

**THE
HOME MISSION
BOARD/STATE
COOPERATIVE
AGREEMENT**

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By Ernest J. Kelley

I. Historical Perspective of HMB/State Cooperation

At the organizational meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Augusta, Georgia, 1845, two mission boards were established to serve the fledgling denomination and its churches at home and abroad. "The establishment and direction of the mission boards by the Convention itself identified the work of missions as a basic concern of the Convention."¹ The Board of Domestic Missions (Home Missions), located in Marion, Alabama, had uncertain leadership at first. The first corresponding secretary, J. L. Reynolds of South Carolina, resigned as soon as he returned home.² Daniel Perrin Bestor, Sr., an Alabama pastor, was elected as corresponding secretary. He resigned after serving only five months in the office, stating: "I have learned . . . that our brethren prefer carrying on their domestic missionary operations through their associations and state conventions."³ Many felt if each state convention and association would do mission work there was no need for a

¹Arthur B. Rutledge, William G. Tanner, Missions in America (Broadman Press, 1983), p. 17.

²Annual, Southern Baptist Convention, 1845, p. 6.

³Minutes, Triennial Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1846, pp. 29-30.

convention-wide Domestic Mission Board.⁴ The Home Mission Board has been forced to prove its rightful and meaningful place in the life and work of Southern Baptists each generation.⁵

The question of the rightful or needful place of the Home Mission Board continues to be asked. It is often theorized that if each state convention and association were effectively doing mission work within its borders there would be no need for a convention-wide domestic board. Associations and state conventions do effective and meaningful mission work. However, there are some associations and state conventions that are stronger than others. Thus, some areas were weak and unreached. The Domestic Board (Home Mission Board) found a meaningful role among Southern Baptists as it sought to use the combined strength of Southern Baptists to reach unevangelized areas of the nation. There was a need for a national missions strategy to bring Southern Baptists together in reaching a new nation for Christ. Since its inception, the Cooperative Agreement has served as an instrument of understanding and planned cooperation in a national missions strategy. Herein the Cooperative Agreement finds one of its most important functions.

It is interesting to note the preamble to the first constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention envisioned the whole of the United

⁴Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, Vol. 1, p. 635.

⁵Ibid, p. 635.

States as needing to be addressed. To concentrate mission efforts in the South was a self-imposed limitation by the Board itself.

Raising funds to advance the cause of missions became vitally important to the new expansion of missions. In January 1846, the Domestic Board began employing agents to raise funds to support fourteen missionaries under appointment.⁶ In the years of beginning (1847-49) some churches were encouraged to designate appropriations for missions, and all churches were asked to inform their membership of financial needs.

In 1851, the Domestic Board had fifty or more missionaries under appointment and averaged \$1,000 per month in receipts. During this time, the Domestic Board announced a plan to secure an agent for each state to assist in fund raising. This move was the forerunner of state directors. Around 1853, the Domestic Mission Board called for some form of a "Cooperative Program" plan of fund raising between churches, associations, state conventions and the Board for conducting home missions.⁷ In 1855, Kentucky voted to cooperate with the Board of Domestic Missions in home missions, rather than continue its own home mission program without contributing to the Board's work. At the same time, Arkansas reported eight missionaries jointly supported by the associations and

⁶Southern Baptist Missionary Journal, no. 6, November, 1846, p. 141.

⁷E. W. Hunke Notes.

Domestic Board.⁸ In less than five years (1851-1856) the Domestic Board secured state directors, projected cooperative funding and employed jointly funded personnel.⁹

In 1865, the Domestic Board was supplementing salaries of some pastors in destitute areas. It also assured Louisiana that it would cooperate in the employment of ten missionaries to the extent it would guarantee payment should there be a deficit within the state convention. In 1867, a "plan of cooperation" for joint appointment and support of a missionary by an association and the Domestic Board was in operation. In 1871, the Domestic Board appointed three district secretaries to work with the corresponding secretary in bringing the Board's work before every church in their district. While different in assignment, these three district secretaries somewhat model the work of today's regional coordinators. In 1873, the Southern Baptist Convention approved a percentage agreement between the Domestic Mission Board and state boards for the propagation of the gospel and mission work. In less than ten years (1865-1873) the Domestic Board entered a stabilizing role for missionaries working in states, began developing a cooperative plan of work, employed regional secretaries to work with several states in one district and established a percentage arrangement with states for support of missionaries. A pattern of

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

work was established for the Domestic Mission Board that continued for over a century.

