

BAPTISTS and MINISTRY

One of the ways that Baptists strive to live out their faith is by ministering to the total needs of people. In multiple ways throughout the world, Baptists ease human hurt in the name of Jesus.

Bases for Ministry

Baptist ministry to people is rooted in basic Baptist beliefs and polity. Such ministry is not tacked on but is an integral part of who Baptists are. The reasons for, the extent of, and the nature of ministry all relate to bedrock Baptist convictions.

Baptists stress the importance of **the Lordship of Jesus Christ.** The Lord Jesus calls for his disciples to minister to others.

Jesus set an example in his ministry of concern for all and their total needs—physical, emotional, mental, social, spiritual. Out of his concern for the physical needs of people he made blind eyes to see, still tongues to speak, crippled legs to walk, and sick persons well (Matthew 11:5; 15:30-31; Mark 7:31-37; 8:22-26; Luke 5:17-26). He fed hungry multitudes (Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-15). He bestowed mental and emotional health on deranged, demon-possessed persons (Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39). He provided self-respect and acceptance to social outcasts such as a dishonest tax collector (Luke 19:1-9), a sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50), and an adulteress (John 8:3-11). He met spiritual needs both in his teaching and by his death and resurrection.

“O, Christian, instead of disputing, let me tell thee how to prove your religion. Live it out! Live it out!”

Charles Hadden Spurgeon
Baptist pastor, London, England, 1800s

Furthermore, Jesus as Lord taught the importance of ministry. He declared to his disciples, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). When asked what the great commandment of the Law was, he answered that it was twofold: love for God and love for neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40). Love for neighbor, Jesus indicated, is lived out in acts of mercy meeting human need. He declared that a basis for eternal judgment of life is how well each person has met the needs of others (Matthew 25:31-46).

Baptists are committed to **the authority of the Bible** for faith and practice. The Bible makes clear the importance of ministry to total human need. The Bible teaches that we are to love not just with words but with



deeds of compassion: “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:17-18 NIV). The New Testament records how the earliest churches did just that.

Baptists believe that **salvation comes only by a faith response to the grace gift of God in Jesus Christ**. We are not saved by good works but by faith. However, salvation is to result in good works: “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Ephesians 2:10). “Faith without works is dead,” the Bible teaches (James 2:20).

Individuals who are saved by faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior become **believer priests** (1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 1:6). Each believer priest has a responsibility to minister to others. Ministry is a task not just for pastors and deacons but for all believer priests. Faced with a bewildering array of human need, believer priests are to exercise their soul competency to find and follow God’s will regarding which needs to meet. In this, they rely on the empowering (Acts 1:8) and leadership of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:25).

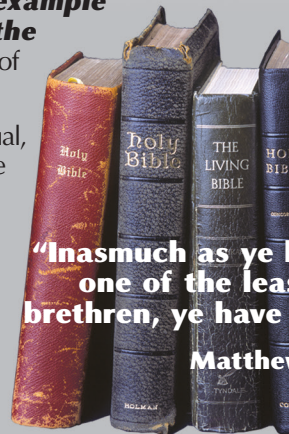
Baptists practice **congregational church governance, local church autonomy, and voluntary cooperation**. The Baptist denomination does not—cannot—dictate to churches which ministries to perform or how to relate to each other in ministry. Churches carry out a wide assortment of ministries. They also work together in voluntary cooperation to provide ministries beyond the local congregation through the work of associations, conventions, societies, unions, and informal networks.

A strong commitment to **religious freedom** has led Baptists to carry out ministry apart from coercion. Individuals and churches are free to choose which ministries to conduct. The ministries are provided by freewill offerings of Baptists (2 Corinthians 8:1-8), not by funds collected by either taxation or denominational assessment, both of which would involve coercion. **Baptist ministry is rooted in voluntary participation, support, and cooperation**.

Extent of Ministry

The extent of Baptist ministry is based on the example and teachings of Jesus and the instructions of the Bible. Therefore, ministry is for the total person, for all kinds of people, and in all sorts of places.

The **total person** is the concern of Baptist ministry—spiritual, physical, mental, emotional, and social. **Physical needs** are met through such ministries as providing food, clothing, water, shelter, and medical care to those in need. **Mental and emotional needs** are met by such things as counseling, positive preaching and teaching, and visiting those who are confined. **Social needs** are met by fellowship, recreation, and inclusion of the lonely and social outcasts in these and other activities. **Spiritual needs** are addressed by evangelism, missions, discipleship, and Christian education.



