

Why Am I Proud to Be Part of the **SBC** of Virginia?

By Tyler Scarlett, Pastor-Teacher of Forest Baptist Church

The title says it all: *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. You may have seen that poem (or best-selling book) by Robert Fulghum. It begins, "Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate-school mountain, but there in the sandpile at Sunday School."

Fulghum proceeds to dig up simple, sage advice from childhood that applies to adulthood. Buried in the middle of it all, there's this shining gem, "When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together."

That's not just great advice for kindergarteners; it's also great advice for Christians. Paul was aware of this. In 1 Corinthians 3:9, he wrote, "For we are God's fellow workers..." The book of Acts shows us how the early church learned to "hold hands and stick together." Cooperation

among Christians is not always easy, but it can be a force for good, both in doing good deeds and sharing the good news.

For that reason, I am grateful that our church is part of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). In our New Members class at **Forest Baptist Church** (FBC), we explain the SBC this way: We are a network of Bible-believing Baptist churches that work together for the Great Commission. The cornerstone of this effort is funneling our finances together through the Cooperative Program. On a regular basis, a percentage of our church offerings (for FBC, it is 12%) is sent to the state convention, which uses a portion of that money within the state for ministry. The state then sends the remaining portion to the national SBC to fund the International Mission Board (IMB), the North American Mission Board (NAMB), our seminaries, and more. We can do more together than we can alone."

We don't hide the fact that we're SBC. We also don't hide the fact that in Virginia, there are two networks of Southern Baptist churches. There is the Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV—also known as "Virginia Baptists") and the

Southern Baptist Convention of Virginia (SBCV—also known as Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia).

At Forest Baptist Church, we are proud members of the SBCV. Why is that? Here are four reasons we continue to "hold hands and stick together" with others in the SBC of Virginia.

1. The SBCV is theologically conservative.

In the early 90s, there was a growing concern about the doctrinal trajectory among Virginia Baptists. Particularly, there were theological concerns related to such vital issues as biblical inspiration, inerrancy, and authority. What we believe will impact how we behave. As a church, we want to ensure God's word is read and spread to all our neighbors.

In September 1996, 158 churches across the Commonwealth began the SBCV. Today, more than 830 like-minded churches are cooperating within the SBCV. When originally organized, the leadership wanted to leave no doubt about where we stood doctrinally. Hence, our name says it all: "Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia." Now our network is more commonly known as



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“SBCV,” which indicates the Southern Baptist Convention of Virginia. Our state convention affirms, as our church does, the Baptist Faith & Message 2000, which means we are fully supportive of the SBC. That gives us confidence about who we are, what we believe, and how we will reach others for Christ together.

2. The SBCV is focused on evangelism and church planting.

One of the SBCV’s core values is church planting. With so many lost people within the Commonwealth, there is a huge opportunity for reaching them right here. Each year, the SBCV allocates millions of dollars for church planting and evangelism efforts to reach our neighbors.

What does this mean? It means millions of dollars to help fund state missionaries and pastors starting churches, including ethnic church plants. The nations are among us, and the SBCV is committed to reaching them all.

3. The SBCV is fiscally responsible.

One of the most impressive aspects of our state convention is how every dollar is carefully designated for ministry, how every penny is accounted

for, and how every budget is balanced. I had the joy of seeing this firsthand, having served on the board of the SBCV for six years. The SBCV operates by the highest standards of financial excellence and integrity.

Furthermore, the SBCV was established and has maintained a 51/49 split with its finances. In other words, for every dollar that comes into the SBCV, 49 cents go to Southern Baptist work in Virginia, while 51 cents is sent to the national SBC effort. Every state convention was originally established under that 50/50 strategy. However, over the past decades, many state conventions have begun keeping more funding within the state, thus shortchanging the IMB, NAMB, and our seminaries. The SBCV has held to this worthwhile priority, and I have no doubt it will continue to do the same.

4. The SBCV has a decentralized organization model.

To talk about a “decentralized organization model” sounds like a bunch of boardroom workflow mumbo-jumbo. But, in all honesty, this is yet another appealing aspect of the SBCV. Rather than maintaining a large, centralized headquarters, the SBCV provides regional staff and resources from the Appalachian

foothills of the western end to the sandy beaches of Newport News. When it comes to the Great Commission, a missional mindset trumps a bureaucratic one every time.

In a traditional state convention, those closest to the home base benefit the most. Rural churches, or those in a far-off corner of the state, can be overlooked. In contrast, the SBCV has divided Virginia into proportionate areas. Each area has its strategists, resources, gatherings, and support. This organization model allows all the churches, big and small, to be ministered to. It’s a great way to bring ministry and the Gospel to the 8.6 million Virginians across our state.

Why am I proud that our church is part of the SBCV? I think the answer is obvious. We are privileged to be a part of a state convention that values what we value. At Forest Baptist Church, we prioritize the Bible, missions, stewardship, and disciple-making ministries. It’s easy to see that the SBCV does too.

It’s our joy and privilege to “hold hands and stick together” with others in this convention. How about you? ■