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Tony Wolfe & W. Madison Grace II

EDITORS

FOREWORD BY JEFF IORG



# 100 Years SBC Cooperative Program



Tony Wolfe & W. Madison Grace II



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### Acknowledgments

In 2022, SBC Executive Committee leadership called together a small group of men and women from around the United States to begin thinking through how to celebrate the centennial anniversary of the Cooperative Program (CP) in 2025. The team persisted in its work to plan for a strategic, forward-focused celebration in 2025. I (Tony) was regularly encouraged by the creativity and passion of these Southern Baptist leaders and volunteers. God has been gracious and kind to our Baptist people in gifting this Convention with some of the sharpest minds and most skilled professionals in the country who joyfully focus their energies together in promoting our Great Commission cooperation with excellence.

We would like to express our gratitude to the staff of the SBC Executive Committee, along with the above-mentioned select group of volunteer leaders from across the Southern Baptist Convention, for commissioning this important work at this critical moment in our history. Our deepest gratitude also extends to the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board, the Georgia Baptist Mission Board, and the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions for underwriting the initial costs of production.

The authors contributing to this volume have undertaken their work as a labor of love. Each of them has been personally blessed by the CP, as you will read in their personal CP testimonies throughout the book. Their contributions are the product of tedious research, careful analysis, compositional excellence, and joyful Southern Baptist cooperation. To them is

owed great commendation, for all posterity, for the value added to our Baptist family in this work both now and for generations to come.

Above all, we extend our highest gratitude to the cooperating churches of the Southern Baptist Convention who have sacrificed much to pool their financial resources through the CP these last one hundred years for the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many of these churches have given faithfully and sacrificially through the CP instead of hiring an additional staff member, raising ministers' salaries, remodeling buildings, or purchasing new technology. Every generous contribution has cost them something. Some have given 10, 15, or 20 percent of their undesignated receipts whether in seasons of plenty or in seasons of want. Surely, "their abundant joy and their extreme poverty [have] overflowed in a wealth of generosity" (2 Cor. 8:2). Christ has demonstrated his provision to these churches time and time again, always having everything they need though emptying themselves of everything they have. As editors of this centennial work, our hearts are swollen with extraordinary love and admiration for them.

"Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us" (Eph. 3:20–21), to him belongs all the glory and the highest praise for the work he has accomplished through the CP giving of our Baptist people these one hundred years. The far-reaching gospel work financed through our cherished unified budgeting strategy will thrive today and tomorrow to the extent that the churches continue to faithfully and sacrificially give through the CP. So, in the words of Earnest Easley in his 1925 Future Commission report at the inauguration of the CP, "May God help our people to see it."

I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. (Phil. 1:3–5)

Grace and Peace, Tony Wolfe and W. Madison Grace II

## Contents

Foreword xiii    Jeff lorg
Introduction
Part 1
CHAPTER 1: Cooperation—A Biblical Model
CHAPTER 2: Cooperation in Baptist Beginnings,  1609–1845
CHAPTER 3: Society and Entity-Based Missions Funding in the SBC, 1845–1925
CHAPTER 4: War and Roar: 1910s and 1920s American  Context Influencing the Development of the Southern Baptist  Convention Cooperative Program
CHAPTER 5: Setting the Stage: The \$75 Million Campaign as Precursor to the Cooperative Program92  Tony Wolfe

#### Part 2

CHAPTER 15: A Charge for Our Future	275
Daniel Dickard	
Afterword  Tony Wolfe and W. Madison Grace II	295
10hy woge and w. Maison Grace 11	
Contributors	299
Notes	303

#### Foreword

Por me it's personal. Just before my thirteenth birthday, a Baptist church shared the gospel with me at a regional fair. There, in an exhibit building just off the midway, my life was changed when I received Jesus as my Lord and Savior. Some years later, I learned that church had joined Southern Baptists only a short time before my conversion. The church cooperated with Southern Baptists (and taught me to be one) because it appreciated their unified mechanism of funding missions through the Cooperative Program (CP).

A few years later, I graduated from a Baptist college funded by the CP. Then it was on to seminary, with reduced tuition made possible by the CP, for both master and doctoral degrees. After pastoring a CP-supporting church for several years, my next major ministry step was moving near Portland, Oregon, to plant a new church. Funding for the church plant came through the CP, jointly supplied by the Northwest Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board (now NAMB).

