

Pastor Fellowships

Fostering
Relationships
and Forging
New Friendships

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That's when you
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Each month, pastors gather in fellowships around the state, each gathering with its own DNA. Some are slightly formal, some educational, and some more relational. But the purpose is the same for all—to be reminded that SBCV pastors and churches are not alone.

Pastor fellowships take place regularly in six areas across the Southwest Region. Although the fellowships meet in different places and at different times, these six groups of pastors share time together in God's Word and in prayer and share updates on what's happening in their families, their churches, and the convention.

"I think we found that not only are we encouraged by fellowships, but we are also dependent on them. We especially were during the pandemic because as our flocks were dispersed, so to speak, we found ourselves missing fellowship."

Pastor Tim Varnadore, Silver Leaf Baptist Church, Rose Hill, VA

"Sometimes it seems that every part of a pastor's life is designed to alienate him from others: He has to deny his family by spending time away from them, and he must keep himself separate from the church in order to teach and discipline her. In the eyes of the world, he is seen as pious and judgmental. Fellowship with other pastors gives a lonely child of God a chance to connect with people who are experiencing the same things. It is a time of strengthening and encouragement that can't be found anywhere else."

Pastor Tommy Shell, First Baptist Church, Pound, VA

"For me, a pastor fellowship does several things: it encourages me, it challenges me and, in some ways, it helps sharpen my vision for the church. It does what the Bible says fellowship will do—it edifies me because, as a pastor, you can feel very alone even among a lot of people at church. At these fellowships, it's encouraging to know you're not alone, especially in your experiences."

Pastor Rob Haynes, First Baptist Church, Jonesville, VA

"Over the years of fellowship time with other pastors, I hear them talk of the various problems they are dealing with and struggles they presently face. And I walk away thanking God for His mercy on me and the many others he has spared from the things that could go horribly wrong. God's hedge of protection around me and His wonderful church, that He allows me to pastor, is far more than I deserve."

Pastor Jack Rutherford, Sharon Baptist Church, Rural Retreat, VA

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"Sometimes the benefits of being part of a pastors' fellowship are more far reaching than we may think. We can feel as if we are all alone and that no one is experiencing what I am or facing the challenges I am facing. I think about the fact that there is encouragement in the meetings and that we are not alone. There are people, other men and families, walking the same path. We make friends and support one another."

Pastor Lonnie Brooks, East Stone Gap Baptist Church, East Stone Gap, VA

"I have seen pastors who participate in pastoral fellowship consistently have longer and more successful ministries. I think that comes from not feeling abandoned or alone and from being open to different ideas, learning from one another, and being open to loving criticism or neutral party cautioning on certain issues."

Pastor Shea Shrader, Harmon Memorial Baptist Church, Grundy, VA

"Fellowships provide an opportunity for interaction and relationship building with other pastors that I would be lacking otherwise."

Pastor Justin Hall, Cedar Bluff Baptist Church, Atkins, VA

"Fellowships are a time where I can relax, knowing I'm with my brothers. It's like a breath of fresh air, not in competition nor is it about the numbers."

Pastor Chad Johnson, Fellowship Baptist Church, Meadowview, VA

"It's easy to feel alone in ministry. Fellowships have been great opportunities to be myself and share my struggles with others who understand the complexities of pastoral life. They've led to friendships, times of encouragement, much-needed prayer, and laughs. We've been blessed to have local SBCV fellowships act as a springboard to fostering pastoral community. Because of them, I know I'm not alone."

Pastor Steven Bednar, The Vine Church, Abingdon, VA

"When you have a guy who has stood with you on your darkest day or stood by you in the face of your greatest challenge, not because of what you can do for him or because of who you are but simply because he believes in you. That's when you know you are not alone."

Pastor Allen Roberts Jr, Euclid Ave. Baptist Church, Bristol, VA

When we invest both our time and ourselves in a relationship with other pastors, we are fostering a relationship that just might help us through the darkest time of our ministry or the most challenging time in our personal life. We are forging a friendship, a brotherhood that will last a lifetime. ■

