



2025 Fall Meeting

Strengthen and Unleash

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director's Overview - 2025

Faithful in the Work, Hopeful for the Future

The Middle District continues to live out its mission of strengthening churches and equipping leaders for Christ-centered ministry. The year 2025 marks a season of renewal shaped by partnership, perseverance, and purpose. We have listened carefully, learned deeply, and are now taking intentional steps to remain faithful to our mission.

Encouraging and Equipping Pastors

We remain deeply committed to supporting pastoral leaders through coaching, retreats, and peer connections. Many have found new courage and clarity for ministry in a challenging season, and we celebrate their resilience and faithfulness.

Strengthening Churches

Churches across our district are rediscovering vitality through revitalization efforts, transitional leadership support, and missional innovation. From small rural congregations to growing suburban ministries, God is at work renewing vision and community impact.

Serving Our Communities

Through local mission partnerships and the annual Middle District Mission Offering, we have provided resources and compassion to those in need while helping churches engage their neighbors with hope and love. These ministries continue to be a visible expression of the gospel in action.

Expanding Global Connections

Our partnerships beyond Virginia, particularly with ministries in Liberia and among immigrant congregations, remind us that our mission extends far beyond geography. Together we share a global calling to make disciples and strengthen the body of Christ throughout the world.

Stewarding Resources Wisely

We face financial realities with honesty and faith. Every dollar entrusted to the Middle District is used to advance the mission efficiently and transparently. This season of careful stewardship has prepared us to move forward with confidence and purpose.

Looking Ahead

The harvest may look different from generations past, but it remains abundant. As we continue planting, watering, and tending the work God has given us, we do so with gratitude for those who labor beside us and hope in the One who gives the growth.

“Let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

Executive Director's Annual Report 2025

Rev. John B. Sawyer

Middle District Baptist Association

Our Mission

"In a spirit of unity, cooperation and mutual support, we nurture and STRENGTHEN local churches, leading to a vibrant and resilient UNLEASHING of the Gospel throughout Central VA and beyond."

Introduction

Over the past three years(2023-2025), the Middle District has walked through a purposeful journey of reflection, discernment and re-visioning.

The first year(2023) focused on careful observation and attentive listening. It gave leadership the opportunity to hear the hearts of pastors, churches, and communities in the association; and gain a deeper understanding of our past, our present realities, and the possibilities that lie ahead.

The second year(2024) invited us to dream and reimagine what an association of churches could look like in a changing world. It was a time to lift our eyes beyond familiar patterns, ask fresh questions and discern where God might be leading us as an association. Through this season, we sensed a renewed call to creativity, collaboration, and courage. We began exploring new ways to connect churches, equip leaders, and engage our communities with the good news.

As we entered year three(2025), we began moving from imagination to implementation, turning vision into action and dreams into reality. Today, we are in a season of both pruning and promise. God is refining us, shaping our priorities, and preparing us for new growth. You will see this reflected in the 2026 budget, which aligns our resources with our mission and the new opportunities for ministry before us.

Going Forward

The landscape of ministry is changing, and we continue to serve in a time when churches and associations are still adjusting to a post Covid reality where participation and giving have not fully returned. Yet even in this season, we are stepping forward in faith.

The call to connection and collaboration has never been more vital. As we introduce new initiatives and begin working to expand our reach, we remain grounded in the legacy that has defined the Middle District for more than a century, with a steadfast commitment to nurturing and strengthening pastors and churches.

Pastors

Ministry offers deep joy and purpose, yet it can also bring seasons of weariness and challenge. Many pastors and leaders in the Central VA are walking through times that call for renewed strength and encouragement.

The heart of the Middle District has always been to care for pastors in meaningful ways. Our monthly peer ministry cohorts have become sacred spaces for renewal and connection. We currently have two groups for lead and senior pastors, and a new group for worship leaders and pastors. At these group gatherings, leaders meet around tables, share openly, pray together, and offer one another genuine encouragement. These gatherings are more than just another meeting. They are lifelines of friendship, accountability, and spiritual refreshment. Together, we are nurturing a community of care and collaboration where pastors are strengthened and none stands alone.

Churches

The same spirit of unity and cooperation that strengthens pastors also serves to strengthen congregations.

Congregations today are navigating cultural shifts, leadership changes, and the ongoing call to remain faithful and fruitful in their communities. The Middle District walks alongside churches in every season, whether that be times of transition, revitalization, strategy or growth.

Here are just a few of the ways we have worked with churches in 2025:

- New Walk Bible Church (Pastoral Transition) - We helped the church identify and secure an interim preacher and provided ongoing guidance and coaching for the pastoral search team.
- Fellowship Baptist Church (Pastoral Transition) - We began working with the church's leadership six months before their pastoral transition, offering training, coaching, and guidance to help them navigate this important season with clarity and confidence, which ultimately led to the calling of their next pastor.
- Branch's Baptist Church (Outreach Strategy) is preparing to welcome 1,000 new neighbors as a Richmond Housing Authority community opens nearby. With three congregations (Black, White, and Hispanic,) the church is seeking to deepen unity and discern how to best engage this growing neighborhood. We are working with their leadership and will host a weekend retreat focused on prayer, vision, strategy and next steps in a developing a shared mission.
- Our quarterly ministry lunches create opportunities for leaders to gather, share ideas and learn from community partners. After our recent lunch with Circle Center, several churches are now exploring adult day care models to serve seniors and support caregivers in their communities. From site visits to feasibility conversations and partnership pathways, momentum is growing.

