

NAMB outsourcing raises conflict of interest question

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ATLANTA (ABP)—Steve Sanford, a paid consultant who advised the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board to outsource most of its media operations, has been hired to provide many of those outsourced services by his longtime friend, NAMB President Bob Reccord.

Mission board officials declined to say if the arrangement poses a conflict of interest. But spokesman Marty King said, “I understand why people would ask about that.”

Reccord did not make himself available for an interview.

In early 2003, NAMB hired Sanford, a personal friend of Reccord’s from their days in Virginia, to conduct an audit of NAMB’s media strategy. Sanford presented the audit to Reccord in the fall of 2003. NAMB officials say it led the agency to outsource many jobs in its communications unit. Forty positions were eliminated, and 31 employees were terminated, according to a report by the Christian Index, newspaper of Georgia Baptists.

Much of the work was handed off to InovaOne, a company founded by Sanford, as well as other companies.

Sanford, however, insisted there was no connection between the audit and the work his company is now performing for NAMB.

NAMB Chief Operating Officer Chuck Allen defended InovaOne as simply a transition company helping NAMB outsource the workload.

The audit has not been made public, but NAMB officials said they do not dispute the connection between the audit and the layoffs.

The fall 2003 terminations removed many long-term employees from NAMB's ranks—editors, writers, graphic designers and a video production team—some with more than 25 years experience with NAMB and its predecessor agencies.

Throughout 2005, InovaOne took on more of NAMB's workload. Sanford's company was given the contract to produce the "Who Cares?" evangelistic media strategy and the new "316 Network."

"We deeply regret the necessity of eliminating any positions that affect NAMB staff members," NAMB said in a public statement, but added nothing "underhanded" was involved.

"We believe our constituents want us to operate with the mindset of efficiency and effectiveness that characterizes the best-run companies but with a heart for ministry," the statement said. "We believe we should focus as an agency on our core assignments of evangelism, church planting and sending missionaries."

The Christian Index article also questioned Reccord's extensive schedule of speaking and writing that is unrelated to NAMB's work.

Reccord and his wife, Cheryl, operate a ministry called Total Life Impact,

which lists Cheryl Reccord as a motivational speaker and promotes books by both.

“It’s Cheryl’s ministry,” King said. “He supports her. Sometimes he joins her. But it’s her ministry.”

King said he did not know how much money the couple makes through their personal ministry.

Reccord keeps a clear separation between NAMB-related speaking engagements and his personal ministry, NAMB officials said.

Reccord has spoken on Focus on the Family’s national radio program, was featured at Promise Keepers rallies, has been a guest on The 700 Club, and granted interviews to publications such as Today’s Pentecostal Evangel. On all of those occasions, according to the organization’s websites, he spoke on general topics, such as how to raise your children and safeguard your marriage against infidelity.

Reccord plans to speak at all 19 Promise Keepers rallies nationwide this year. He told the NAMB staff he has reworked his schedule to accommodate the requests and may be unavailable for any additional NAMB speaking engagements for that time frame—nearly half of the year’s Friday evenings.

At NAMB’s recent board meeting, Reccord told trustees that 56 percent of Promise Keepers participants have a Southern Baptist affiliation, implying the men are just the market to hear his message and be ushered into a mission lifestyle.

But when contacted by the Index, Steve Chavis, communications director for Promise Keepers, painted a slightly different picture.

“We don’t actually break the denominations down by individual groups,” he

said. “But our research shows that 25 percent of our attendees claim some kind of Baptist affiliation. That includes all groups across the Baptist spectrum—Southern, American, National, whatever.”

The NAMB response said Promise Keepers President Tom Fortson told Reccord the Baptist participation was 56 percent.

The statement said only “two or three media appearances” out of Reccord’s thousands of speeches and interviews were not related to NAMB, and that even those “were focused on helping laity be on-mission Christians.”

Steve DeVane of the North Carolina Biblical Recorder contributed to this article.

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