the HISTORY and FUTURE of

associations

in the Baptist ecosystem



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Session 1

Why did local Baptist associations form?
How have they developed over time?
What value have they added to the SBC ecosystem?
What is the current state of associationalism in SBC life?



from Amsterdam (1609) to Philadelphia (1707)

597–1534

Roman Catholicism; Protestant Reformation; Church of England

1609

The birth of the Baptist movement by John Smyth and Thomas Helwys in Amsterdam; General Baptist beginnings

1637

Glasgow Rebellion and and Military “associations”

1644

London Baptist Association and London Baptist Confession

from Amsterdam (1609) to Philadelphia (1707)

1687

Elias Benjamin Keach; Philadelphia-area churches in connection; Keach’s confession

1707

Philadelphia Baptist Association is constituted (1742 officially adopts its confession)



from Philadelphia (1707) to Augusta (1845)

1682–96

William Screven and the First Baptist Church of Charleston, SC

1751

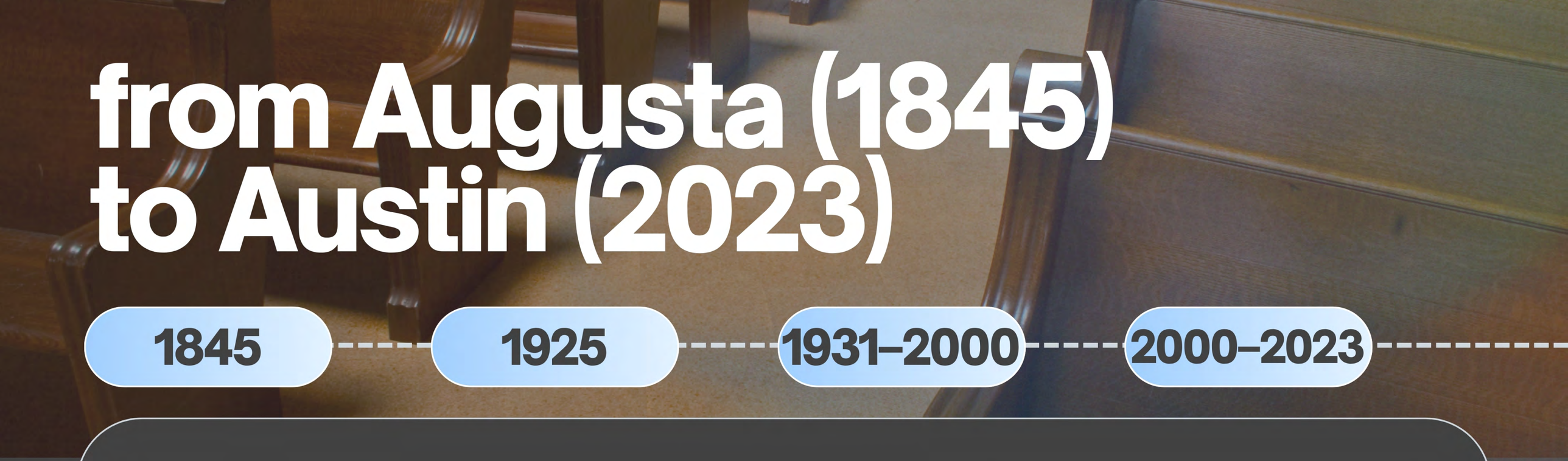
Oliver Hart pastors FBC Charleston and starts the Charleston Baptist Association

1758–1800

Associations multiply across the States; by 1800, 180,000 Southern Baptists belong to churches in 48 associations

1800–1845

Mission societies are started by individual Baptists and Baptist associations. State Conventions (1821) and National SBC (1845)



from Augusta (1845) to Austin (2023)

1845	1925	1931–2000	2000–2023
The Southern Baptist Convention is first constituted; Home Mission Board; International Mission Board	SBC officially adopts its first confession as a consensus of faith and practice (the Baptist Faith and Message)	Identity crisis: denominational development; church growth movement; Conservative Resurgence	SBC Reformation & the rise of networks: Acts 29 (1998), Reaching & Teaching (2009), Pillar (2010), *[CBN (2020)]*, ACME (2023)

summary of historical principles...

1) For 250+ yrs., in local Baptist Associations **intercongregational fellowship** thrived.
2) For 250+ yrs., in local Baptist Associations **doctrinal accountability** was maintained.
3) For 250+ yrs., in local Baptist Associations **Great Commission cooperation** was provoked.

summary of historical principles...

4) Over the last 100 yrs., local associations have faced **diminishing SBC influence.**
5) Over the last 50 yrs., local associations have faced **diminishing congregational influence.**
6) Over the last 25 years, local associations have faced **diminishing doctrinal influence.**


Q
A



Session 2

What role(s) *must* Baptist associations play within the larger Southern Baptist cooperative ecosystem moving forward?

8 critical areas for the future of Baptist associations

1. Meaningful local inter-congregational fellowship. Large organizations must foster close relationships in small circles.

2. Doctrinal solidarity & accountability. The tightest doctrinal parameters should be drawn in the closest relational circles.

3. Bi- and co- vocational pastor/church resourcing. The busiest Baptist pastors need the most localized attention.

4. Great Commission Provocation and Connection. Mission discipline and mission commitment flourish best in close proximity.

8 critical areas for the future of Baptist associations

5. Resource curation and redirection. In a world of abundant options, a most valuable relationship is a trusted one that vets, curates, and connects.

6. Pastor and church leader reproduction. Intergenerational multiplication is the crux of multigenerational value.

7. Church planting strategy & partnership. With growing populations and atrophying congregations, every Baptist association needs both more *healthy* churches, and *more* healthy churches.

8. Regional evangelism and mission coordination. Likeminded local churches need impartial local coordination for successful local cooperation.


Q
A

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