Within a few years, the Northwest Baptist Convention called me as their executive director. My salary was provided through the CP, a major part of my job description was promoting the CP, and my responsibilities included accounting for and distributing CP gifts from churches. After about a decade in that role, my next assignment was president of Gateway Seminary where about one-third of the budget was provided by the CP.

That's why it's personal for me. The CP was the reason the church of my youth became Southern Baptist (and taught me to be one as well). The CP helped provide my education, supported my church plant, funded denominational strategies under my direction in the Northwest, and sustained my presidency of a seminary in a Western location with few Southern Baptists. My life demonstrates that the CP is not a corporate funding mechanism designed to bilk churches and pad bureaucracies. It's a lifeblood for spiritual life and ministry vitality.

The CP is also personal because of the people who make it possible—everyday Baptists who give their tithes and offerings through their local church, like my mother-in-law. She is in her nineties, lives mainly on Social Security, and never misses a month in giving to her church. As a lifelong Southern Baptist, she understands and believes in the CP. She frequently asks, "How is my seminary doing?" because she knows she is one of its main donors!

That's who funds the CP: gray-haired seniors, working-class men and women, and young families trying to make ends meet. Rich fat cats are not the secret benefactors of the CP. Instead, rank-and-file Baptists make it happen a few dollars at a time, resulting in a steady stream of millions of dollars flowing to national and global causes. And, miraculously, they do this voluntarily as their churches adopt annual budgets which specify a percentage or amount of their choosing for the CP. There are no dues, no invoices, and no required allotments or apportionments. The CP is grounded in voluntary cooperation, not contractual coercion.

It's also personal because of the impact the CP has made on the lives of people close to me. For twenty years, thousands of students enrolled while I served as president of Gateway Seminary. Every student benefited from the CP. Southern Baptist students received a tuition discount made possible by the CP. But non-SBC students also benefited since CP resources were used to

fund our total budget, not just allocated to SBC students. These were not nameless faces but passionate students we shared life with while they trained.

While serving in the Northwest, we channeled CP resources to support dozens of church planters, collegiate ministers, and regional missionaries. Our CP gifts supported international missionaries, including many who came from churches in our region. Again, these were not anonymous strangers but friends and colleagues we interacted with daily. The CP funds real people, not a faraway religious fiefdom.

Every author who contributed to this volume could have written a similar forward. We have all been personally blessed by the CP. We have given through it, promoted it, expanded it, managed the resources it generates, and been funded by it. For all of us, it's personal. That's why this book is a labor of love, an opportunity to tell an important story and challenge a rising generation to embrace the CP. We hope a similar book can be written in another hundred years, further celebrating this remarkable approach to supporting God's global mission.

For that to happen, a new generation of CP advocates must take up the mantle. That begins not with financial commitments but with a convictional decision to cooperate. This is hard for some Christians for a variety of reasons. Some believe cooperation requires compromise, and they are right. It requires compromising on lesser issues but not on the gospel and the importance of communicating it to every person in the world. Some believe they can do more by themselves than by working with others. That's arrogance, not wisdom, underlying a selfish and faulty conclusion. Some resist cooperation because they get less credit for the results. Again, that's pride talking when a leader cares more about being noticed than getting results. Finally, some Christians resist cooperation because they must surrender

management of missional and educational efforts to denominational entities. While that might seem risky, the combined and specialized economy of scale makes it worthwhile.

Leaders who cooperate experience compounding organizational impact. Like compounding interest in a retirement fund, cooperating with other Christians exponentially increases our overall impact. We really are better together!

Cooperation allows us to maximize our strengths while allowing the strengths of others to overcome our weaknesses. When we cooperate, ministry efforts are sustained since they rest on combined efforts instead of depending on a few people. For example, when a hurricane ravages the Gulf Coast and churches in that region give less, CP-funded ministries do not fear loss of revenue. We know the financial base is broad enough to withstand a regional shortfall caused by natural disaster, business downturns, or civil unrest. CP revenue emerges from tens of thousands of churches across the United States which creates remarkable financial resiliency.

Since the CP is supported by so many churches, it eliminates dependency (and the associated risk) from depending on a few donors. A president of an independent seminary lamented his concern about the possibility of losing one of his handful of major donors. If even one died, lost passion for their school, became frustrated with his leadership, or had an economic setback which limited their giving—their school would be in trouble. He concluded by saying, "I wish we had something like the Cooperative Program to depend on." Southern Baptists are glad we do!

