

Ezell presents five-year goals for NAMB

February 12, 2020

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (BP)—Kevin Ezell, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board, presented a series of five-year goals for the missions agency, including more than doubling the number of Send Relief ministry centers throughout North America.

"Our goal is to add at least 13 more by 2025, so we can have 20," Ezell told NAMB trustees.

NAMB's Send Relief ministry centers each focus on one or more area of work—poverty; refugees and internationals; foster care and adoption; human trafficking; and crisis response.

Additional goals outlined

In addition to the ministry centers, Ezell wants to see 100,000 people engaged in Send Relief compassion ministry.

The broader goals Ezell outlined for NAMB include 6,000 new Southern Baptist churches by 2025 coming from a combination of new church plants, new church affiliations and new church campuses.

In evangelism, NAMB will pursue commitments from at least 50,000 people who say they will share Christ with at least one person, he announced.

"A lot can happen in five years and a lot might need to be adjusted," Ezell said. "But as we look at 2025, this is where we want to be."

Ministry in Puerto Rico highlighted

Ezell's announcement came during NAMB's board of trustees meeting Feb. 3-4 in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Trustees heard reports from Send Relief missionaries who have been coordinating relief efforts for ministry on the island since earthquakes and aftershocks began rocking the southern region in late December.

"Southern Baptists can be proud and inspired as our missionaries and churches have come to the aid of residents here," said Andy Childs, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist church in Toccoa, Ga., who chairs the Send Relief committee on the NAMB board of trustees.

"They are making a huge difference for so many people whose lives have been put on hold. And in the process of meeting practical needs, the gospel is being shared, and people are coming to Jesus."

Trustees also met more than a dozen church planting missionaries and their families, hearing first-hand stories of a church planting movement that is starting to spread throughout the island.

"You are our heroes, and we are so grateful for you," Ezell told the missionaries. "We can't wait to see how your churches are multiplied and what's going to be here in the years to come."

Increased Send Relief presence on the island

Puerto Rican residents face several ongoing challenges. More than a decade of economic decline has left the island of 3.3 million residents with a 43 percent poverty rate and a rapidly declining workforce as younger

people migrate to the mainland in search of better opportunities. Hurricane Maria in September 2017 caused nearly 3,000 deaths and left an estimated \$90 billion in damages.

An earthquake and the following aftershocks that started in December 2019 and carried into 2020 damaged or destroyed homes and left residents on the south side of the island sleeping in cars, tents and shelters. Government instability and corruption has compounded all of the problems.

Against this backdrop, NAMB is significantly increasing its Send Relief presence on the island. A new ministry center is set to open this summer that will be able to house up to 100 mission volunteers. NAMB also is expanding its orphan and foster care ministry along with its crisis response work related to Hurricane Maria and the recent earthquakes.

Taking care of business

In their business meeting, trustees approved spending up to \$15 million from NAMB reserves for the expansion of Send Relief ministry centers throughout North America.

The board voted to receive an independent auditor's report for fiscal year 2018-19. The auditors gave NAMB an unqualified, clean audit, the highest rating possible.

NAMB Chief Financial Officer Matt Smith reported fiscal year financial details to-date, which show revenues over expenses are running \$456,382 ahead of budget as of Dec. 31, 2019.

Johnny Hunt, NAMB's senior vice president of evangelism and leadership, updated trustees on the progress of the Who's Your One evangelism initiative and the state-to-state tour he has embarked on to promote evangelism in churches.

“There was a day when Southern Baptists used these words: ‘We must keep the main thing the main thing,’” Hunt said. “We’ve got to get back to that. We have to be intentional. The last thing any of us want to do is face the Lord empty-handed.”