

Missional Leadership for the Baptist Association:
The Associational Director of Missions/Church
Starter Strategist Model Defined¹©

Dr. George W. Garner
March 2008

Introduction

The Associational Director of Missions may be the worker most ideally positioned to influence mission strategy in the Southern Baptist Convention? Several factors validate this statement. (1) The association is the closest cooperative resource entity to the local churches. (2) The ADOM is the authorized administrative and strategy leader of the association. (3) The ADOM, by virtue of expectation as the chief associational leader, can affect the strategic planning of the association. (4) The ADOM, on a relationship level, has the broadest influence with churches and their pastoral and lay leadership. (5) Because of the geographical scope of his responsibility, the ADOM has the closest and most objective perspective on the issues within the association. (6) The ADOM is the closest denominational field strategist to the local church field. Any ADOM, from this advantaged position, who is fueled by a spiritual calling, equipped in skills competencies, committed to church planting, and driven by a passionate motivation for kingdom expansion, will function well in the Associational Director of Missions/Church Starter Strategist (ADOM/CSS) model defined in this paper

A Proposed ADOM/CSS Model

The ADOM/CSS approaches his job as ADOM with church planting strategy development as his top priority. Though emphasizing the starting of new churches, his care for the churches, church leaders, and administrative leadership of the association will not be diminished. The phrase a “pastors to pastors” is often used to define an ADOMs job. However, this is often understood as the ADOM being reduced to an associational chaplain. The true way to encourage pastors is for an ADOM to come along side them as a mission strategist and assisting them to have healthy reproducing churches. A multitude of ills will be cured when a pastor’s church is helped to grow and thrive.

Reality is that few men will have equal strengths and giftedness in every aspect of the ADOM role. Rarely is one person extremely gifted or passionate about the traditional aspects of the role of the ADOM and also the role of a CSS. However, considering the urgent spiritual needs of North America and the state of the vast number of local churches in plateau, one must ask, “Can the 1200 SBC associations avoid the need for their key leader to be anything less than a field mission strategist?” Are not the times too urgent for this role to be diminished by giving undue attention to mundane duties of being a tour agent, fellowship director, politician, golf tournament coordinator, newsletter publisher, camp supervisor, or administrative office manager? None of these functions are inherently bad, but should they require priority status for

¹Excerpt from *THE ASSOCIATIONAL DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS/CHURCH STARTER STRATEGIST AS A MODEL OF LEADERSHIP FOR RURAL CHURCH PLANTING*, a doctoral dissertation by the author for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, 2006.

the job of an ADOM? The ADOM/CSS presents a focused model of the mission strategist role. Would not the qualities and characteristics described in the ADOM/CSS model be transferable to any ADOM position?

The ADOM's skills in administration, organization, coordination, budget management, communication, and public relations can be and should be increasingly sharpened and developed since these skills are necessary for all effective leaders. However, could these skills be better laser-focused for the purpose of kingdom expansion? Could not many tasks required for the functioning of an association be delegated to persons under the ADOM's leadership, which would allow him to concentrate on implementing kingdom extension strategies?

The ADOM, in his finest expression, is a catalyst for spiritual movements rather than organizational success. He must be a vision caster for global mobilization, rather than a keeper of local maintenance. Likewise, he must be an implementer and encourager of eternal matters and discipleship, rather than consumed by temporal administrative tasks. His efforts are most important as an advocate of local church collaborative kingdom strategies rather than a funnel for a multitude of program resources. While no title or job description assures the actual function of the individual ADOM, the ADOM/CSS model creates the framework in which the ADOM can function as a missionary leader.

J. C. Bradley has been recognized as a leading authority in associational leadership design. Bradley's classic model (Figure 1) has multiple role dimensions.

