

Rural Zip Code Ministry

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Associational Missionary

Pickens County, Alabama-35447

I moved to 35447 in January when I became the bivocational missionary for the Pickens Baptist Association. Carrollton, Alabama. About 1,000 people in town. 20k. In the county. 12/8. It is 30 miles either to Tuscaloosa or to Columbus to shop in a Walmart. Appalachia and Blackbelt. Forestry and poultry. Some cattle ranching. Governmental service. Transfer of payments. Commuters. The other four towns are Aliceville and Pickensville with about 1,000 each and Reform and Gordo with 2,000 each. Population in the county has been flat for decades. As much as half of the land is owned by timber companies and non-resident investors.

Within the first month we were told at least 100 times, "Welcome to Pickens County". I interpret this to mean that the people identify with their place. I have met any number of persons who worked elsewhere, but took early retirement to return to Pickens to care for aging family members. Place and people are important. This is a common trait in rural places. They also love their churches and their association.

The Baptist movement is strong in Pickens County. PBA has 31 congregations with more than 4,000 resident members. There are 4 other SBC churches around the edges that belong to neighboring associations. This swells the SBC res. Membership to 5,000. The Primitives and Freewills have 10 congregations with about 1,000 members. The National Baptists have nearly 30 congregations with 3,000 resident members. So, about half of the people old enough to be a Baptist are a Baptist. This means that we have key people in places of leadership in the county, we have some significant resources, but we have great responsibility.

Each of the five towns has resident Southern Baptist pastors. And so do about that many of the rural churches. Many of these meet each Tuesday for breakfast and prayer. They have a good, loving fellowship. Three of the fellows have been in their current pastorate for more than 20 years. For two of them this has been their only church. Yet, 13 of the pastors live outside the county and commute to the church to lead in worship and do some pastoral work. Most of these, and nine of the pastors living in the county, are bivocational. Most of these 9 commute to work, or school, outside the county. It is partially because of this that much of the ministry done in the county is done by lay volunteers. The churches range from 5 or 6 that will often have more than 100 in worship, to 5 or 6 with fewer than 30. Two meet bimonthly. Two worship only on Sunday morning. One church has closed in this decade. This could be the fate of 3 or 4 in the coming decade. The churches are now receiving 2.3 million dollars in gifts. They give about 10% of this to the cooperative program and about 4% to the association.

Missions and ministry are deeply woven into the cultural of the PBA churches. Scores of their sons and daughters have gone to the missions field and into ministry. And many of those who have not gone elsewhere want to be on mission here. So the task of the associational missionary is to facilitate and channel the energies of some gifted people. Already, they are so busy in ministry that I am expecting to get a call most any day from the Governor of Alabama telling me that he has received a petition signed by 20,000 buck and doe deer in Pickens County woodlands asking that he restrict the Baptists from engaging in so many missions activities because their coming and goings have made it dangerous for the deer as they cross the roadways of the county.

Current Ministries

- *Baptist Center Thrift Store
- *Chaplaincy Program
- *Lydia House
- *Disaster Van
- *Builder Group
- *Campground SS
- *Hispanic English as Second Language
- *Mission groups to other places

Coming Soon Ministries

- *Senior Adults
- *Single Adults
- *Cluster/Assn. Youth events
- *Nurses fellowship
- *Parish/Congregational Nurse program
- *Electronic Bulletin Board.

Dreaming

- *Coordination of Southern Gospel Concerts
- *Identification of the gifts of each congregation for countywide ministry/missions
- *Expand the work of the Baptist Center
- *Offer after school tutoring
- *Involvement in plans for community/county development
- *Associational Missions Service Corp.
- *Racial reconciliation.
- *Missions Day camps for our children.
- *Annual events and festivals in our towns—ministry to
- *Increased utilization of the cable TV and Christian radio outlets in our county.

My Philosophy

I want to have 4,000 Southern Baptist Missionaries in Pickens County Alabama—Zip codes 35447, 35466, 35461, 35481, 35442, and 35471. I want them seeing places and peoples which as the associational leaders of a century ago would have said is “destitute of a Gospel witness”. I want to encourage those 4,000 missionaries to dream dreams and have visions of what God is doing and wills for us to do with Him here and around the world. Share. Let me help them network the thing. I want our pastors and church staffs to be equipped to equip these 4,000 missionaries to work locally and globally. I want them to seek to multiply their ministry by empowering the laity. Get it going.

What is happening in your life, your church, your association? What are the needs that you see? What is God doing? What do you dream that needs to be done.