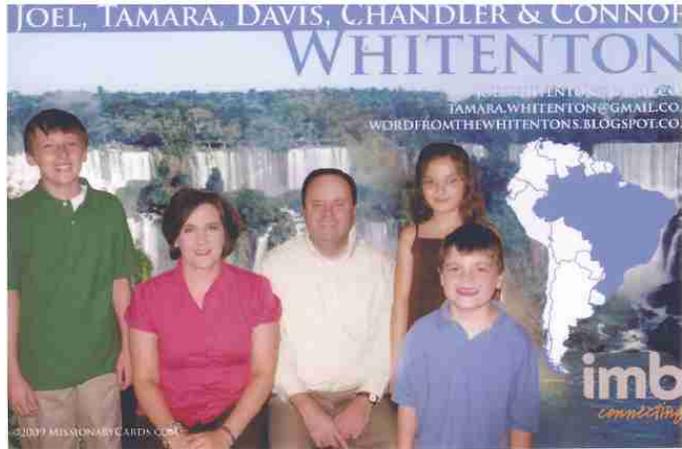


HOW IMPORTANT IS THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM?

My name is Joel D. Whitenton and I am married to Tamara Gayle Whitenton. We have three children, Davis, Chandler, and Connor. I served as a pastor of Springhill Baptist Church, a member church of this Association, from 2004 to 2009. My family and I were appointed as career missionaries of the International Mission Board to Brazil in May, 2009. I want to thank you for your support to us through your prayers and through your giving to the Cooperative Program.



The purpose of this article is to emphasize the importance of your continual support for the Cooperative Program. The Cooperative Program is the Southern Baptists' unified plan of giving through which cooperating Southern Baptist churches give a percentage of their undesignated receipts in support of their respective state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention missions and ministries. From the founding of the convention in 1845, Southern Baptists have united around a mission of eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of the whole denomination in one sacred effort for the propagation of the gospel.

What was elusive in the early years was an organized plan to accomplish this mission. Thus, the Cooperative Program was established by the Southern Baptist Convention in its 1925 meeting in Memphis, Tennessee as the "... only way of liquidating our debts and creating an adequate financial support of all our institutions and activities under God ...," calling all Southern Baptists to "... commit ourselves thoroughly to our Co-Operative Program, taking the nucleus of regular and systematic givers and the wholly or partially enlisted churches and the great body of the unenlisted members, and week by week and month by month, build them into a great and mighty host of never failing causes ..." (SBC Annual 1925, pp. 24-31). Therefore, from its inception, the Cooperative Program has been established as a holistic partnership in cooperation between state conventions and Southern Baptist Convention causes entrusting "... the initiative in raising funds sufficient to care for the needs of all our general Baptist work – state missions, home missions, foreign missions, ministerial relief, and Baptist schools, orphanages, and hospitals" (The Christian Index, May 28, 1925, p. 32).

The simplicity and effectiveness of the Cooperative Program have continued to be its hallmarks, and now, the better part of a century after its birth, the Cooperative Program still functions essentially the same way it did in its earliest days. The success of the Cooperative Program has enabled the expansion of Southern Baptists' missions and ministries at home and abroad in ways unforeseen in those early years. The Cooperative Program sends career missionaries and church planters to a hundred nations and throughout the United States. Through Cooperative Program ministries, volunteer disaster relief teams are some of the first responders to areas of weather-related or other crisis, making the Southern Baptist Convention one of the largest disaster relief organizations in the world. It also funds each of the Southern Baptist

Seminaries who are equipping our future pastors, missionaries and other church leaders with the essentials of our faith.

I also want to add how the Cooperative Program helps us as missionaries. Along with the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, our ministry is supported through the Cooperative program. It is how our housing, transportation and ministry costs are paid. Currently, we have a house and a car awaiting our arrival in Brazil that was made possible through Cooperative program giving. Our medical and dental expenses as well as our children's educational costs also come through Cooperative Program giving. Missionaries of other mission organizations have to spend a good deal of their time raising funds back home in order to stay on the mission field. Southern Baptist missionaries do not have to do that. Since their funds are already provided through the Cooperative program, Southern Baptist missionaries can spend all of their precious time focusing on the Great Commission.

I do not believe that God ever intended for local churches to accomplish the task of the Great Commission on their own since the task is simply too large. Instead, churches must cooperate together in order to accomplish the task. To that end, the Cooperative program remains the simplest and most effective way for churches to do that. Such cooperation is definitely biblically based. Such biblical cooperation between churches is shown in biblical passages such as Acts 2:40-47 and Acts 4:30-37. Such cooperation in the early church characterized their joint missions (Acts 8: 4-8, 14-17), ministries (1 Corinthians 16:2; Romans 15:24-29) and doctrinal education (Colossians 4:16-17).

Today the Cooperative Program stands at a crossroads that it has faced before. In 1924, M.E. Dodd spoke almost prophetically to the issues faced today: "At this point our Unified Program will either break or be saved. If it should break at this point, by an under-emphasis upon the whole program and an over-emphasis upon the individual object, then we will find ourselves back where we were five years ago, with every object contending for all it can obtain, to the exclusion of other equally worthy commitments." In unity, Southern Baptists came together in those early years to forge the Cooperative Program. Southern Baptists have the opportunity today to preserve and even elevate the Cooperative Program as that primary means of support and the key unifying method for showing love in action in seeking to fulfill God's Great Commission at home and abroad.

It is my plea that each of you reading this will urge the members of your churches to commit their unreserved support for the Cooperative Program as the most effective and Biblical means for advancing worldwide mission and ministry causes according to the command of Christ through the Great Commission. I also challenge my fellow churches to commit to a bolder level of mission support through the Cooperative Program than ever before, understanding the command of Jesus Christ that we take the Gospel to the nations beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47), and that each church increase its support of the Cooperative Program on an annual basis until it is satisfied that it has reached a level of giving commensurate with the command of Christ to extend the Kingdom of God throughout the entire world. Such Cooperation should also include support of the local Associations such as the Robertson County Baptist Association. Even the Great Commission task of reaching the people of the Robertson County area is too big for any one church. For this reason, I urge your continual support to the Robertson County Baptist Association as well.

I want to end by thanking you for your support of us as your missionaries through prayer and for continuing to give towards the Cooperative program at traditional and extraordinary levels just as the Apostle Paul called upon the Corinthian church to follow the example of faithful giving by the Macedonian church saying, "I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others" (2 Cor. 8:8).

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