Perhaps the most amazing part of the CP is its voluntary and self-determined participation. The only reason Southern Baptists give to the CP is they want to. There is no denominational requirement to give any percentage or amount. Yet churches

voluntarily give—some in double digits—a percentage of their unrestricted offerings through the CP. Not only is participation voluntary, but the percentages or amounts of the gifts are all self-determined. Each church decides how much to give and can rescind or revise that amount at any time.

The CP has been an effective tool for so long, it's easy to forget it was once an unproven method dreamed up by frustrated Baptist leaders who were tired of two major problems: perpetual fundraising for every imaginable cause and erratic support from a hodgepodge of fundraising schemes. There had to be a better way. Southern Baptists took a huge risk by creating a financial strategy to fund the totality of their work, built on voluntary cooperation. Their conventions and entities took a similar risk in foregoing direct fundraising and depending on the churches. Billions of dollars channeled to God's mission and millions of lives impacted are our proof of concept. The Cooperative Program works.

As a settled denominational method, it's also easy to overlook the visionary faith of the people who created the CP. These were statesmen who put their reputations on the line to do something never before attempted by any convention, association, or denomination of churches. Their vision was amazing, but it's doubtful they imagined the global impact the CP has made for the past century. Their example, however, motivates us to dream big dreams and trust God to do amazing things!

The scope of what has been accomplished through the CP is outlined in the following chapters. But even these skilled writers can only provide a sketch or summary of all God has done. The original visionaries were concerned about aligning state and national conventions by creating a shared financial channel to resource common missionary and educational enterprises at home and abroad. Those concerns have been satisfied, but

the genius of the CP has enabled it to expand to support other aspects of our common efforts as Southern Baptists.

While this book will be a history for some and a textbook for others, my hope is it will do more than catalog facts. As you read it, my hope is the CP will become personal for you as well. When that happens,

- you will become an advocate for cooperation,
- you will insist on giving more generously through the CP,
- you will invest prayerful support in people funded through this channel, and
- you will thank God for revealing such a unifying, resilient funding model.

May God give us similar visionary wisdom, insight, and courage—as demonstrated by our forebearers in creating the Cooperative Program—to reinvigorate our commitment to enhancing it for future generations of Southern Baptists!

Jeff Iorg
President and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee

### Introduction

#### Tony Wolfe and W. Madison Grace II

May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me.

John 17:21-23

Ome close, and let's celebrate the story of our Southern Baptist people who rose in their time with courage, solidarity, and faith to diminish what International Mission Board president Paul Chitwood consistently reminds us is "the world's greatest problem: lostness." However, in our celebration, let it not be lost on us that this is our time. As our Baptist parents and grandparents rose to their times, we must rise to ours. Our commission is great. Our message is urgent. Our time is short. These factors call for us to examine Southern Baptist's Cooperative Program (CP) and realize that it is more than a funding mechanism. The CP is a unifying force for Great Commission advance—a conduit for voluntary, cooperative, and sacrificial investment from the churches to the nations. For one hundred years, God has counted this program worthy of his blessing and

has shown us favor in our unified efforts. But the success of our Baptist people in these next one hundred years may depend on *our* "unity of purpose and consecration," as it has depended on the unity of those who have come before us.

The CP is the envy of other evangelical denominations. It is a past treasure, a present strength, and a future promise. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Allow us first to take you back to where it all began: a Baptist people who owned a unified purpose, a courageous innovation, and an iron resolve to work together for local and global gospel advance in their time.

The dawn woke the morning in the city as the sun broke through the eastern hills, the warmth of its beams quickly stirring activity around the Mississippi River on the city's West bank. There, 4,001 Baptists from across the states began to enter the newly constructed Ellis Auditorium on the corner of Poplar Avenue and Front Street in downtown Memphis, Tennessee. There they were, in "the Crossroads of the South," Wednesday, May 13, 1925—a fitting location for this pivotal gathering in Baptist history. The \$75 Million Campaign had promised more than it could deliver, but it left Southern Baptists with a sense of solidarity and an increased denominational consciousness. Eighty years of Great Commission cooperation were behind them, thanks to generations before. But this was their day. This was their time. The need was great, the time was right, and expectation filled the air.

At 9:30 a.m., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's music director and professor of church music Isham Emmanuel Reynolds directed the hearts of the messengers heavenward as they lifted their voices to sing:

How firm a foundation Ye saints of the Lord Is laid for your faith
In his excellent word.

#### Then another:

Let every kindred, every tribe
On this terrestrial ball
To Him all majesty ascribe
And crown Him Lord of all!