“Inasmuch as ye love one of the least of these brethren, ye love me.”
Matthew 25:40

Baptists generally view meeting needs as incomplete unless a spiritual component is included, such as is provided by evangelism and Christian nurture.

Baptists also minister to **all kinds of people**—individuals of all ages; all spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental conditions; all races, cultures, classes, philosophies, and creeds; and all economic, educational, and social levels.

Baptist ministry can be found in a **wide variety of places**. Inner city slums, prisons, military camps, hospitals, rural areas, refugee centers, disaster sites—on and on the list goes of places where Baptists minister. Baptist ministries can be found locally, regionally, nationally, and throughout the world.

Methods of Ministry

Baptist ministry is delivered by an extensive array of methods. These methods are utilized by individuals, churches, institutions, and denominational organizations such as associations and conventions.

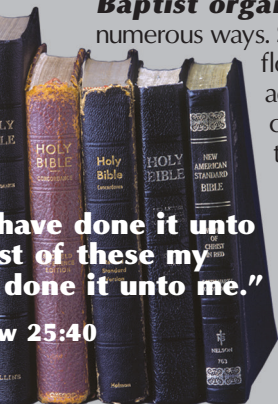
Individual Baptists, in keeping with the example and commands of Jesus, minister to human need. On their own, apart from any organization, Baptists bind the wounds of the brokenhearted, visit the sick and dying, encourage the depressed, and conduct multiple other ministries. Furthermore, dedicated individuals make up the corps of volunteers and staff members who enable churches and other organizations to minister to people.

Baptist churches of various sizes and locations minister to human need. In addition to meeting spiritual needs through evangelism and Christian nurture, churches meet other aspects of human hurt—physical, mental, emotional, and social. Counseling for the distressed, food for the hungry, clothes for the poor, transportation for the disabled—the list of ministries is practically endless.

Baptist institutions minister to human need. Baptists founded schools and colleges to provide for the educational needs of people before public schools and tax-supported colleges existed. Institutions to care for orphaned and otherwise needy children are among the oldest Baptist institutions. Baptists support institutions to care for the elderly. Baptist hospitals and clinics minister through medical care, extensive chaplaincy services, and charity programs. Many institutions send staff members and volunteers to various parts of the world to perform ministry.

Baptist organizations of different kinds meet the needs of people in numerous ways. Some of these function in times of natural disasters, such as floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes, to care for those adversely affected. The organizations supply food, water, and clothes and help to rebuild homes and churches. Others function with ongoing programs, such as job training for the unemployed and literacy training for those who cannot read. Some of these organizations act on their own, while others work in collaboration with various religious and secular groups.

Baptist conventions, unions, associations, and networks of churches foster many of these institutions and organizations, channel funds to them given by individuals and churches, and help to coordinate ministry efforts.



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Conclusion

Ministry in numerous forms plays a major role in Baptist life. Committed to serving Jesus as Lord, Baptists seek to obey his teachings and follow his example. Jesus declared, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love” (John 15: 10 NIV). And Peter wrote, “Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21 NIV). Jesus demonstrated concern for the total person and for all kinds of persons, and we are to “follow in his steps.”

Instructed by the Bible and empowered by the Holy Spirit, Baptists endeavor to minister in Jesus’ name to the total person, to all people, and in all places to the glory of God the Father.

For further information, see www.baptistdistinctives.org

The basic material in this leaflet originally appeared in a series of articles in the *Baptist Standard* in 2005. Wanting to share information about Baptist distinctives, Noble Hurley, shortly before his death in 2004, established the Jane and Noble Hurley Baptist Identity Fund to provide for publishing the series. He asked William M. Pinson, Jr. and Doris A. Tinker to prepare the articles. The financial assistance of The Prichard Family Foundation and Vester T. Hughes, Jr. enabled this series of nineteen leaflets to be produced based on the articles. Skyler G. Tinker designed and formatted the leaflets for publication. Each leaflet is for both individual and group study.

The topics in this series: (1) Baptists: Who? Where? What? Why? (2) What Makes a Baptist a Baptist? (3) The Lordship of Christ; (4) The Bible as Authority for Faith and Practice; (5) Soul Competency; (6) Salvation Only by Grace Through Faith; (7) The Priesthood of All Believers; (8) Believer’s Baptism; (9) A Regenerate Church Membership; (10) Congregational Church Governance; (11) Church Autonomy; (12) Baptist Church Life: Organization, Worship, Officers, Ordinances; (13) Voluntary Cooperation; (14) Evangelism; (15) Missions; (16) Ministry; (17) Christian Education; (18) The Application of the Gospel; (19) Religious Freedom.

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