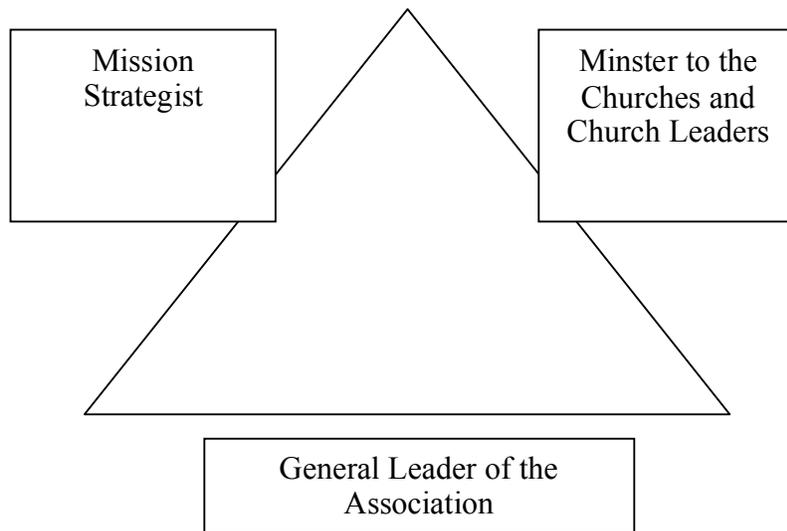


Figure 1

J. C. Bradley's Three-Dimensional Model of the Associational Director of Missions

One of the key dimensions in the Bradley model is mission strategist. Bradley explains the key role of a mission strategist:

Mission strategist emphasizes the missionary aspects of the total task of the director of missions. It emphasizes the missionary nature of the association which is based on the missionary nature of the church. The director of missions calls on the churches and the association to join in what God is doing in their associational area. He serves as a leader, inspirer, catalyst, activator, challenger, and proclaimer or prophet. He calls on the association to apply the unchanging Word of God to the needs and opportunities of their special part of the world. This dimension of his role implies that the director of missions knows his context, has spiritual vision for what the association can do in addressing its various frontiers, and can lead the association in making strategic decisions about basic directions and priorities that are faithful to what God is doing in the world.²

The role of mission strategist cannot be overemphasized and must be not allowed to take a secondary role as may be perceived at a surface glance. I will argue that mission strategist should be the principle and essence of the ADOM. To strengthen this argument, this model can be altered for a stronger application in the context of an ADOM/CSS. Rather than mission strategist being one of three dimensions of the ADOM, should mission strategist be the



Figure 2
Associational Director of Missions/Church Starter Strategist

comprehensive essence of the ADOM role? One might mistakenly think, as he views the Bradley model, that an ADOM can choose mission strategist as simply one optional aspect of his role. Figure 2 suggests an alternative model representing mission strategist as an integrated essence for every aspect of the ADOM task? In the simplest expression, the ADOM should function as the general leader of the association, leading the association to primarily focus on resourcing local church strategies rather than building an elaborate associational entity that must be maintained. The association then becomes a dynamic catalyst to identify resources within and without the association in order to cooperatively assist the churches who are working as the front

²J. C. Bradley, *A Baptist Association: Churches on Mission Together* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1984),

line kingdom forces. The diagram in Figure 2 of the ADOM/CSS model suggests a healthy associational leader who gives balanced attention to church planting, church health, and leadership development.

A Proposed ADOM/CSS Training Component

The ADOM/CSS model can be propitiated by formal training by NAMB, or by the state conventions. Whether in a conference or a coaching setting, an intentional effort to develop ADOMs and ADOM/CSSs as missional leaders is the goal of this training component. Figure 3 represents an outline of a core curriculum.

The first unit of the training component includes spiritual formation issues as the basic foundation upon which ADOM/CSS ministry should be based. The topics of this unit include prayer, calling, character issues, and giftedness. Each area can be expanded to thoroughly develop that concept. Prayer includes personal devotional prayer, leadership in corporate prayer, and prayer strategies. Calling includes exploring the biblical basis of calling, and the assessment of the individual's experience of calling. Character explores the area of personal holiness, personal integrity, and relationship integrity. Giftedness assesses spiritual giftedness, leadership ability, and past ministry experiences.

The second unit of the ADOM/CSS training component is Missiological and Theological Foundations. Missiological Foundations will address the topics of contextualization, incarnationalism, indigenous principle, homogenous unit principle, significance of church planting, the missional church, worldview, and cross-cultural training. Theological Foundations will address the topics of mission theology, scriptural authority, and kingdom principles.

