

A SUMMARY HISTORY OF THE Waco Regional Baptist Association

The Waco Baptist Association was formed, November 10, 1860, at First Baptist Church, Waco, with a membership of 531 in nine churches. They adopted the New Hampshire Confession of Faith as the Articles of Faith. The work was rather slow due to the Civil War, which rendered the currency in Waco almost worthless. However, during the war, and afterwards, the Association maintained concern for foreign and home missions and mission work among African Americans.

The decade, 1880-1890, was a period of great growth! There was large giving to missions and to what was termed Buckner's Orphans Home. Special work among the Germans began 1889.

The Hispanic work started in 1911 in the basement of First Baptist, Waco. The Association, through the vision of AJ Barton, 1908, initiated plans toward the construction of Hillcrest Hospital (now Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center). A committee was formed in 1912; ground was broken in 1917; and the hospital was opened in May, 1920.

The decade of 1920-1930 found an emphasis placed on stewardship, effective educational programs, and establishment of sound budget systems in the churches.

The decade of 1930-1940 dealt with issues concerning the Christian and the State. Churches were urged to concern themselves with liquor traffic and poverty.

The emphasis of 1940-1950 was in the area of evangelism, Training Union (now Discipleship Training), and special work with minority groups.

The decade of 1950-1960 found a strong emphasis on the establishment of mission churches. There were eight new churches and sixteen mission churches established from 1953-1960.

The emphasis in the decade 1960-1970 continued the previous decade's thrust, but also added the dimension of understanding the concept of the total person. Among these areas of concern were counseling, work with senior adults, and the maturing of the program of Christian social ministries.

The decade of the 1980's offered the Waco Association one of its greatest challenges in one of the finest periods in history. As during the ministry of Dr. Edwin Crawford, in the 1970's, and later, Reverend Larry Rose Executive director, Dr. Paul Stripling emphasized the marriage of evangelism and missions, in keeping with the Bold Mission Thrust, SBC. Such an emphasis was born out of our Strategy Planning, August 26, 1982, as well as May 12-13, 1983, Strategy Planning wherein evangelism was placed as the first priority in the work of the Association. Thus, the Task Force committees, Strategy Planning, Salado, May, 1983, continued to work in the fulfillment of the following priorities, as adopted by the Executive Board: Evangelism; Church Program Support; Strengthening Families; New Work; and Mission Support. In addition to Dr. Stripling's arrival, January, 1982, the Association approved of the selection of a director of church services, who, in part, assisted in the accomplishment of the WBA goals, particularly with a focus on Sunday School and special programs for senior adults. In 1982, the WBA organized the Pastors' Conference, Baptist Senior Ministers Fellowship, and started a Counseling Center. Later, this Center, though supported by the WBA and placed in the Associational Office building became Samaritan Counseling Center. Subsequently, the Center became related to Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center.

By 1998, the WBA celebrated the largest World Missions Conference in its colorful history. More than sixty missionaries, representing foreign, home, state, and associational missions, spoke in the participating churches. This year, in cooperation with the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Southern Baptist Convention, the WBA celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Woman's Missionary Union. The WBA implemented PROBE, a means to discover pockets of need in order to start new churches, in 1989. In 1991, the 84 churches of the WBA hosted the most historic Baptist General Convention of Texas, with a record registration of more than 11,000 messengers!

The year 1993 was a most historic year as the WBA celebrated Debt-Free in '93 that is, for the first time in many years, attaining a debt-free status. This is remarkable when considering the move of the WBA offices in 1982.

In the 1990's the Association was engaged in mission trips to the states of Washington, Idaho, and Minnesota, primarily conducting revivals and Sunday School growth campaigns. Earlier, in 1984, several revival teams ministered to churches in Monterrey, Mexico.

A major focus in the 90's was starting new work again, reflecting the emphases from several Strategy Planning meetings. The results are more than obvious: in 1982, there were 72 churches, with a total of 48,717 Southern Baptists; wherein, August 1996, the number grew to 101 churches and 56,605 members. These congregations now included a great deal of ethnic diversity, such as Chinese, Hispanic, Korean, and Vietnamese. In addition, the WBA had sixteen African American congregations, as well as many Anglo Churches.

