

# IMB trustee investigation rejects allegations of board impropriety

February 2, 2007

Posted: 2/02/07

## IMB trustee investigation rejects allegations of board impropriety

**By Robert Marus**

*Associated Baptist Press*

ONTARIO, Calif. (ABP)—The Southern Baptist Convention’s International Mission Board, following an internal investigation, has rejected a trustee’s accusations of impropriety and unauthorized tightening of doctrinal parameters.

The board reportedly approved a report, based on its own executive committee’s investigations into the charges, Jan. 31. There was no recorded dissent or discussion regarding the report at the meeting, which took place in Ontario, Calif.

The committee said the board retains “the prerogative and responsibility of further defining the parameters of doctrinal beliefs and practices of its missionaries.” That came in response to a request to investigate why trustees had instituted two requirements for missionary candidates that go beyond the doctrinal parameters of the [2000 Baptist Faith & Message](#), the denomination’s official confession of faith.

The investigation came in response to a motion, [made by trustee Wade Burleson](#), during the SBC's 2006 annual meeting in June. Burleson asked for an investigation by the SBC Executive Committee into several areas of IMB business for which the board recently had come under criticism.

The Oklahoma pastor's motion called for an investigation into five allegations:

1. The alleged "manipulation of the nominating process of the Southern Baptist Convention during the appointment of trustees for the IMB."
2. "Attempts to influence and/or coerce the IMB trustees, staff, and administration to take a particular course of action by one or more Southern Baptist agency heads other than the president of the IMB."
3. "The appropriate and/or inappropriate use of forums and executive sessions of the IMB as compared to conducting business in full view of the Southern Baptist Convention and the corresponding propriety and/or impropriety of the chairman of the IMB excluding any individual trustee, without Southern Baptist Convention approval, from participating in meetings where the full IMB is convened."
4. "The legislation of new doctrinal requisites for eligibility to serve as employees or missionaries of the IMB beyond the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message."
5. "The suppression of dissent by trustees in the minority through various means by those in the majority, and the propriety of any agency forbidding a trustee, by policy, from publicly criticizing a board approved action."

When Burleson made his motion during the SBC meeting, then-SBC President Bobby Welch referred the motion to the IMB. That practice is typical when motions pertaining to a particular SBC agency are presented at convention meetings.

Burleson's motion grew out of particularly contentious time for the IMB, when the board's leadership attempted to rebuke him for his public criticism of previous board actions placing on missionaries theological restrictions that he—and other Southern Baptists—said go beyond SBC doctrinal consensus.

[One policy](#) bans the appointment of new missionaries who practice a “private prayer language.” [Jerry Rankin](#), IMB president, has said he previously practiced the controversial prayer practice, related to glossolalia, or speaking in tongues.

The other policy placed new restrictions on what modes of baptism would count as acceptable for missionary candidates.

The IMB investigators said the board had the right to enact those new restrictions, even if they go beyond the parameters of the convention's confessional document.

“While the Baptist Faith and Message represents a general confession of Southern Baptist beliefs related to biblical teachings on primary doctrinal and social issues, the IMB retains the prerogative and responsibility of further defining the parameters of doctrinal beliefs and practices of its missionaries who serve Southern Baptists with accountability to this board,” the report said.

Burleson, in a Feb 1 response posted on his blog, [kerussocharis.blogspot.com](http://kerussocharis.blogspot.com), said that aspect of the report “causes me the most concern.” However, he declined to comment further on the subject until two separate, ad hoc IMB committees appointed to review the controversial policies report back to trustees at the board's March meeting.

However, other Southern Baptists were highly critical of the report.

“The end of this is simply that the (board of trustees) of the IMB does not

think the SBC as a whole should be telling them what to do and how to do it,” wrote Art Rogers, another Oklahoma pastor who operates the Twelve Witnesses blog at [www.twelvetestimonies.com](http://www.twelvetestimonies.com). “This should surprise no one. We already knew that the (board) felt that they had a better grasp on their agency than the general population of the SBC and especially better than the blogger-informed crowd that seemed to support this motion.”

He continued: “As far as my expectations go, this is pretty much what I was ready to receive. When you ask an agency to police itself against accusations that it is failing to police itself, then you can’t expect much else.”

Burleson also accused trustees of bending to undue influence from SBC leaders outside the board and alleged that members of the convention’s nominating committee had attempted to place people with hidden agendas as IMB trustees.

In response to those aspects of Burleson’s motion, the IMB committee said it had no authority to investigate actions by other SBC bodies—in this case, the convention’s nominating committee and other SBC bodies.

“It is assumed that any and all heads of SBC entities are concerned about the effectiveness of all entities in order for the SBC to fulfill its kingdom task in the world,” the IMB investigators said. “While the IMB may exercise authority over its own president and elected staff, we are not in a position to question or investigate the actions and motives of heads of other entities.”

Burleson, responding to that determination, said it was precisely the reason he asked the SBC for an external investigation of the IMB in the first place.

“This is why I asked for the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention to look into the matter,” he wrote. “The IMB is not in a position to question or investigate the motives of heads of other entities, but

somebody sure should be in a position to demand that an agency head stop undermining the work, vision and agenda of a fellow agency head—and that somebody is the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention or the SBC herself.”

In response to the other two aspects of Burleson’s motion—the accusation that trustees had improperly conducted business in closed forums and suppressed dissent among trustees—the investigators said the board was conducting its business properly.

“The IMB does not allow formal business to be transacted in its closed trustee forums, but uses this time for prayer, personal testimonies and preliminary questions and discussions regarding issues of mutual concern between senior staff and trustees,” the investigators wrote.

Burleson said he agreed that the IMB’s business had been conducted in a more appropriate manner since the board’s leadership changed hands and new trustees joined the body in June.

“Thank God that (trustee) forums are now filled with praise reports, testimonials and prayer. This is the way it should be, but my personal experience, as well as that of others, is that this kind of forum has not always been the case,” he wrote.

“I have consistently and repeatedly advocated that the business of any agency of the Southern Baptist Convention be done in full view of the entire convention through plenary sessions. But for the safety of missionaries in security three zones or extraordinarily sensitive personnel matters, all the business of the IMB is appropriate for public viewing. I think every trustee now understands this point and is doing everything to insure that closed doors be spent in prayer and testimony and not politics.”

The investigators also said any IMB trustee has ample opportunity to express dissent throughout the board’s decision-making process.

“All board-approved actions result from a process of committee, and sometimes multiple committees, consideration before they are brought to a plenary session for adoption,” the report said.

“All trustees have opportunity in the committee process and plenary session to express and advocate minority opinions. As in any democratic body, once the majority has determined the action to be taken, the board feels that the action should receive the unified public support of all trustees for the sake of effectively moving forward to fulfill our mission task.”

Burleson said he agreed, but “with one caveat—if the policy violates Scripture, then no matter how strong anyone’s desire for unity is, it cannot become a stumbling block to seeking correction. Further, even if some refuse to see that their views are based on tradition and not Scripture, and if their interpretations are regarding doctrines that are beyond the Baptist Faith & Message 2000, then though it may be the trustees prerogative to demand doctrinal conformity on these tertiary doctrines, the more appropriate question may be, ‘Should they?’”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Baptist churches, in Texas, the BGCT, the nation and around the world.