

NEW BAPTIST COVENANT

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the New Baptist Covenant?

The New Baptist Covenant is an informal alliance of more than 30 racially, geographically and theologically diverse Baptist organizations that have come together to form an authentic and genuine prophetic voice for Baptists in North America. The movement was birthed on April 10, 2006, when 18 Baptist leaders gathered at The Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia, at the invitation of prominent Baptist and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, to discuss new ways of cooperating. The 18 representatives committed themselves and their organizations to reaffirming traditional Baptist values, including sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ and its implications for public and private morality. The group has specifically committed themselves to their obligations as Christians to fulfill the biblical mandate to promote peace with justice, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, care for the sick and the marginalized, and promote religious liberty and respect for religious diversity.

That core group of 18 representatives expanded to more than 80 participants representing more than 30 Baptist bodies. These women and men gathered at The Carter Center on January 9, 2007, to plan and announce a major celebration that will take place in Atlanta January 30 through February 1, 2008. The three-day program will feature speakers and presenters who will address these historic Baptist commitments and explore other opportunities to work together as Christian partners.

Is this the beginning of a new denomination?

No. None of the participating organizations is giving up its autonomy to participate in this initiative. The aim is not the formation of a new convention. The objective is to find ways of cooperating that will allow Baptists to achieve more by working together than they could achieve independently. Collectively, the organizations participating in the New Baptist Covenant represent more than 20 million Baptists throughout North America.

Isn't the involvement of so many current and former elected officials politicizing the New Baptist Covenant?

The New Baptist Covenant 2008 Celebration in Atlanta is a non-partisan, issue-centered event. The current and former elected officials – representing both Democratic and Republican parties – who have agreed to participate in the Celebration will be speaking to these issues as Baptist laypersons with a perspective on New Baptist Covenant principles and how they intersect with public policy.

Why was the Southern Baptist Convention not invited to participate in the New Baptist Covenant?

While a number of the leaders in the New Baptist Covenant are members of Southern Baptist Churches, and individual Southern Baptists and Southern Baptist congregations are expected to participate in the Celebration, the SBC's leadership has to date not been involved in this initiative. The original organizations represented in the New Baptist Covenant are members of the North American Baptist Fellowship, an affiliate of the Baptist World Alliance. The Southern Baptist Convention withdrew from membership in the North American Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist World Alliance in 2004.

What kind of topics will be addressed at the 2008 Celebration?

Themes for the five plenary sessions are: Unity in Seeking Peace with Justice; Unity in Bringing Good News to the Poor; Unity in Respecting Diversity; Unity in Welcoming the Stranger; Unity in Setting the Captive Free.

The Celebration, whose overall theme is "Unity in Christ," is based on Luke 4:18-19. It will also include a number of special interest sessions on topics such as racism, religious liberty, poverty, the AIDS pandemic, faith in public policy, stewardship of the earth, evangelism, financial stewardship, and prophetic preaching.

Do Baptists really need to have another meeting?

Baptists are certainly known for their frequent gatherings. However, this historic celebration represents a Baptist unity that has not been seen in this country for well over 150 years. The opportunity for Baptists from the North and the South, from conservative, moderate and progressive traditions, from black, white and brown congregations, to come together and focus on new ways to fulfill Christ's mandate to share the Gospel is unique in Baptist life. It will be a gathering like no other in recent history.

Will the New Baptist Covenant siphon funds away from churches and the organizations represented?

While many of the organizations represented in the New Baptist Covenant have committed in-kind support and cash funds, most of the financial resources needed to stage the 2008 Celebration will be raised from foundations and individual Baptists.

What happens after the 2008 Celebration?

That remains to be seen, but organizers have expressed a desire to see sustained action come out of this movement. Collaborations on mission and evangelism projects, health care initiatives, poverty eradication efforts, and promotion of religious liberty are all possibilities for this movement. In the end, God's spirit will lead.