The Association, 1997, helped to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the arrival of the W.B. Bagby's to Brazil. Dr. Stripling represented the Waco Baptist Association, in Brazil, from which the Bagby's had resided, as well as First Baptist Church of Waco.

In 1998 the WBA continued to start new churches, reaching 107 congregations. This focus on new work and church growth were enhanced by Strategy Planning and Task Force meetings each year, along with another PROBE, later, in 2000. The Lighthouses of Prayer emphasis was highlighted, 1998-99.

The year 2000 was highlighted by the Task Force Assignments: Ministry to Hispanics (new churches); Help Churches With Positive Change; Ministry To "At-Risk" Persons; Prayer Ministry In Every Church; and Family Ministry. The 2000 Waco Baptist Association Mission Statement was adopted:

The mission of the Waco Baptist Association is to encourage cooperation and doctrinal integrity among churches by assisting them in ministering to people and carrying out the Great Commission.

The Jesus Video was also a highlight of this year's associational activities.

By this time (2001) the association had 120 churches. Practically every year the Association has sponsored a mission trip or evangelistic thrust---2001, again, the WBA sponsored Experiencing God conferences in Minnesota, which was a total of at least 8 mission trips to this state.

By 2002, the Waco Baptist Association was given the Orvel And Lois B. Edington Earle Missionary Home to accommodate furloughing missionary families. By 2002 the Association exceeded 123 churches. Churches baptized 1169 people this year. The Association hosted the Baptist General Convention of Texas, 2002, as well as sponsoring "Wake Up Waco! (also called Crossover Waco). Though the attendance did not match the 11,000 attendance Waco, BGCT in 1991---this Convention was most successful!

Dr. Stripling retired June, 2003, after serving nearly 22 years as Director of the Association. May of this year was highlighted when many ministers made a most successful mission trip to areas near, and in, Boston. By June, 2003, the Association reached 125 churches. Thirty-six of these were African-American.

Other churches included Hispanic, Native American, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Anglo congregations. Ministries in the Association, included, the "Crisis Center," Healthcare (hospital equipment), and Jail Ministry. The WMU, and its many mission organizations, historically, has always been strong dating back to the formation of the Association in 1860. Baptist Men, also, and its mission groups have likewise been strong in the past, as well as the present.

Dr. David Hardage came as Executive Director of the Network in February, 2004. Structure for the Network changed from a committee approach to teams. The name of the Association was changed to Waco Regional Baptist Network. The associational building at 1516 S. New Road was sold with the anticipation of later purchasing another building for the Network. Temporary offices for the WRBN have been located in the Grace Temple Baptist Church, until new offices can be created.

The continuation of starting new churches has been an active part of the Association---- now termed, Network. The Baptist General Convention of Texas is to be applauded for their constant support of the "beginning of new work." By 2008, there were 143 congregations, or churches, in the Network. Along with the continuing active Healthcare Ministry, begun in the 1980's by Dr. Gary Cook, now President, Dallas Baptist University, (he also helped to begin the Senior Adult Council, also in the early 1980's), are the Crisis Center and Jail Ministry. An additional ministry is the Waco Immigrant Service, which is embodied in the Ruth Project. The purpose of this service is to provide compassionate legal and professional social assistance to our immigrant community.

Also, the Network enjoys a unique relationship with the Christian Women's Job Corp of McLennan County, organized in 2004. Though the National and Texas Woman's Missionary Union helped to give birth to this group, as well as many other CWJC organizations, the WRBN supports and cooperates with their many ministries and activities. During, 2007, the Network developed a partnership with Romania following a trip by Dr. Hardage and Dr. Earl Murphy.

Dr. Hardage resigned, December, 2007. January, 2008, Dr. Stripling was asked to return as the Interim Executive Director. The pattern for this Association, or Network, which began as early as 1860---- continues today in 2008! The philosophy of the multiplication of congregations continues to be an ongoing theme of the Network. Dr. George Bullard, director of the Hollifield Leadership Center indicated that the "most effective way to transform the work of the kingdom, your denomination your É.associationsÉis through new units." (Paul Stripling, Turning Points In The History Of Baptist Associations In America (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 85.

There are many challenges and opportunities before us ---- let us reach out with the spiritual stamina of the Apostle Paul who said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!" (Philippians 4:13)

