

Reccord resigns as NAMB president after trustee investigation

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By Greg Warner

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ATLANTA (ABP)—After a trustee investigation produced a scathing report of numerous examples of poor management, Bob Reccord resigned as president of the North American Mission Board, effective immediately.

“I regret that events of recent weeks have created an environment which makes it difficult to lead the organization and to stay on mission,” Reccord, 54, said in a statement April 17.

Allegations first surfaced in a February expose by the Christian Index newspaper. NAMB’s trustees, after their own investigation, put Reccord under strict “executive-level controls” March 23, which many observers thought would prompt his resignation.

Bob Reccord

The trustees' investigation faulted the missions leader for poor management, autocratic decision-making, extravagant spending on failed ministry projects, apparent conflicts of interest in no-bid contracts for a friend, and creating a "culture of fear" that prevented staffers from questioning the abuses.

They also said Reccord spent time and money on events and projects on the periphery of NAMB's mission and was absent so much he couldn't provide consistent, day-to-day oversight "to properly manage the agency," which directs and coordinates Southern Baptist mission work in the United States and Canada.

Yet some trustees were most upset by Reccord's blurring of the line between NAMB and personal interests, such as his extensive non-NAMB speaking schedule and a trip to London for Reccord and his wife to attend the premiere of the Chronicles of Narnia movie, which cost NAMB \$3,800.

As the dust settled from the investigation, calls for Reccord to resign grew louder.

"There is an outcome that we all believe is necessary," one trustee, who spoke only on the condition of anonymity, said in an interview prior to Reccord's resignation. "Everybody gets it except Bob Reccord."

Reccord did finally get the message. He reportedly resigned to trustee Chairman Barry Holcomb over the weekend, then informed NAMB employees April 17 in a hastily called staff meeting. Holcomb, a pastor from Alabama, was on hand to read a statement praising Reccord's accomplishments and integrity.

Holcomb said the trustees' investigation and audit found "no evidence that Dr. Reccord had done anything unethical in his role as president," adding Reccord's "integrity is strong and solid today."

“Contrary to some opinions, Dr. Reccord is in no way being asked to resign, let alone forced to resign,” Holcomb said.

“First, he is taking this step for what he feels is best for Christ’s kingdom. While others might have placed their own personal well-being ahead of what was best for NAMB, Dr. Reccord is doing just the opposite. I believe that this is one of the strongest evidences of his personal character and integrity. He has a strong love for our missionaries, for those who work within NAMB and for our trustees. And so taking the high road of leadership on behalf of our missionaries, our agency and our convention, he is resigning today as president.”

Carlos Ferrer, recently named interim chief operating officer, also will assume acting executive officer duties, Holcomb said. No interim president has been named.

Trustees are expected to continue with policy reforms to ensure they are not caught off guard again, regardless of who is president, several said. A task force will make sure specific rules now will govern the president’s travel, speaking engagements and office time. A system of competitive bidding for outside contracts will be established. And new initiatives will require “appropriate oversight and approval by the board.”

Reccord alienated many state-level denominational leaders with his go-it-alone decision-making style, according to the NAMB investigation. Trustees said Reccord gave too much attention to his own public profile, seeking media exposure and speaking engagements that would bring him—and the agency—into the spotlight.

“Bob wanted someone to get him on CNN,” one trustee leader explained. Reccord hired two outside public-relations firms—contracts totaling \$12,000 a month; more than \$75,000 to date—to get him secular media placements like other SBC leaders Al Mohler and Richard Land.

Reccord and his administrators developed a pattern of launching expensive, often innovative, ministry projects without specific approval from trustees, who found out only after million-dollar losses resulted. Questionable contracts, like the ones with Reccord's friend and neighbor Steve Sanford of InovaOne that brought charges of conflict of interest, weren't disclosed until reported by the Christian Index.

However, Reccord's innovations also brought some successes, his supporters say, pointing to high-profile urban-evangelism strategies as an example.

"He could have gotten approved, through the trustee board, anything he wanted in the way of ministry projects, but he tried to do it without approval," one trustee leader concluded.

While some trustees—particularly pastors following the same leadership model—could accept those lapses, others could not, the trustee said. In the end, Reccord's leadership style proved a poor fit for a denominational agency dependent on donations and collaboration from churches and conventions all across the spectrum, he concluded.

"He's always flying at 40,000 feet," said one trustee who supported Reccord in the past.

"The majority of trustees love Bob and would not disagree with his style. But his unwillingness to involve trustees more (was the biggest failure). There was not a lot there that couldn't have been defended. The largest offense was we didn't know so much was going on."

Chairman Holcomb, in his statement to employees, defended Reccord's leadership style: "Dr. Reccord has aptly noted that in convention life, entrepreneurial leadership and denominational requirements may be at odds with one another. This is no one's fault—it is simply a reality. There is no question God has some special things in store for the next chapter of

this out-of-the-box thinker.”

Reccord told employees he is undecided about his future plans but has been contacted about several possibilities.

Reccord was the first president of NAMB, formed in 1997 as part of a restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention. The mission board included remnants from three SBC agencies—the Home Mission Board, Radio & Television Commission and Brotherhood Commission. Reccord led the implementation task force that oversaw the SBC restructuring.

Prior to coming to NAMB, he was senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Norfolk, Va., and Bell Shoals Baptist Church in Brandon, Fla.

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