

NIGERIAN BAPTIST CONVENTION

COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Of late, the general performance of, and the attitude of some pastors and churches towards the Nigerian Baptist Convention Cooperative Program (hereinafter referred to as “the CP”) has been a source of concern to many. Admittedly, there had never been a year where the income is less than that of the preceding year, the increase in recent times had been somewhat inconsequential, at a pace that was far below the rate of inflation. Apart from this, there is a growing list of churches, viable churches that contribute tokens or do not even contribute anything at all to the CP. Many a times, even the token contribution is made at the end of the year when they know that the Financial Report and the Honour Roll is about to be published.

The natural consequence of the above scenario is a gradual reduction in the quality of and the magnitude of ministry care that the convention is collectively able to deliver. It has also unwittingly ensured that visionary plans for projects which are capable of adding real value to the Convention's collective dreams, are decimated due to inadequate funds.

At this rate, given the pivotal role of finance in an organization, the future portends gloom and is at the edge of a precipice unless an urgent action is taken. Thus, it is thought that if the Convention will be in a position to meet her future obligations and challenges, the time to sound the alarm and make a wake up call is NOW. If we are to stem the tide of a drift towards a possible disintegration through nonchalance, this introspective discuss is of great importance and significance.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to explain what the CP is all about, how it works, how the money is utilized, why some are unfaithful to or are totally unconcerned about the CP, what the Convention does for the churches and the imperative of our involvement, commitment and faithfulness to the CP and its sustainability.

WHAT IS THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM?

The CP was launched in 1925 by the Southern Baptist Convention, USA which also came to us by adoption, though in a modified format. It is one of the cherished traditions of Baptists the world over, and is a system whereby individual church members who have given their lives to Christ, give their tithes and offerings to their church, while the church, in turn and by joint agreement, voluntarily gives or contributes to the central body, known as the convention (or Union in some countries), an agreed percentage of its undesignated income, as a member of the national convention. Of course, this can be extended to the other central organization of lesser coverage within the national convention such as associations, conferences/state assemblies/state convention.

The funds so contributed by member churches to the CP are used for the stated purposes of the Convention as agreed by member churches in furtherance of the Great Commission in Matt. 28:19-20.

WHAT IS THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST CONVENTION?

The Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) is a derivative and result of the nurturing of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), USA. It (NBC) is the umbrella body for the Baptist Churches in Nigeria and represents the interests of the denomination with governments, national and international ecumenical associations, the Baptist World Alliance and its regional body known as the All Africa Baptist Fellowship.

The Convention exists primarily in obedience to the Great Commission, and is made up of Churches. Churches themselves are made up of individual members. Therefore, the Convention is owned by the churches. For avoidance of doubt, the convention is not owned by the officers of the Convention; they are only serving the mandate of the owners (the churches) to administer it on their behalf. This is why officers of the Convention must be voted for and approved by the Convention-in-session. The NBC also exists to assist and encourage churches in their ministries of outreach, training and development of members, church planting and church growth, training and relief of ministers and other workers etc.

If the churches actually established and own the Convention, then, who should fund the Convention? Obviously when you set up a thing, you have to pay for its maintenance. This is why it is imperative that churches should pay and contribute jointly to maintain the body set up by them. If they don't, nobody else will. If they won't, then they are saying that the body is unnecessary. But is that what we are saying? The identity of the Convention is so important that an understanding of it should engender a new positive attitude towards the CP.

HOW THE CP WORKS

Over the years, different percentages have been applied, but since 1972 the churches have agreed to contribute 20% of their undesignated (i.e. not designated for church building, pastorium, organ etc.) funds to the NBC. They also contribute 5% to the Association and another 5% or 7% to the Conference.

The Baptist churches thus pool resources and work together cooperatively to achieve and accomplish “far more than they could ever do alone”.

These 20% contributions received by NBC from churches for the CP are distributed to support the following in these proportions:

- Missions & Evang. And support for missionaries
- Theological Training
- Members Nurturing & Development
- Retirement benefits for Pastors and other workers
- Administration including maintenance and utilities

Each year, the Executive Committee prepares a budget through its budget Committee and presents same to the Convention-in-Session for approval. The messengers to the annual session of the Convention approve the budget which is then operated by the executives. No budget has ever been operated without the prior approval of the Convention-in-Session. An audited Account is also presented and approved annually by messengers.

It is therefore not correct when people say, “we don't know what they do with the money”. Everything (the budget and Accounts) is published in the annual Financial Report.

WHAT THE CONVENTION DOES FOR THE CHURCHES

1. The Convention represents the interest of all the Baptist churches as one body, as already mentioned. Provision of platform for joint action in missions and land projects Legal representation
2. Payment of 10% of the Pastor's salary as pension premium on behalf of the church.
3. Provision of a sound retirement scheme for the church Pastor and other Workers.
4. Training Pastors for the churches at highly subsidized fees.
5. Provision of training facilities and subsidised or free publications or materials, in the areas of Sunday School, Church Training, WMU, MMU, Literacy, Prison Ministry, Youth & Students Ministries, Music, Media etc.
6. Making interest-free Church Building Revolving Loans available to churches.
7. Pastoral Aid to needy churches through the Conferences.
8. Encouragement and Mobilization for missions and creative evangelism.
9. Projection of corporate identity and image. Etc,

WHY SOME DON'T SUPPORT THE CP

1. Lack of understanding of what the CP is.
2. Omission by theological educators to properly teach and inculcate in student pastors, the principle of CP of which they are also beneficiaries. Some were alleged to have actually disparaged NBC as doing nothing; yet their salaries come from the CP. Such student graduate to pastor churches and can't see why they should support the CP.
3. Ignorance of how the funds are utilized. (The 'we don't know' syndrome)
4. Pastors with non-Baptist background.
5. The tale shop – rumour mongering.

6. We are also busy with “our own” project.
7. If we don't pay, nothing will happen. No sanctions on defaulting Pastors and churches.
8. Those who didn't pay last year got away with it, why should we also be faithful or pay at all this year? Faithful ones are thus discouraged.
9. ‘They’ (NBC) did not assist us when we were building.
10. The officers are wasteful. They travel too frequently.
11. Lack of understanding of the personality of the Convention as a corporate body and who the owners are.
12. We were not there, neither was our church in existence when NBC decided that churches should pay 20% to the CP. Why should I or we be committed?
13. Dislike of the face of one or some officers of the Convention.
14. Disagreement with a particular decision or policy of the Convention.
15. I was not given scholarship during my study whereas my classmate/friend got. Why should I now lead my church to cooperate?
16. When I had problem with my former church the Convention did not intervene to prevent the church from throwing me out.
17. ‘Take care of me first’ syndrome. Personal desires (e.g. car, house etc) of the pastor must first be met by the church. Whatever then remains, we will send.
18. We have contributed to so many Convention-related fundraisings during the year. Why should we be further burdened?
19. The money is too much, let's just give them (NBC) something.
20. The “we/us” versus “they/them” syndrome. The feeling here is that the church is doing NBC a favour, rather than the contribution to the CP as a matter of duty.

