

**Recommendation VIII:
Proposed Partnership Mission Covenant**

*A Covenant of Shared Values, Mission, and Vision Agreement Between
BAPTIST GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF VIRGINIA*



the Baptist House of Studies at Duke University Divinity School

I. Prologue

This covenant is established by the Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV) and the Baptist House of Studies at Duke University Divinity School (BHS) for the purpose of clarifying and affirming the relationship between each as they seek to support one another through shared commitments and collaborative partnership while at the same time recognizing the independence and distinct character of each.

The ever changing and increasingly unstable landscape of denominational life among Baptists has created opportunities for new networks of emerging partners. Both the BGAV and the BHS desire to be connected through a web of relations that promote the formation of a vital and flourishing Christian ecosystem which produces healthy and vital congregations and pastors. Such a system fundamentally responds to God's generous provision enabling partners to think about the overall ecosystem rather than regarding their institutions or others as stand-alone competitors. And such commitment leads to the awareness of those resources and relationships that are necessary for both short-term stability and long-term fruitfulness.

Over the years a surprising number of students have come to Duke from Virginia churches, especially since the formation of the BHS in 1988, and a significant number of Duke Divinity School (DDS) alumni have found places of ministry among Virginia Baptists. That Duke is geographically contiguous to BGAV churches is reason enough to think about cooperation and collaboration, but our institutions are closer in more ways than just geography. The theological vision at Duke and the formation students receive through the BHS have deep resonance with Virginia Baptists.

The BGAV and the BHS seek collaborative arrangements with institutions and other organizations that can strengthen its capacity to employ resources and energy in the preparation of leadership for the church which equips Christians for participation in the mission of God in the world. Yet the world is rapidly changing. Strategic partners, particularly in theological education, are crucial to prepare, not for the world that once was, or even for the world that now is, but for the world that is coming to be.

II. The Values, Mission, and Vision of the Baptist General Association of Virginia

With over 1,400 member congregations in Virginia and beyond the BGAV is one of the largest and most diverse denominational bodies within Baptist life. Through its mission and ministry partners the BGAV is strategically committed to mobilizing Christians to engage the whole world with the whole gospel. The BGAV is committed to developing leaders, both lay and clergy, for the church, and assists in matching ministers and congregations. The BGAV also seeks to identify emerging leaders for the church and equip them for service through special training experiences, mentoring relationships, and deploying them to places of service for learning the practice of ministry.

Values

In November, 1995 during annual session the Baptist General Association of Virginia adopted the following values:

- Centrality of Christ
- Authority of Holy Scripture
- Priesthood of Believers
- Soul Competency
- Religious Liberty
- Separation of Church and State
- Autonomy of the Local Church
- Believers Baptism
- Respect for Persons
- Intellectual Integrity
- Cooperative Spirit
- Compassion for Unbelievers
- Responsiveness to a Changing World

Mission

Since 1823 the Baptist General Association of Virginia has pursued its mission as stated in the purpose statement of the BGAV Constitution and Bylaws:

The object of the General Association shall be to furnish the Baptist churches of Virginia a medium of cooperation for the propagation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and for the advancement of the Redeemer's Kingdom by all methods in accord with the Word of God. There shall be full recognition of the autonomy of the local churches.

Vision

In a special called meeting in May, 2002 and in the annual meeting of November, 2002 the Baptist General Association of Virginia adopted a challenging new vision for the future. "Kingdom Advance: Partners in a New Vision" is a comprehensive strategy of the churches of the Baptist General Association of Virginia in cooperation with Kingdom partners in Virginia, the United States, and around the world.

"Kingdom Advance" outlines these major goals:

BGAV will emphasize the matching of ministers and churches so that they might serve boldly the cause of Christ; the modeling of wellness for the church, its ministers, and Christian families; and developing leaders, both lay and clergy, for the church. Key strategies include developing assessment and placement tools in order to better match ministers and churches; intensified efforts to assimilate new ministers to BGAV life, leadership development cooperatives that provide specialized training and continuing education in multiple locations though linkages with ministry partners; and supportive ministries to prevent "burn-out" among ministers and their families.

BGAV will identify new leaders for church leadership, both lay and clergy, young and old, on campuses and at places of employment; equipping them for service through special training experiences and through mentoring relationships; and deploying them to places of service for "hands-on" learning of practical skills. Key strategies include "call-out" events at church, associational, and statewide levels; the ongoing program of campus ministry on college campuses; the creation of "greenhouse" events where emerging leaders are challenged to grow through intense learning experiences; the development of coaching and mentoring networks for new leaders; and the creating of internships in local church and denominational ministry.

BGAV has an overall mission strategy of going to places where the Gospel is needed, both locally and globally, caring for emotional, social, physical, and spiritual needs; and educating future generations of mission leaders. Key strategies include the deployment of missions volunteers to serve alongside our missions partners locally and around the world; the deployment of Kingdom Advance Ambassadors and a flexible, mobile missions force, supporting caring ministry at the local church level and through joint efforts of ministry on a larger scale; and providing missions education opportunities through classroom and “hands-on” experiences.

