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NAMB identifies two issues with BGCT

By Ken Camp

Texas Baptist Communications

The president of the North American Mission Board has identified two “weighty issues” that must be addressed in a proposed cooperative agreement between NAMB and the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

NAMB trustees at their May 7 board meeting did not approve the cooperative agreement, choosing instead to appoint a task force to study “substantive issues” surrounding the matter.

In a letter dated May 9, NAMB President Bob Reccord told BGCT Executive Director Charles Wade that he recommended the trustees place the cooperative agreement on hold.

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“While you see our differences as 'semantics,' we consider them to be weighty issues that must be addressed before we can move forward toward a new cooperative agreement,” Reccord wrote.

BGCT and NAMB staff members have been working on the proposed cooperative agreement for months. The issue stalled first when members of the BGCT Executive Board objected to language about NAMB's requirement that jointly funded missionaries must conform to the 2000 Baptist & Message.

Staff members thought that issue was resolved when the BGCT Executive Board approved the agreement as adopted by NAMB trustees with one clarifying statement. Now, however, NAMB officials have raised new objections.

Reccord identified two problem issues—the BGCT retaining funds in Texas that normally would be routed through NAMB before returning to joint mission projects in the state, and disagreements regarding the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message.

Retaining Cooperative Program funds is “at the center of our concerns,” Reccord stated in the letter. This practice, he said, violates the historic practice and agreement established in 1928 between state conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention, as well as the 1991 cooperative agreement between the BGCT and the SBC Home Mission Board, NAMB's predecessor.

Retention of those funds, however, is not a new issue. The BGCT began the practice in January 2002. The BGCT does not retain all Cooperative Program funds going to NAMB, only the portion that would have come back to Texas. The change was made, BGCT officials said, to reduce bureaucracy and delays in funding.

NAMB trustees approved a version of the cooperative agreement with the

BGCT in October 2002 that acknowledged the retention of Texas funds, noted E.B. Brooks, director of the BGCT Church Missions and Evangelism Section.

Regarding the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message, adopted by the SBC but rejected by the BGCT, Reccord wrote: "As an SBC agency, it is the doctrinal standard by which we operate. When the BGCT chose to reject this document, it placed NAMB and the BGCT on separate doctrinal ground."

While acknowledging "no two Baptists agree 100 percent on issues," Reccord declared the faith statement is a "critical issue" because any personnel jointly funded by NAMB and the BGCT must affirm it.

"This includes pastors of churches that receive congregational assistance for more than three months," Reccord explained.

Reccord's observation that the BGCT and NAMB are on "separate doctrinal ground" could be "misleading," Brooks replied. "NAMB and the BGCT have never tested their working agreement with doctrinal statements. To begin such a practice now is inappropriate and seems to make the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message a test of fellowship. I am certain this is not what Dr. Reccord wants."

Brooks also questioned Reccord's statement in the letter that the breakdown was not about "semantics."

The motion adopted by NAMB trustees in May stated: "Rather than enter into an argument about semantics, we move that the president and chairman of the NAMB board of trustees jointly appoint a response task force to review the substantive issues underlying the impasse."

"That term is theirs, as indicated in the motion approved by their board," Brooks said. "To the contrary, we have taken the statement regarding the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message very seriously."

“We have spent significant time with commissions, committees and boards making every effort to honor their requirements while remaining true to the position of the BGCT on the issue. We recognized in adopting the cooperative agreement their right to make requirements. We indicated our willingness to work with those requirements in dealing with jointly supported missionaries.

“If there is an impasse, it is an arbitrary, unilateral position taken by the North American Mission Board trustees,” Brooks said. “The Baptist General Convention of Texas sees no impasse, only a delay on their part in acknowledging that the agreement is in effect.”

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