T. W. O'Kelly of North Carolina rose to read from the Scriptures.

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. (Josh. 1:9 KJV)

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. (Mark 8:34–35 kJV)

After a morning full of business, Pastor Len G. Broughton of First Baptist Church Jacksonville, Florida, preached the Convention sermon, "The New Way," from Joshua 3:4–5. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore. . . . Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you" (KJV).

In the afternoon, the Convention reassembled in session. Lee Rutland Scarborough, president of Southwestern

Baptist Theological Seminary, brought the final report on the Conservation Commission and the \$75 Million Campaign. He concluded with hope for a "more glorious" future through "Southern Baptists' great forward, co-operant movement. . . . We must not lose the things we have already wrought through the mercies and power of God; but we must do our best to bring them to a full reward."<sup>2</sup>

As Scarborough took his seat, C. E. Burts and M. E. Dodd approached the podium. The first annual report of the Future Program Commission was greatly anticipated. Burts's voice cut through the silence of the room as his opening words arrested the missionary spirit of Southern Baptists: "That ours is a critical situation as a denomination all must admit. In presenting this body with our first annual report, therefore, we frankly face the difficulties, but at the same time call attention to certain aspects which should inspire gratitude and give confidence and hope."

Throughout the previous year, many Baptist churches across the South had adopted annual budgeting protocols and were making preparations to include denominational mission funding as part of their annual budgets. The \$7,072,234.84 collected in this manner between May 1, 1924, and May 1, 1925, from eighteen states, fell short of the \$7,500,000 goal set for it the previous year. But the corpus of those funds still served as "a great stabilized nucleus," a solid foundation on which Baptists were "to build our greater superstructure of financial resources." This new program, Burts insisted, would constitute the "financial hope of our denomination."

Dodd, however, pointed out that although the seven million dollars raised was a good start, it was "inadequate" for the work ahead of Southern Baptists. He argued that ongoing individual appeals from Baptist institutions and unsystematic giving from the churches were choking out the success of the Convention.

The words "demoralization" and "disaster" fell from his tongue, and he characterized this unsystematic giving approach as inefficiently and unnecessarily expensive, wasting Baptist dollars on fundraising rather than maximizing them in the gospel work for which they were given. Fortified by God's revealed direction and emboldened with clarity of purpose, Monroe Elmon Dodd, pastor of First Baptist Church, Shreveport, Louisiana, and chairman of the Future Program Commission, spoke with conviction and courage.<sup>5</sup>

Dodd's report included the provision that upon its adoption, the Future Program be renamed "The Co-Operative Program of Southern Baptists." For a full thirty minutes, he stood for questions from the floor. When the vote was called, no hand opposed; the greatest unified missions-funding mechanism the world has ever known between voluntarily associated autonomous churches was born. The CP of Southern Baptists found its genesis that afternoon, May 13, 1925, in Memphis, the power of the Mighty Mississippi beside it, the Crossroads of the South amidst it, and the command of unanimity behind it. And what would it take for the program to succeed? What was to be the price of innovative, systematic cooperation? What would hold the churches together and thrust them forward in this new season of Great Commission cooperation? "A unity of purpose and consecration never known before."

The need today is as it was then—that we might rediscover and recommit ourselves to a unity of purpose and consecration never known before. The chapters of this book are not merely a testimony to God's faithfulness in CP history; they are also a call to Southern Baptist solidarity in our present and to multiplied sacrifice in our future. Much of our world remains unreached with the gospel, the doors of billions of families' homes darkened by the curse of sin. Apart from Christ they will perish for all

eternity, separated from the God who loves them. With all that we have been entrusted and with all the opportunity that lies before us, brothers and sisters, we cannot let it be. We must not. As you read these pages, perhaps your soul will be arrested with the same sense of urgency as ours. Perhaps you will see, as we do, that "the very time has come" for a renewed commitment to joyfully sacrificial investment in our shared mission through the CP.

Chapter 1, by W. Madison Grace II, builds out a compelling biblical doctrine of cooperation. The CP knows a one-hundred-year-old title among Southern Baptists, but it is rooted in a clear biblical theology of intercongregational financial cooperation. First-century churches pooled their resources and relationships together to send missionaries who evangelized the lost and planted churches. The Bible does not prescribe a particular method or organization of missional financial cooperation between churches, but it does record the practice as a regular, celebrated method of Great Commission advance.

