

## What are the duties of messengers representing their church in the association?

The Southwestern District Missionary Baptist Association has been in existence for 168 years for one main reason. God has been in it. All of our individual churches consist of baptized men, women, and children who have been mercifully saved by the grace of God. Although our inward spirit has been made perfect by the blood of Jesus, our fleshly bodies are still subject to sin. We will make mistakes as the ones who went before us, yet it is beneficial to learn from where we came and why we are still here. God does indeed have a purpose for all His children. Romans 8:28 says, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose." Some are called to preach the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, some to be teachers of the Word, some have been blessed with talents to glorify the Lord and bless others through song or playing instruments, some to use their influence to shine the light of the Lord in the secular world within their careers in business, education, healthcare, government, etc. All God's children can provide a guiding light, deliver a helping hand, and represent our Savior Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world.

There is a reason this Association meets together each year. Our churches share a common goal to focus on the furtherance and advancement of the Gospel and the development and growth of our brothers and sisters in Christ spiritually, morally, and intellectually. It is our effort to know what we believe and why, to have discussions to that effect, to provide support to ministries preaching the Word of Truth throughout this world, and to fellowship with one another in Christian Love. There are boundless blessings that come from multiple independent bodies of likeminded churches which practice the same faith and doctrine gathering together each year. Neither the Association nor any particular church dictates what any other church should or should not do. The purpose is to discuss the doctrinal principles that are manifest in the Holy Bible. We must never forget or neglect our First Love to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world.

There is a Biblical and historical basis for having Association meetings and continuing to keep the strength of fellowship and cooperation among our churches of like faith and order. We all know that Saul was converted, called and ordained an apostle by Jesus Christ Himself. In Acts 9:26-31, we read how many of the area churches still feared him and would not allow him to accomplish his work for the Lord until he had been examined by the trusted council of apostles and proven himself. Word of the evidence of his ministry spread through communication of the several churches and he was permitted greater opportunities to serve. The 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> chapters of Acts records the examination and authorization of individuals charged with the duty of confirming churches for the common doctrine and delivering writings and decrees to the fellowshipping churches in the area. The 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of First Corinthians tells of the communication of the churches of Galatia in their collection of offerings and letters of approval for those churches and other churches of Asia recognizing visiting members among the churches. In the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Second Corinthians, Paul writes of Titus recommending him to be received in fellowship and even refers to "messengers of the churches". The cooperation and communication among the churches of the Bible is clear. These letters and travels were made to keep the churches working together and to ensure church servants were being examined by trusted councils and recommended to the work. There is even record of times, such as in Jerusalem and Antioch that Paul referred to in Galatians 2, where several churches met to examine the common doctrine and ensure they were in agreement with the Lord. In one of those cases, we understand that even Peter had begun to

stray from the common doctrine and had to be corrected for the sake of the Gospel and the edification of the church (Galatians 2:11-14).

As much as it is important for our churches of like faith to worship together, strengthen each other and hold each other accountable to our common doctrine, it is also important to identify those who believe differently in order to separate company from them. There is Biblical instruction for this, as well. Paul discusses the matter in Romans 16:16-18 and John acknowledges it in First John 2:18-19. There are many false doctrines in the world. Associating with heretical churches will diminish our own effectiveness for the Gospel and will very likely lead us astray with their continued influence.

Paul admonished the church in Corinth to remember that God is not the author of confusion and to do all things decently and in order (First Corinthians 14:33, 40). Under that Biblical instruction, the Association authored a Constitution and Rules of Decorum. Our Articles of Faith state our common faith and doctrine and allow for an easier examination of what we believe as a thoroughly reviewed test of doctrine for our sister churches or other churches with which we may consider worshipping and fellowshiping.

The messengers are selected by their respective churches to represent them during the meetings of this Association each year. There are several duties and obligations for which a church messenger must be responsible. Understanding they are representatives of their respective churches, messengers should be willing to participate in the business of the Association, be prepared to express thoughts and opinions under the guidance and leadership of the Holy Spirit, and be ready to communicate the business and various discussions of the Association back to their respective churches.

Articles II & IV of the Constitution of our Association state that the association shall be composed of such persons as have been duly elected by such church as may belong to this union to represent them in body and that each church shall be entitled to three messengers. When a church has selected an individual as a messenger to represent them in the Association, the church has entrusted the individual to act on their behalf. They are to represent their beliefs, hopes, and wishes during the meetings of the Association, prayerfully according to the will of the Heavenly Father above. The Apostle Paul prayed for the Colossians that they might be filled with the knowledge of the Father's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (Colossians 1:10). When a church member accepts the responsibility of being a messenger, they should recognize the opportunity as a sobering obligation and genuinely try follow the Lord's will.

There is much business to be accomplished at each annual Association meeting. There is the appointment and labor of various Association committees. Some of these committees' responsibilities are to recognize our sainted dead and to participate in doctrinal topic discussions. There are many hands at work to prepare for these matters and each part has its own purpose. Looking back these 168 years within our own Association, there have been many patriarchs that have set the proper examples for us. With the world getting darker and our churches with less attendance, it is especially crucial in this day and time for us to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit to pave the way for the generations to come after us. Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim.1:7 that "God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." We all must be willing to do our part in serving the Lord, our respective churches, our country, our families, and our communities. Our Association is a bridge that serves as an

advisory council to bring our churches together on an annual basis. For this reason, it is important for church messengers to get involved, support, and be outspoken during the meetings of our Association to keep the bridge between our churches of like faith and order connected until the end of the age.

We are all human beings with different qualities, talents, and personalities that make us unique from one another. Some are naturally more out spoken than others and some more timid. However, despite what our personality is or how comfortable we are speaking, there is a time to keep silence and a time to speak (Ecc. 3:7). When we as children of God are led to speak by the Holy Ghost, it is very important that we do so. This holds true despite the time and place we are led, whether this is witnessing to a lost individual in the world, giving testimony Sunday morning at church, or being led to speak concerning discussions at the Association or any business concerning the Association. Jesus said in John 14:23-24, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

Since messengers are elected to represent their church on their behalf at the Association, it is necessary these messengers report back the business of the Association to the church. It is beneficial to have a discussion to accomplish this effort. Some church may do this after Sunday school class or maybe before church service begins. It is clear that the avenue of communication is not so much as important, as long as there is actual communication. It would also be beneficial to have multiple copies of the minutes of the Association meeting readily accessible to the members and other attendees of the church services. There is also a website for the Association where previous years’ minutes have been made available to anyone with internet access. ([www.swbmba.org](http://www.swbmba.org)) How many of our church members are aware of this website?

Realizing the duties imposed on them by the church, a church messenger should participate willingly, without fear. Proverbs 29:25 says, “The fear of man bringeth a snare, but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.” Let us take time to study the Word of God and apply it to our lives that we may be found blameless. Let us study to make a connection in the Holy Word to our Articles of Faith and Church Covenant. Another great impact a messenger could have is to encourage other church members to attend Association meetings. Just because a church is entitled to three messengers doesn’t mean that only three church members should be in attendance. If church messengers or pastors won’t encourage church members or even the lost for that matter to attend Association meetings, who will? Just think, this is the one time of year that this many sister churches are represented together in one body at the same time. Let us take advantage. The devil is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. May we seek the will of the Father and wrap each other in our love for one another. The Association encourages fellowship with sister churches and is a great time to fellowship with one another in Christian love. In this day and time, it is especially important to stand together and support one another.

Humbly submitted,

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