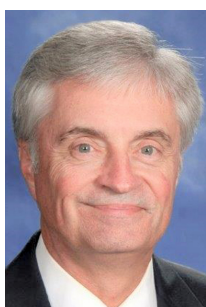


First Church, Natchez, commitment to Cooperative Program far exceeds average giving

*By Tony Martin
Associate Editor*

Editor's note: April 25 is Cooperative Program Sunday across the Southern Baptist Convention.

First Church, Natchez, celebrated its bicentennial in 2017. Over the years, the church has been mission minded, and nowhere is that more evident than its giving to the Lord through the Cooperative Program (CP) – Mississippi Baptists' and Southern Baptists' unified plan through which cooperating churches give a percentage of their undesignated receipts in support of their respective state convention and Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) missions and ministries.



Broome

Doug Broome has been senior pastor at First Church, Natchez, since 2008, and served two terms as president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention (MBC) in the mid-2000s. Under his leadership, the church has continued its history of CP giving.

In 2019, the church gave \$143,446. They increased their CP

giving last year to \$157,692. The church sets aside 10% of its budget each year for CP, a sizeable amount compared to many churches' commitments to CP today.

According to the SBC Executive Committee in Nashville, the average per-church giving to CP across the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was 4.82% in 2019, the closest year for which statistics are available.

"Not only have we supported the Cooperative Program, but we've done some special things, too," said Broome, a Mississippi College and New Orleans Seminary graduate. "One year, we raised over \$230,000 for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering [for International Missions]."

"Every church I've served has given at least 10% to CP. I've served four churches in Mississippi and they've all done the same thing."

First Church, Natchez, has been giving generously to CP for years. "Actually, I'd like to claim credit for that giving, but that wouldn't be correct," he explained. "Even in these lean economic times, we recognize that we need to support missions. It's part of our calling as a local church and as Christians."

Financially, the church has fared well during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Broome. The past year was a record year for giving at First Church, Natchez, in spite of the pandemic. "We had an unusual outpouring of giving last year," Broome said.

"We're at a place where a church has to decide what they're going to do with the Cooperative Program. It's the glue that holds us together. It's not just a matter of what our church can do. It's a matter of what our churches can do together."

Doug Broome, senior pastor at First Church, Natchez

“We’re at a place where a church has to decide what they’re going to do with the Cooperative Program,” Broome continued. “It’s the glue that holds us together. It’s not just a matter of what our church can do. It’s a matter of what our churches can do together.”



Blythe

Rick Blythe, director of the Stewardship/Prayer Ministry Department at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board in Jackson, said, “Jesus Christ said, ‘Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation’ (Mark 16:15 NASB). The Lord Jesus charged His followers with the task of sharing the Good News about Christ with the communities, cities, countries, and continents of the world.

“It is critical for every believer and every church to do their part in obedience to Christ and accept the responsibility to reach this generation with the Gospel. This includes giving to missions.”

How would Broome encourage a pastor and/or a church that wasn’t giving to CP or needed to boost their giving? “I think every church and every Christian has been called to fulfill the Great Commission [Matt. 28:18-20],” he stressed. “There’s never been anything invented by modern man that is able to fulfill that Commission like the Cooperative Program. It is the tool that God has given us to reach the world for Christ.

“We might be able to support two or three missionaries on our own, but together we can support thousands of missionaries. A small church that might have only 50 people in Sunday School can be supportive just like we are. They’re missionaries,

