

Missouri Baptist Convention moves toward tightening its membership requirements_112204

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RAYTOWN, Mo. (ABP)-The fundamentalist-oriented Missouri Baptist Convention took the first step toward limiting membership to "Southern Baptist" churches and excluding churches that support moderate organizations, including the state and national Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist General Convention of Missouri.

Messengers to the convention's annual meeting agreed to vote next year on four constitutional changes that would tighten requirements for MBC membership. Membership would be open only to churches identified as "Southern Baptist" and affiliated solely with the Missouri Baptist Convention.

If approved, the changes would exclude congregations that support both the traditional Missouri Baptist Convention and the newer alternative state

convention established by moderates. Likewise, congregations that support the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship would not be allowed to participate.

The proposed changes were included in the report of the continuing review committee accepted by messengers during the annual meeting in Raytown. Also proposed are rules and procedures to enforce the new standards. Messengers agreed to vote on the changes at their 2005 meeting.

One proposed amendment would modify the constitution's membership article to change wording from "any Baptist church" to "any Southern Baptist church" and to include the words "singly aligned." No church could be an MBC church without cooperating with the Southern Baptist Convention—a move that departs from Baptist tradition.

Under the proposed guidelines, churches will be considered Southern Baptist if they have adopted a doctrinal statement that reflects "historical Southern Baptist faith, polity and practice," if they support financially the work of the Southern Baptist Convention, and if they do not send representatives or financial support to other national conventions or organizations that act as national conventions.

The convention would have the right to examine churches' contributions to determine whether those congregations support other national or state conventions or other bodies that act as national or state conventions.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, although it serves many functions of a convention or denomination, has declined to describe itself in those terms.

Although "dual alignment" with those moderate organizations would be excluded, the constitution would allow for African-American churches to affiliate with more than one convention.

The membership article would not "prohibit cooperation" by Baptist

churches that have racial, ethnic or cultural ties to other organizations unless the relationship violates the MBC constitution, bylaws or business plan or “accepted Southern Baptist faith, polity and practice.”

Churches that merely allow individual members to designate contributions to other organizations would not be excluded because such a designation would not be considered an action of the church.

In other action, messengers defeated a motion that called for an end to legal action against five convention-related entities-Missouri Baptist University, the Missouri Baptist Foundation, Windermere Baptist Conference Center, the Baptist Home and Word & Way newsjournal.

The five entities changed their charters in 2000 and 2001 to allow each to elect its own trustees, rather than allowing the convention to continue to elect them. The MBC filed legal action against the five in 2002 and filed a new lawsuit Oct. 25.

Messengers approved a 2005 Cooperative Program budget of \$16.7 million that earmarks 35.75 percent for the Southern Baptist Convention and 64.25 percent for Missouri Baptist Convention programs.

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