By the 1870s, agency names and their scope of work became a matter of discussion among Southern Baptists. The "first" Sunday School Board and Domestic and Indian Mission Board were consolidated by the Convention in 1873.¹⁰ The new agency name was Domestic and Indian Mission Board and Sunday School Board. This move did not fully satisfy the Convention. Therefore, in 1874, the title was shortened to Home Mission Board, the current name for the agency. Dr. Robert A. Baker makes the observation that "the Home Mission Board...had not sought the increased responsibility involved in the consolidation."¹¹

Cooperative work has always been an intricate part of the work of the Home Mission Board. In 1893, a special Southern Baptist Convention committee emphasized the importance of home missions as a means of "unifying our forces." In 1897, the Southern Baptist Convention directed the Home Mission Board to undertake the task of unifying the churches. A meeting of state secretaries was called by the recording secretary of the Home Mission Board to confer on the needs of each state for mission work. By the early twentieth century, the Home Mission Board was reporting to the annual

¹⁰Rutledge, Tanner, Missions in America, p. 33.

¹¹Robert A. Baker, The Story of the Sunday School Board. (Nashville: Convention Press, 1966), p. 27.

meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention cooperative mission work with the states. The dual emphasis of the Home Mission Board in encouraging Baptists to systematically give to missions and planning with states for cooperative missions, set the stage for the introduction of the Cooperative Program in 1925.

II. Strategic Initiation of the Cooperative Agreement

The Home Mission Board is committed to strategic program and budget planning with state conventions on the basis of adopted statements of cooperation between the Board of Directors of the two entities.

The desire to relate to state conventions for missions and evangelism ministries dates back to the early years of the Home Mission Board. However, for many years, mutual planning between the Home Mission Board and state conventions was not implemented on a very coordinated basis. Periodic events would be held where state conventions and the Home Mission Board would cooperate but seldom was there an effective, ongoing, cooperative plan of work. Generally, Home Mission Board programming was done on a direct mission basis. If Home Mission Board leaders saw a need somewhere in the country, plans would be made unilaterally to respond to the situation as quickly and specifically as possible. This was especially true from the end of World War I through the 1950s.

In the 1950s, two benchmark events took place that directly effected the establishment of the Cooperative Agreement with state conventions. In the mid 1950s, Dr. Arthur Rutledge was director of missions for the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He began to talk with Dr. Courts Redford about a written statement of cooperation between the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Home Mission Board so as to avoid duplication in missionary personnel, time and money. Interestingly enough, at the same time, the Southern Baptist Convention was appointing a study committee to review the work of the SBC agencies and make helpful suggestions. Dr. Douglas Branch, executive director of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, was chairman of the special study committee, referred to as the "Branch Committee."

The Committee to Study the Total Southern Baptist Program (Branch Committee) was authorized by the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Kansas City in 1956. The report of this committee is of major significance when considering the development of the Cooperative Agreement. Some of the principles that guided the committee are especially significant to the development of the Cooperative Agreement. These selected principles are: 1) Local Baptist churches are autonomous organizations and each general Baptist body is independent and self-governing. Cooperation is always on a voluntary basis. 2) The Southern Baptist Convention has responsibility for providing broad direction to all its agencies. The purpose of the Southern Baptist Convention is to carry on programs which are essential to the

attainment of the denomination's objective, but which cannot be carried on by individual churches working alone, and which cannot be more effectively carried on by local associations or state conventions. 3) Convention agencies should have full responsibility and authority for conducting their affairs within the limits established by the convention. 4) The Executive Committee should assist the Convention in its work without infringing upon the authority and responsibilities of the agencies. 5) The Convention's programs should be promoted through other general Baptist bodies wherever feasible. Under this concept, the Southern Baptist Convention should provide promotional methods and materials to assist the state conventions in their work. 6) The Southern Baptist Convention and its agencies should carry on only those programs which cannot be carried on more effectively by the local churches, the associations or the state conventions.¹²

The report and its recommendations came to the 1958 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention and were adopted a year later. Section three of the report addressed the Home Mission Board. Since its adoption, the "Branch Report" has significantly influenced decisions at the Home Mission Board. Some of the more important matters in the report follow.