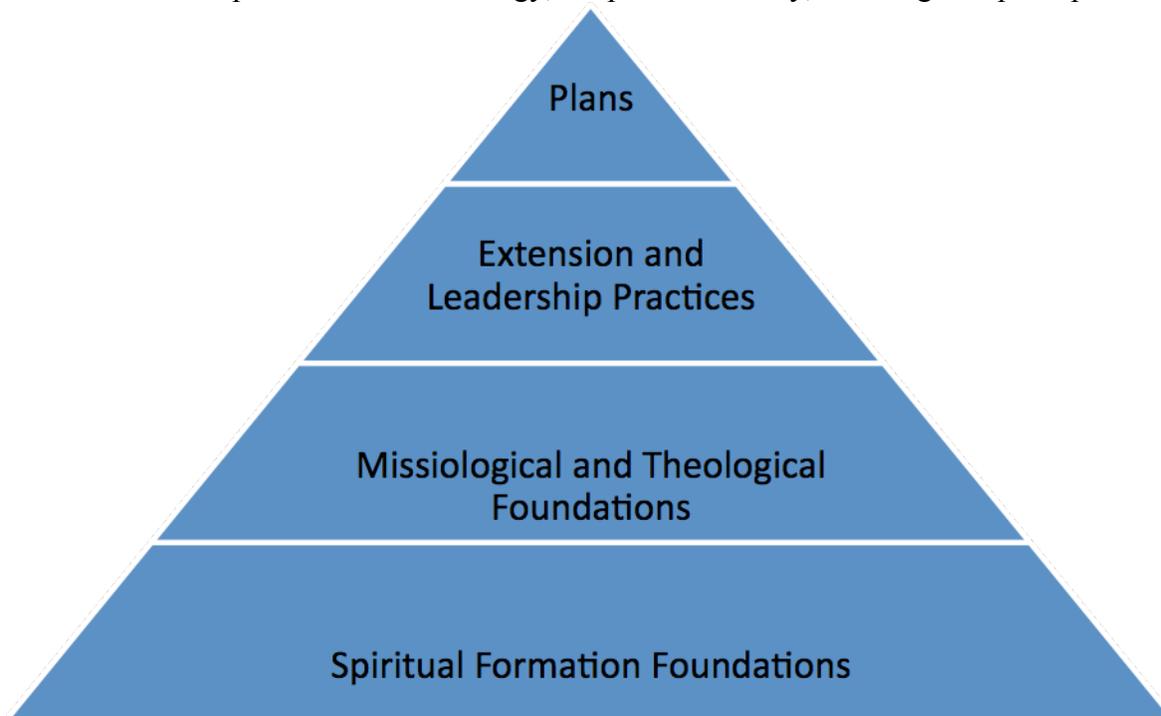


Figure 3
ADOM/CSS Training Component

The third unit of the ADOM/CSS training component is Extension and Leadership Practices. This unit will address issues in church growth, conversion growth (evangelism), church planting, and church planting movements. Included will be leadership development issues that relate to recruiting and equipping ADOMs who view themselves as missionary leaders versus pastoral chaplains.

The fourth unit of the ADOM/CSS training component is entitled Plan. This unit addresses the specific issues for the ADOM/CSS as he leads an association to plan a comprehensive mission strategy for engaging the target culture giving special attention to the church planting component. Processes of strategic planning will be explored, and a basic strategic plan will be designed with an emphasis on planting the presence of the gospel in every pocket of lostness.

The role of the national SBC denominational mission agency (NAMB), in facilitating this leadership model, can be instrumental in the perpetuation of the model in its appointment system and by supporting a training component for the development of these missional leaders.

Some today may question the value of the association for the future. This questioning often centers on the role of the association as well as the value of the ADOM. The future will be bright for those associations that bring value to the local churches. This value may be best evidenced in terms of strategy collaboration and mutual encouragement in the kingdom of God being extended in the pattern of Acts 1:8.

Southern Baptists historically have been associational in nature and practice. While many associations may degenerate to become an archaic vestige of the past, associationalism, understood in its best sense, is a vital part of the basic fabric of Southern Baptist churches and will remain so. However, for associationalism to exist, churches and leaders must be missional in their thinking and practice. The viable future of associations may rise or fall on the leaders who emerge as ADOMs. The missional principles and practices of the ADOM/CSS offer a model to inform and shape the role of the ADOM for the association of the future.