BGAV will seek to create a movement where Christians and churches go beyond being healthy to being courageous in evangelizing the lost through church planting and evangelistic outreach; discipling believers to become bold Christians; and visioning a new future for the church and its ministry as often as a changing community and God demands. Key strategies include the provision of resources and supportive networks for church planters and new congregations; training in evangelism, Bible study, discipleship development, worship leadership, and church growth; concentrated efforts at church revitalization and community transformation through an intensive covenant process; financial partnering with churches seeking to become courageous; and through matching assistance for significant discipleship and outreach projects.

III. The Values, Mission, and Vision of the Baptist House of Studies at Duke University Divinity School

DDS is a Christian seminary deeply committed to the formation of women and men for ministry in the church of Jesus Christ as well as equipping them for service in the world. The BHS was established in 1988 for the formation and care of Baptist students at DDS. Over one hundred Baptist students from across the denominational spectrum are currently enrolled, comprising the second largest denominational body in the Divinity School. The BHS has an advisory board of twenty-two members who represent the wider Baptist family including several current and past members from Virginia Baptists. The outstanding faculty of DDS, including eight Baptists, stand at the top of their respective fields and collectively are charting a significant future for the church of Jesus Christ in the United States and around the world. Baptists form an integral part of an ecumenical whole, through which DDS is preparing people to chart renewal for the church in the 21st century by being grounded in a deep, sympathetic, critical, and imaginative engagement with Scripture and the Christian tradition. One of the key aims of this theological formation is to foster a scriptural imagination, which may be described as the capacity to see the world through the lenses given in Scripture. Seeing the world through scriptural lenses does not just change the way the contemporary world is seen. It also changes the way Scripture is seen too.

The BHS shares a commitment to historic Baptist principles and practices. Baptist students working toward an MDiv degree at DDS are encouraged to earn a Certificate in Baptist Studies that includes completion of two courses in Baptist history, theology, ecclesiology, and polity, and either a third course or participation in a second year of spiritual formation on Baptist ministerial identity led by Baptist clergy. Through these studies students are formed in a broad and integrative understanding of Baptist faith and practice. The Baptist certificate also specifies that at least one of the two required field education placements be in a Baptist congregation.

The renewal of the Baptist witness for the future depends on the formation of transformational leadership for the church, the academy, and other strategic organizations. Twenty five or more Baptists graduate from DDS every year to serve in churches, chaplaincy, nonprofit groups, and other ministry settings, or to pursue further graduate studies. The strongest evidence of the value that Duke brings to the BGAV and the wider Baptist denominational family is through the formation of Christians for transformational ministry, the preparation of leaders for work in strategic organizations, and the education of scholars who serve the church is the contributions that its alumni are making to the strength and vitality of Baptist life.

DDS is well-positioned to be a significant partner with the BGAV for equipping transformational Baptist leadership in the world:

- Duke has a well-recognized “brand” in church, education, and in the broader culture;
- Duke’s faculty is committed to renewing the church through scriptural imagination;
- Duke’s faculty and staff are committed to forming Baptist leaders through a variety of degree programs;
- Duke has cultivated networks of Baptist alumni and friends on which it can draw;
- Duke is equipped to partner with congregations and judicatories to equip Baptist leaders and institutions for faithful and effective engagement in the world; and
- Duke is committed to learning and adapting in its relationships so that Baptist identity, convictions, and practices have a shaping influence in the larger Duke Divinity School vision.

Each of these components is significant in itself. However, the true transformational potential for both Duke and Baptists lies in developing these relationships and activities together.

As a leading theological school within a major research university, DDS is uniquely situated to serve as a strategic resource that enables the BGAV to be equipped for this emerging future through the BHS, Leadership Education (LEAD), and its other centers and initiatives. Entering into a deepened and sustained partnership with the BGAV is also vital for DDS in order to gain a fuller understanding of the emerging needs and live into its vision of theological education “in service and witness to the Triune God in the midst of the church, the academy, and the world.” This partnership covenant will foster stronger connections and enable us to provide mutual support and encouragement in the mission to which God is calling us.

IV. Our Covenant Together

Because the BGAV and the BHS share common values, mission, and vision it makes sense to name ways in which their collaboration might be demonstrably expressed. To this end the BGAV and the BHS enter into an intentional partnership that includes:

- Encouraging BGAV churches to look to Duke Divinity School as a partner school for theological education where students can be equipped for ministry,
- Cultivating field education opportunities for Duke students through BGAV healthy congregations and missional ministries with experienced mentors,
- Providing opportunities for students to network and seek ministry positions among BGAV churches and entities,
- Fostering opportunities for African American Baptists at Duke Divinity School to connect with BGAV life, particularly through the Preaching Camp meetings and other activities of the AAFVA.
- Engaging Duke Divinity faculty as resources for BGAV conferences and events,
- Inviting Duke Divinity School to participate as an exhibitor at the BGAV annual meeting,
- Seeking the collaborative partnership with Duke Divinity School through conversations and resource sharing with the BHS and Leadership Education at Duke Divinity,

V. Term

These shared values, mission, and vision frame our relationship as Covenant Partners effective November 11, 2015. With six months’ notice, either party to this Covenant of Shared Values, Mission, and Vision may request that it be renegotiated or terminated. This Covenant shall be reviewed every five years.