

California Baptists cut staff, citing giving shortfall

July 5, 2024

(RNS)—The California Southern Baptist [announced](#) it had cut six staff jobs, citing an ongoing decline in giving.

Donations to the state's Cooperative Program, which funds national, international and state-specific ministries, fell short by \$170,000 in the current fiscal year. That 7 percent shortfall is part of an ongoing decline in giving, according to Baptist Press.

State Baptist officials have drawn on reserves to cover shortfalls over the past three years. The staff cuts, including four layoffs and two voluntary retirements, mean the state convention will not need to draw on reserves—as long as giving does not decline.

“The stewardship that God has given me as the executive director in assuring we continue to have a healthy and sustainable future is a heavy burden,” Pete Ramirez, the state convention's executive director said, according to Baptist Press.

Giving overall to the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program [is down](#) just under 2 percent in the current fiscal year. The SBC's annual budget called for \$148 million in donations to be given to national and international causes, but actual giving to date is \$145.4 million, according to a recent [report](#) posted by the SBC's Executive Committee.

The SBC Cooperative Program, which [turns](#) 100 years old in 2025, is one of the nation's most successful religious charitable programs, having raised more than \$20 billion since its inception. Those funds pay for overseas missions, new church starts, seminary education, disaster relief and other

programs.

Cooperative Program giving declines

But giving to the program has declined in recent decades. Southern Baptist churches give less than 5 percent of their income to the Cooperative Program, down from 10 percent in the 1980s. And less than 60 percent of SBC churches give to the program, down from three-quarters in the early 2000s.

The denomination also has [lost](#) more than 3 million members since 2006 and has faced a sexual abuse crisis and [debates](#) over the role of women in church leadership. The denomination's Executive Committee also spent several years dealing with leadership turmoil before [electing](#) a new permanent leader this spring.

In 2023, the SBC expelled Saddleback Church in Southern California, one of its largest congregations, after the church ordained several women as pastors. At the time, Saddleback was giving \$100,000 annually to the Cooperative Program.

It's unclear whether Saddleback remains a member of the California Baptist Convention, or if the congregation still gives to the convention. In either case, the shortfalls in California predate Saddleback's removal from the SBC.

It's also unclear if other states also are experiencing Cooperative Program shortfalls. Most of those conventions will hold their annual meetings in the fall. A 2023 [report](#) from Baptist Press found Colorado, Minnesota-Wisconsin and New Mexico conventions also reduced their giving to the program.

The recent Executive Committee report showed giving remained down in Colorado. However, Mike Proud, that state's executive director, said that is

not the case.

“[Cooperative Program] giving is actually up in Colorado there may be some delays related to getting that money to the [Executive Committee],” he told RNS in an email. “But our giving through June of 2024 is actually up by 2 percent over last year.”