In the introduction, it identified the geographical work of the agency in both new and well-established state conventions. "In large

¹²Annual. Southern Baptist Convention, 1958. p. 430.

part, this potential is in areas where relatively new state conventions or no state conventions are in existence. In part, it is in areas served by well-established state conventions." Some of the main sections of the Home Mission Board report state general guidelines.

1. The Home Mission Board should continue to exist as a separate agency of the convention.
2. The Home Mission Board should continue to increase its emphasis on work in areas where there is no state conventions or where the state convention is not well established. The Board...should be encouraged...to devote an increasing share of its budget each year to work in such areas. The well-established state should also assist by assuming increasing responsibility for financing the continuing mission work within their own areas.
3. Cooperation in mission work by the Home Mission Board and state conventions should be continued and even accelerated. The Home Mission Board and the state convention should continue to explore means of increasing cooperative and financial support in order that the best possible plan may be found to direct our mission resources where they are most needed...It is further recommended that the HMB and state conventions seek to develop a uniform Southern Baptist Convention-wide pattern of mission work.
4. State conventions should be encouraged to assume administrative and financial responsibility for direct mission work now conducted by the HMB as rapidly as possible...The HMB should take the initiative in developing these plans.
5. The HMB should continue to sponsor direct mission work in areas where adequate programs cannot be sponsored by state conventions on a cooperative or on an independent basis. Where new direct mission work is undertaken by the HMB, it should, at the outset, obtain concurrence of the state convention and jointly with the state convention develop a plan for the orderly assumption of administrative and financial responsibility for the work by the state convention.

6. State conventions should also be encouraged to assume full financial responsibility for all mission work in their areas as rapidly as possible.
7. The Home Mission Board should work with the state convention to develop a single uniform mission program. The HMB should continue to develop the concept that all mission work carried on in the United States is a part of a single, uniform Southern Baptist mission program...The HMB should also continue to be responsible for:
 - a) surveying needs for expanded mission work;
 - b) developing and experimenting with new types of mission activities;
 - c) developing books and other information on mission methods;
 - d) sponsoring conferences and training sessions for mission workers;
 - e) promoting interest in missions and financial support for missions, and;
 - f) encouraging persons to enter mission service.¹³

The "Branch Report" became Southern Baptist Convention policy for the Home Mission Board and has a strong effect on the work of the agency.

The Texas Cooperative Agreement, the first of its kind, was effective January 1, 1959. Dr. Rutledge, state missions director, Loyd Corder, state language director, Woodrow Fuller, associate to the executive secretary in Texas and Courts Redford, executive secretary-treasurer, HMB, became the negotiating team that hammered out the first Cooperative Agreement. A single coordinator

¹³Ibid., pp. 430, 435-437.

directed language missions work for both Texas and the HMB. The concepts in this first agreement still serve as the basic concepts in the present model for current agreements, now much broader in scope. Soon after the first Cooperative Agreement was adopted by the BGCT and HMB boards of directors, Dr. Rutledge was invited to come to the Home Mission Board as director of Missions Division (March 1959). Here he became the prime mover in creating Cooperative Agreements with all state conventions. Within three years the HMB and twenty-six of the then twenty-eight state conventions had approved and negotiated a Cooperative Agreement.¹⁴

After a decade of negotiations with state leaders, Dr. Rutledge announced that the HMB had formal Cooperative Agreements with twenty-nine of the then thirty state conventions. These agreements, while varying in minor details from state to state, called for "joint planning of the mission work within the state, the joint selection and employment of missionaries, a unified budget with annual agreements on respective percentages to be supplied by the state convention and by the HMB, and continuing supervision of the work within the state to be supplied by the state mission office consistent with predetermined plans."¹⁵

¹⁴Rutledge, Tanner, Missions in America, pp. 72-73.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 73.