Community Engagement

We live in a time of deep division, rising anxiety, and growing spiritual hunger. The message of the Church is not just relevant; it is essential. But before the world can hear it, the Church must show up and be present.

Local Mission Offering

Each year, the Middle District selects five mission partners to support through our annual Mission Offering. Our mission partners for 2025 are:

- Bridging RVA
- Grace Project
- M40 Automotive
- Meno
- SHRMP

In 2025, we launched Mission CVA as a way to build on our Missions Offering by helping churches move beyond their walls and serve alongside our mission partners to live out the gospel together, meet real needs, build relationships, and strengthen our shared witness. From handing out cold water at community events to delivering beds to children in need, donating vehicles for families, serving at the Christmas Store, or assisting individuals seeking help for a substance use disorder, Mission CVA connects faith with action. It reminds us that the Church is at its best when we serve others together and are known as a compassionate presence in our community.

Regional

In 2025, Middle District churches collected and donated resources to the South Hampton Roads Mission Project (SHRMP). SHRMP engages in intentional ministry among urban and underserved neighborhoods, offering Bible school, sports camps, reading programs, and relational outreach to help children and families see God's transforming power.

In 2026, we will continue an ongoing partnership with SHRMP to bring hope, healing, and the love of Jesus into communities across South Hampton Roads. SHRMP also provides great opportunities for student and adult Summer Mission trips.

Expanding Global Connections

What began as a friendship with Rev. Dr. Benjamin Yeanay in Monrovia, Liberia has become a God given partnership between the Providence and Middle District Baptist Associations. Together we are sharing wisdom, developing leaders, and advancing the gospel in Central Virginia and Liberia.

This partnership is both unique and full of opportunity. It connects two associations from different continents who share the same heart for the Great Commission, allowing us to learn from one another's experiences, cultures, and faith practices. It reminds us that the mission of God is larger than any one region and that the global church is strongest when we walk together.

This year we've provided hymnals, Bibles, and choir robes to Liberian churches and began laying the groundwork for virtual training for pastors and ministry leaders. A three year ministry covenant now guides this shared commitment to walk side by side in the gospel, fostering prayer, leadership development, and mutual mission that continues to bless both partners.

Facing Realities and Stewarding Resources

I want to share candidly about our finances. Like many associations and churches across the nation, we have experienced a decline in giving this year. Some of this reflects broader cultural shifts, changing patterns of church attendance, and tighter local budgets. Yet it also calls us to reflect on value and vision.

Where do we see the greatest return on our Kingdom investment?

For generations, churches have faithfully supported local, state, and national conventions, and their work continues to play a vital role in missions and ministry around the world. Yet the most immediate and relational impact of cooperative giving happens right here in the Middle District.

When you give to the Middle District, you are not funding distant programs or administrative layers. You are directly supporting pastors who need encouragement, churches that are finding renewed life, and communities that are being transformed through local partnerships and acts of service.

We are working diligently to ensure that every dollar entrusted to us is mission focused and ministry driven. We have streamlined operations, reduced overhead, and prioritized investment in people and partnerships that advance our shared mission. Every contribution fuels tangible impact through cohorts for pastors, revitalization efforts for churches, and community engagement through Mission CVA and beyond.

As you prayerfully review your church's mission giving this year, I ask you to make your local association a higher priority. We celebrate the global reach of our partners, but the work God has entrusted to us here in Central Virginia is uniquely ours to do. The Middle District is where cooperation becomes community and where the Great Commission takes on a local address.

Looking Ahead

As we move further into our third year of renewal, our focus turns toward implementation. The time for reflection and reimagining has prepared us for a season of faithful action. This next chapter will be defined by intentional investment in people, churches, and communities as we live out our shared mission together.

Our work in 2026 will center on five priorities:

- Supporting Pastors through continued cohorts, retreats, and care initiatives.
- Strengthening Churches through leadership training, revitalization support, and coaching designed to help congregations grow in health and mission.
- Engaging Communities through Mission CVA, cross cultural partnerships, and local collaborations that demonstrate God's love in practical and visible ways.
- Expanding Global Connection through our partnership in Liberia.
- Stewarding Resources Wisely so that every gift entrusted to us produces meaningful ministry impact locally, regionally, and globally.

The road ahead is filled with opportunity. God is already at work among our churches, and together we can build upon this momentum with faith, creativity, and courage. The Middle District exists to serve and strengthen our churches, and through that shared mission we believe our best days are still to come.

Conclusion

The Middle District is uniquely positioned to be a catalyst for renewal and collaboration among our churches. Across Central Virginia, we are witnessing fresh energy, new partnerships, and a deepening commitment to the mission we share.

To every pastor, leader, and congregation that prays, gives, and serves, thank you. Your faithfulness sustains this ministry and strengthens its reach. To our officers, leadership team, and partners, your wisdom and steady leadership have guided us with grace and unity. Each act of generosity and service reflects the heart of Christ and reminds us that we are truly better together.

As we look ahead, we are encouraged by the promise of Galatians 6:9: “Let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” This remains our shared posture: steady, hopeful, and committed to sowing seeds of encouragement, unity, and love.

The harvest may look different from generations past, but it is no less real. God continues to work through our churches, across our communities, and around the world. May we remain faithful in planting and watering, trusting that the growth belongs to Him.

With faith in God's guidance and confidence in the mission we share,

John

Rev. John B. Sawyer
Executive Director
Middle District Baptist Association

For Christ. For the Church. For the Community.