In chapter 2, Jason Duesing digs deeply into our Baptist roots to survey the practice of cooperative missions giving. The Baptist movement began in 1609 when John Smyth broke ties with the Puritans and Separatists of his day through credobaptism. The movement fledged as it matured over several decades, but the more churches were gathered, the more they saw the need to work together for church strengthening and missions sending. Cooperation is embedded deeply in Baptist DNA. The Southern Baptist Convention, constituted in 1845, was built upon centuries of mission-minded intercongregational cooperation.

Chapter 3 continues the historical timeline by examining the missions-giving models of the Southern Baptist Convention before 1925. Adam Harwood demonstrates that upon its constitution in 1845, mission efforts of the Southern Baptist Convention were funded through society and associational methods of

financial support. Representation in Convention meetings was afforded to members of various mission societies and missions-minded individuals. These society and associational methods of missions-giving and representation in the Southern Baptist movement became more complex as worthy missions organizations multiplied. The need for a unified budget and a strategic giving plan emerged as Southern Baptists' capacity for meaningful missions cooperation multiplied.

Chapter 4, by Taffey Hall, explains the social, political, and cultural context into which the CP was born. The Great War of 1914–1918 awakened American consciousness toward sacrificial cooperation in a common cause. Efficiency became a popular concept in businesses and organizations. Following the war, the roaring twenties saw a post-war concentration on social, economic, and political change. The CP found its genesis in this postwar American context and was, no doubt, influenced by the awakened consciousness of streamlined business practices and organized efficiency.

In chapter 5, Tony Wolfe examines the five years of Convention cooperation immediately before the permanent unified program was approved. Between 1919 and 1924, Southern Baptists launched their most aggressive missions-funding campaign to date: the \$75 Million Campaign. While receipts fell woefully short of the goal, the effort can hardly be called a failure. The \$75 Million Campaign awakened the Southern Baptist denominational consciousness to its capacity for a great, worldwide movement through sacrificial giving and organized collection. This campaign stimulated the imagination of Southern Baptists and set the stage for the greatest cooperative missions-giving and missions-sending mechanism they have ever known.

Chapter 6 begins the more celebratory, less academic portion of the book with an attempt at concisely defining the CP.

Tony Wolfe proposes the following: "The Cooperative Program is a missions-funding mechanism involving the deliberate and voluntary cooperation of local Baptist churches, state/regional Baptist conventions, and the Southern Baptist Convention through which every contributing Baptist maximizes the Great Commission impact of every dollar given." Churches voluntarily pool their resources together to send missionaries, provide scholarships for seminary students, plant churches, serve communities in crises and disasters, strengthen established churches, encourage church leaders, advocate for biblical values in the public square, and much more. Over the past one hundred years, more than \$20 billion has been given through the CP to reach North America and the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 7, by Leo Endel and Pete Ramirez, reports on one hundred years of CP giving from the perspective of a state convention executive leader. State conventions are the collecting agents of the CP. Each retains a portion of CP giving, as determined by its messengers, to populate the state's budget and reach the states or region with the gospel. For one hundred years, state conventions across America have labored and colabored diligently to plant churches, train church leaders, and propagate the gospel in their communities. God has richly blessed and highly favored the work of Southern Baptist state conventions in these one hundred years of CP organization.

Chapter 8 focuses on the work of the Southern Baptist seminaries as they have been sustained and supported through CP giving. Jamie Dew and Chris Shaffer represent seminary leaders with distinction as they tell the story of the CP from the seminaries' perspective. In 1859, Southern Baptists founded The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. They founded New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1917, acquired Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1925, then

founded Golden Gate (now Gateway) in 1944, Southeastern in 1950, and Midwestern in 1957. Since 1925, \$1.7 billion of CP funding has been invested in the work of these seminaries resulting in almost 140,000 graduates deployed for missions and for every area of local church leadership.

Chapter 9, by Richard Land and Brent Leatherwood, narrates the story of Southern Baptists' engagement in public policy through the years. While Southern Baptists own a long history in organized public policy engagement, they officially organized the Social Service Commission in 1947, which eventually became the Christian Life Commission (1953) and then the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (1997). This organization has advocated tirelessly on behalf of Southern Baptists in Washington on issues of biblical morality and ethicality such as pro-life causes, the sanctity of marriage, biblical gender and sexuality, religious and economic freedom, and more. It has also worked to equip Southern Baptist churches with resources and consultation to engage their local and state governments on issues of biblical morality and ethicality that affect their daily lives in their own backyards.