Cooperative Agreements provide an orderly method for the effective correlation and utilization of the resources of Southern Baptists. This has been the strength and genius of Cooperative Agreements from their beginning.

Dr. Rutledge expressed that his understanding of the strong points of the Cooperative Agreements were:

1. The relationships between the state conventions and the Home Board are clearly understood. Unilateral actions in areas of cooperation are not taken.
2. The mission work within a given convention is unified in contrast to the parallel and sometimes duplicating programs when both a state convention and the Board were conducting mission work within the same area.
3. The supervision is provided at close range, where maximum help can be supplied to the missionaries and where problems can be faced promptly.
4. The missionaries belong primarily to the people among whom they live and serve and not to a distantly located agency. This provides the missionary with the meaningful ties that open the way to needed local understanding and encouragement. By means of general conferences, provision of fringe benefits and occasional correspondence and field visitation, the Home Mission Board maintains a warm relationship with the missionaries on the fields.
5. Responsibility for all the mission needs of a given state is placed upon that state convention. The role of the Home Mission Board thus becomes that of a helper to the Baptists of a given convention in meeting their own mission challenge. Where local resources are limited, in personnel and finances, the Board becomes a channel whereby the older, well-established states of the Convention share in meeting these pressing needs.

6. This approach permits the Board to concentrate on a national strategy, a uniform, Convention-wide program of missions and evangelism to be developed and implemented in cooperation with the several state conventions.¹⁶

The 1960s was a turbulent decade in the United States. The turbulence was not isolated to the college campuses, government or streets of the land. The social and cultural revolution strongly effected the churches. It was a time of locked church doors, police action to prevent church-centered demonstrations and other disruptive activities. The 1968 Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Houston adopted "A Statement Concerning the Crisis In Our Nation."¹⁷ This action dramatically effected the Home Mission Board, its programs and agreements with state conventions.

The report requested the Home Mission Board to take the leadership in working with the problems related to the crisis. The heart of the crisis centered in human dignity and respect for each individual. Since the 1960s, the Home Mission Board has actively taken the initiative in reaching other races and languages and welcoming them into our fellowship. The agency reevaluated its priorities in regard to language culture people, black people, political immigrants, the impoverished and others not in the mainstream of Southern Baptists. It is the opinion of the author that during this

¹⁶Arthur B. Rutledge, "Southern Baptist Missions at Home," Review and Expositor, LXII, No. 1, Winter, 1965, pp. 17-18.

¹⁷Annual, Southern Baptist Convention, 1968, pp. 67-69.

time, the Home Mission Board gave strong and effective leadership to Southern Baptists in meeting a national crisis.

The 1976 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention was held in Norfolk, Virginia. At this meeting, a significant policy statement was adopted. It was the Southern Baptist Missions Challenge Report. The Missions Challenge Committee was created in 1974 at the Dallas meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. A large section of the report addressed the Home Mission Board.¹⁸

The section "Cooperation Through State Conventions" of the Missions Challenge Report is of special interest in relation to the Cooperative Agreement. Among other things it reaffirmed the Home Mission Board should develop a "single uniform mission program for the United States and assigned territories" with the various state conventions.

The paragraph on Cooperative Agreements states: "A formal cooperative missions agreement has been worked out with all conventions. These agreements, while varying to fit the situation in respective states, call for joint planning of the mission work within the state, the joint selection and employment of missionaries, a unified budget with annual agreements on the respective percentages to be supplied by the state convention and by the Home Mission Board, and continuing supervision of the work within the

¹⁸Report of the Missions Challenge Committee, pp. 28-30.

state to be supplied by the state missions office consistent with predetermined plans.”¹⁹

The report reiterated the strong points of Cooperative Agreements:

- a) Unilateral actions in areas of cooperation are not taken by either the Home Mission Board or the respective state convention.
- b) Unified mission work in a given state convention in contrast to parallel or duplicate programs.
- c) Supervision to be provided at close range for maximum help for the missionary.
- d) Missionaries belong primarily to the people among whom they live and serve, not a distantly located agency.
- e) Responsibility for all mission needs of a given state is placed upon that state convention. The role of the Board thus becomes that of a helper. Where local resources are limited, in personnel and finances, the Board becomes a channel whereby the older, well established states of the Convention share in meeting these pressing needs.
- f) The Board is to concentrate on a national strategy, a uniform, convention-wide program of missions and evangelism to be developed and implemented in cooperation with state conventions.

