

SBC gives IMB first crack at solving its own problems

June 23, 2006

Posted: 6/23/06

SBC gives IMB first crack at solving its own problems

By Marv Knox

Editor

GREENSBORO, N.C.—The Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board will get a chance to resolve its own trustee dispute, despite a plea for outside arbitration.

Trustee Wade Burleson asked SBC messengers to authorize the convention's Executive Committee to create a special committee to study conflict at the mission board. The panel would have been charged with reporting its findings and proposing steps to "effect reconciliation" among IMB trustees.

But messengers instead affirmed the SBC order-of-business committee's proposal to refer the issue to the board's trustees themselves.

Wade
Burleson,
pastor of
Emmanuel
Baptist
Church in
Enid, Okla.,
and a
trustee of
the
International
Mission
Board,
introduces a
motion
calling for
an Executive
Committee
inquiry into
the
possibility of
improper
pressure
being
exerted on
IMB staff,
missionaries
and
trustees. (BP
Photo by
Van Payne)

The conflict surfaced last fall, when IMB trustees narrowed the qualification for appointment as missionaries. They disallowed candidates who practice “private prayer language” and candidates who have not received “biblical baptism.”

Burleson, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Enid, Okla., protested, claiming the board shouldn’t impose requirements more stringent than the SBC’s 2000 Baptist Faith & Message doctrinal statement.

On his Internet blog, he also criticized some IMB trustees for conducting secret caucuses to orchestrate the board’s formal sessions. Other trustees accused him of violating confidentiality rules.

Subsequently, the trustees suggested Burleson be removed from the board. To take effect, messengers to the SBC annual meeting in Greensboro would have had to concur. The action would have been the first such impeachment of a trustee in the SBC’s 161-year history.

Later, trustees backed down and decided not to ask for Burleson’s ouster. But they placed limitations on his involvement with the board, barring him from executive sessions and committee meetings.

As he announced prior to the annual meeting, Burleson called for the Executive Committee to create an ad hoc committee to report back to the convention in 2007.

He asked the committee to investigate several concerns. They included manipulation of the IMB trustee-appointment process, attempts by heads of other SBC agencies to “influence and/or coerce IMB trustees, staff and administration,” secret trustee actions, implementation of narrow doctrinal requirements for missionary service, and suppression of dissent by trustees who take a minority position on board matters.

The order-of-business committee countered that traditional convention

practice indicates an entity impacted by a motion has “first authority” to respond, noted Allan Blume, the committee’s chairman and pastor of Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Boone, N.C.

Burleson told SBC messengers the convention needed to call for the ad hoc study committee in order to break an IMB stalemate over the issue.

“The only reason we are at this point is there was an impasse over selection of (an IMB) committee” that would seek resolution to the dispute, Burleson said.

He and outgoing IMB Chairman Tom Hatley were to have appointed the mission board’s study committee, but they could not agree on how it should be composed.

“I offered suggestions; the chairman declined,” he said.

Messengers lined up on both sides of the issue as they debated how the study committee should be created.

Steve Jacobson of Jonesboro, Ark., stressed outside help is needed to achieve reconciliation.

“It’s clear that, regardless of motives, the trustees have had six months to deal with this, and they have not,” Jacobson observed. “It does not seem that they have been particularly forthcoming.”

But Robin Hadaway, a missions professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., contended the new policies Burleson protested are necessary and proper.

“International Mission Board trustees deserve commendation, not investigation,” he said.

In a related motion, Clif Cummings, pastor of First Baptist Church in

Duncan, Okla., proposed that messengers request new IMB Chairman John Floyd restore to Burleson the “full duties and responsibilities of a duly elected trustee of the International Mission Board.”

Cummings’ motion was ruled out of order, since the IMB study committee is expected to address Burleson’s involvement in the trustee board.

The IMB is to report its actions on the issue at the 2007 SBC annual meeting.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.