

Introduction to the Upcoming Called Meeting of the Henry County Baptist Association of Virginia

The Henry County Baptist Association of Virginia has recognized its struggles, begun taking concrete steps toward renewal, and now stands at a pivotal moment to rediscover its mission and impact. Over the last eighteen months, we have moved from a season of discernment into a season of action, facing hard truths about spiritual disunity, financial strain, and declining engagement, while also identifying meaningful, cooperative ministry opportunities that could revitalize our work.

Season of Discernment and Decision

A year and a half ago, the association entered into a focused 40-day period of prayer seeking God's direction for our future. This time of discernment reflected a shared awareness that the association could not simply continue "business as usual," but needed clarity about how to proceed. Emerging from this season, the messengers and leaders concluded that renewed, consistent leadership was essential and made the strategic decision to call an Associational Missionary to help guide the association forward. As an initial step, the association secured an interim Associational Missionary during the October 2024 annual meeting, signaling a commitment to move from passive concern to intentional reorganization and mission.

Challenges Identified in 2025

Throughout 2025, the Associational Missionary focused on three central questions: how to re-engage churches in ministry, how to fund the association's work, and why the association had become less active than in the past. The Associational Missionary began this work by meeting personally with as many pastors as possible, listening to their concerns and hopes. As these questions were explored, it became clear that several underlying problems were contributing to the association's dormancy. There was what seemed like a surface level of spiritual disunity. This, and logistical obstacles left pastors often struggling to catch or embrace a shared vision for cooperative ministry, making it difficult for churches to see how working together could multiply their impact in the community.

Spiritual and Practical Disunity

Through conversations with the pastors, the Associational Missionary discovered that the spiritual disunity running through the association was rooted in divergent theological commitments and ministry philosophies. While some churches remained firmly connected to Southern Baptist Convention theology, others had shifted toward - and gradually adopted - Cooperative Baptist Fellowship theology, creating tension and uncertainty about the association's identity and direction. At the same time, nearly all churches were facing financial strain, especially in the wake of COVID, which further limited their capacity to support associational work. Many churches had lost interest in the association due to a perceived lack of both direction and visible ministry effectiveness. Bivocational pastors, stretched between church responsibilities and secular employment, had little margin for involvement beyond their own church of primary responsibility, while full-time pastors often became absorbed in

their own church's needs and programs. In this environment, the association drifted into dormancy, not out of deliberate neglect, but through a gradual lack of attention, focus, and shared purpose.

Renewed Vision for Cooperative Ministry

In light of these realities, the association is now called to reconsider what it can and should be doing together that no single church can easily do alone. At its best, an association serves as a coordinating body, leveraging the combined resources, gifts, and callings of its churches for greater ministry effectiveness. The association can take the lead in coordinating our churches in community outreach ministries to provide practical help to those in need and offer a sustained witness for Christ, such as initiatives like Operation InAsMuch and/or CareForward, which is a more ongoing effort. Such efforts may also spark and strengthen a vibrant men's ministry as men serve side by side in hands-on projects. Beyond mercy ministries, the association can encourage and equip churches to share the gospel in the marketplace, in obedience to Christ's command, bringing a unified spiritual presence into the community's everyday spaces.

Another significant avenue is disaster response, where the association can keep organized volunteer teams ready to deploy when crises occur and even undertake projects such as building tiny homes for individuals still homeless after disasters, using tools like Zeffy fundraising to help support these efforts.

Supporting Churches and Reaching the Next Generation

Alongside outward-focused ministry, the association can play a vital role in supporting local churches directly. By organizing youth rallies and related youth ministry events, the association can help churches attract and retain young families, offering shared resources that many congregations could not provide on their own. The association can also assist churches with membership drives, helping them think strategically about reaching and assimilating new people. It can also maintain a pool of qualified substitute preachers to fill pulpits as needed, especially benefiting smaller or pastorless congregations. Additionally, the association can represent its churches at key community events, providing a unified presence that raises the visibility of Baptist churches and their collective witness, while easing the burden on individual congregations. In all these ways, the Henry County Baptist Association of Virginia has the opportunity to move from dormancy to renewed vitality, rediscovering the strength of cooperation and the power of a shared mission for the glory of God and the good of the surrounding community.