Several general understandings were reaffirmed in the Mission Challenge report. Among them were the following:

¹⁹Ibid., p. 28.

- 1) A cooperative relationship assures that national priorities receive consideration, as well as state priorities.
- 2) The Board provides a national relationship between missionaries.
- 3) Agreements assure that the Board gives full consideration to special state priorities.
- 4) The Board counts persons as missionary personnel if they have a financial relationship to the agency.
- 5) Part of the strategy for developing indigenous work is to reduce assistance to persons serving associations and churches as local support can assume responsibility.
- 6) Missions and evangelism strategies must be planned in cooperation with other Baptist bodies (associations, state conventions) if there is to be unity of action in accomplishing the responsibility for developing a "single uniform missions program."

During the 1960s, annual budget planning between the Home Mission Board and state conventions was done most often by several mission leaders from Atlanta who would travel to the state convention offices for intense discussions. Sometimes as many as eight to ten persons would go to a state convention building and meet with the executive director and his staff. Often the meetings were laborious and difficult to manage because so many persons were involved in the detailed decision-making discussions. Program strategy, state/agency administration, national agency and state convention strategy, personal concerns and biases became intertwined in these meetings where up to 12 or 15 people were involved. Consequently, in January 1971, Dr. Rutledge, by then

executive director of the Home Mission Board, after a great deal of consultation with state executive directors, launched a new approach to planning and budgeting with state conventions.

This new approach required a reorganization of the Home Mission Board staff. Sections were created, with planning assigned to one, missions programs to another and services to a third. In 1975, evangelism programs became the fourth section. The responsibility of negotiating and managing the Cooperative Agreements was given to the Planning Section and four regional coordinators. The planning, coordinating and budgeting for the agency was assigned to the Planning Section. The four regional coordinators represented the Home Mission Board president in three meetings a year with the executive director of each state. The Planning Section was also assigned the responsibility of planning, coordinating and budgeting within the agency. It was the primary responsibility of this section to develop a single, national mission strategy.

The Missions and Evangelism Sections were assigned the responsibility of developing program strategies, conducting training events, supervising missionaries and managing an annual budget. New and creative programs and materials were developed by the program sections. At this time Dr. Rutledge introduced priority planning for budgeting mission funds. The Planning Section conducted numerous conferences inside and outside the agency in preparing a priority list of mission needs for the nation. The

Cooperative Agreement is the instrument that facilitates the harmonious development of a uniform, national missions strategy.

Summary

It is the author's opinion that the unique and effective Cooperative Agreements established between the HMB and state conventions are especially vital to a nation-wide strategy for missions and evangelism. It is a planned approach to fulfill the Southern Baptist Convention directive to develop a single, unified missions plan of work.

These agreements (1) call for joint planning of HMB work in the states and (2) include the joint selection and employment of missionaries and (3) a unified budget with annual agreements on amounts of funding, ratio of participation and other understandings. It was never intended that Cooperative Agreements be legal documents, but rather basis of understanding and plans for working together. In the planning process, program leaders of both the Home Mission Board and state conventions plan together state strategies of missions and evangelism. At the same time, Home Mission Board program leaders develop a national strategy for missions and evangelism. These two strategies are compatible and not in conflict.

While unilateral actions in areas of cooperation are not taken, there are provisions for church extension, ministry and evangelism

work to be done by state and national missionary personnel outside of the agreement. The Home Mission Board budget is based on approved plans developed within the understandings of the Cooperative Agreement.

There are currently 37 state conventions with 36 Cooperative Agreements, one with a Statement of Cooperation, three state Baptist fellowships with Cooperative Agreements and an established cooperative budget with Canada and Puerto Rico.