Chapter 10, from the pens of Kevin Ezell and Mike Ebert, pulls its focus onto one of the first two organizations created by Southern Baptists, the North American Mission Board (previously the Home Mission Board and Domestic Mission Board). The Board has planted churches, mobilized evangelists, and proliferated evangelistic and missional resources in America since 1845. Since the inauguration of the CP in 1925, through their unified funding mechanism, Southern Baptists have continued their legacy of a unified purpose by planting thousands more churches and supporting the work of countless evangelists in an even more unified and systematic way than in their first eighty years. Through NAMB partnerships with state conventions,

associations, and local churches, Southern Baptists not only cooperate to reach the nations for Christ but to reach their own neighborhoods as well.

Chapter 11 broadens the focus of Southern Baptist missional engagement as Paul Chitwood, Julie McGowan, and Melanie Clinton celebrate one hundred years of CP giving to the International Mission Board. Since its inception in 1845, "almost 25,000 Southern Baptist international missionaries have shared the gospel, made disciples, planted churches, and planted their lives in 185 countries around the world." Since 1925, this one sacred effort has been made possible by almost \$4 billion invested in international missions through CP giving. The chapter follows the record of the Board's historical and concurrent activity and its missionaries' inspiring stories in China, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Vietnam, and other unreached regions around the world.

Chapter 12 begins the final section of the book by acknowledging present challenges and reaching forward to future opportunities. Since 1925, Southern Baptists have weathered many storms theologically, methodologically, relationally, financially, and organizationally. Challenges are not only behind us but in front of us as well—some new and some tired. But through them all, the persistent spirit of missional unity compels a level of cooperation between the churches with relentless Great Commission focus. Bart Barber acknowledges concurrent theological, sociological, financial, and organizational challenges for Southern Baptists but insists on a present and future hope through the persistent, unifying worldview that is embodied by our cooperative missions-funding program.

In chapter 13, RaShan Frost examines the ethics of cooperation with an eye on next-generation engagement. As the SBC and CP age, we must reproduce denominational understanding and

commitment from generation to generation. What is compelling about our Baptist work to millennials and Gen Z? What about our work and our Cooperative Program will capture their hearts and invite them in? Perhaps *how* we engage is as important as *that* we engage.

In chapter 14, Scott McConnell demonstrates how vastly the world has changed since Southern Baptists launched the CP in 1925. The national and worldwide population has exploded. Lostness has increased by number and percentage. Thousands of people groups have been discovered but not yet engaged with the gospel. Technology has awakened our people to greater global awareness. Today the fields are white unto harvest, and the workers are few. The gospel stewardship before us is great, but through the years Southern Baptists have proven their ability to rise to the most extraordinary of challenges with a unity of purpose and prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 15 is an invitation to rise to our own time as Southern Baptists, with a unity of purpose and consecration never known before. Daniel Dickard proposes that today we stand at an "intersection" at which we must decide whether we move forward together or leave behind all that we have gained. The future of the Southern Baptist Convention, Dickard writes, will depend on persistent prayer, commitment to the Bible, charity in disagreement over secondary differences, congregational and intercongregational humility, dependence on the Holy Spirit, a refocus on mission and ministry, and renewed sacrificial generosity. "A new generation of Southern Baptist leaders must lean into our cooperative commitments with relentless determination if we are to steward our season successfully to the glory of God."

As you read through the chapters of this book, we hope you feel the urgency of our own day. We hope you hear, through the echoes of our past, the anticipation of our future. A Unity of Purpose must be more than a catchy historic quote and a timely book title. It must become the motivation of a newly consecrated people. Our shared mission keeps us together and drives us forward. Today, we must again become that Baptist people who own a unified purpose, a courageous innovation, and an iron resolve to work together for local and global gospel advance.

# The nations were calling.

A theology of cooperation was formalizing. Best business practices of the day were refining. Baptists acknowledged God's call would require a great sacrifice and proposed a new funding model. Over the next one-hundred years, Southern Baptists would give more than \$20 billion through their Cooperative Program.

## But is the Cooperative Program merely history?

On the centennial anniversary of the Cooperative Program, *A Unity of Purpose* convenes an array of Southern Baptists to celebrate the program's past successes, analyze current challenges, and imagine the future of the largest voluntary Great Commission funding mechanism the world has ever known.

BART BARBER • PAUL CHITWOOD • MELANIE CLINTON • JAMES K. DEW JR.

DANIEL DICKARD • JASON G. DUESING • MIKE EBERT • LEO ENDEL

KEVIN EZELL • RASHAN FROST • TAFFEY HALL • ADAM HARWOOD

RICHARD LAND • BRENT LEATHERWOOD • SCOTT McCONNELL

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