old Testament lobby of the building. The statue of Jesus and the Children was placed in the New Testament lobby.

Dr. White said, "We have a great heritage, but our greatest days are ahead and the most efficient facility possible is needed for these future years."

In February of 2007, Frank Murphy, campus minister in Rome, Georgia, completed the paintings located in the Old and New Testament lobbies of the new headquarters.

The Georgia Baptist Convention became the first state convention to establish an Internet radio station in 2007.

In 2010, Shorter College obtained university status and became Shorter University.

The Georgia Baptist Convention approved a Study Task Force report to reduce lostness in Georgia called the "5 Smooth Stones" at its Annual Meeting in 2011. Messengers also affirmed the Georgia Baptist Convention Great Commission Resurgence Task Force report, and reduced the Cooperative Program budget to 1999 levels.

In 2012, the Convention honored J. Robert White on his 20th anniversary as Executive Director and increased the Cooperative Program budget by 3.7%. The Cooperative Program Allocation Study Committee chaired by Jeremy Morton agreed to maintain the 50/50% funding split between state and national ministries.

The 50th anniversary of ministry at the Georgia Baptist Convention Conference Center in Toccoa was celebrated in September 2013 during the meeting of the Executive Committee held on site and was recognized at the 2013 Convention Annual Meeting.

2014 brought the retirement of Pete Rockett as CEO of the Baptist Foundation after 25 years of service and Tom Duvall was recognized for 25 years of service. The lostness of Georgia was the emphasis of the annual convention session.

In March 2015, it was announced at the meeting of the Executive Committee that the Board of Trustees of the Georgia Baptist Health Care Ministry Foundation approved the decision to provide the funds to pay the entire debt of \$24,631,330.13 on the Georgia Baptist Missions and Ministry Center in Duluth.

In November 2015, Executive Director J. Robert White announced at the Georgia Baptist Convention Annual Meeting that the Convention is beginning a reinvention process and the "doing business as" name was changed to the Georgia Baptist Mission Board. The Christian Index migrated to an online edition after 193 years.