

Ezell presents ‘NAMB Phase II’ vision

June 22, 2015

COLUMBUS, Ohio (BP)—Kevin Ezell, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s North American Mission Board, presented highlights of a year of ministry expansion and introduced what he called “NAMB Phase II” at the SBC annual meeting.

The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering was up 2 percent this past year, Ezell reported.



Kevin Ezell, left, president of the North American Mission Board, and David Platt, president of the International Mission Board, end a joint Church and Mission Sending Celebration by recognizing missionaries with a standing ovation at the June 17 SBC annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio. “I am happy to say that last year Southern Baptists started 985 new churches—a 5 percent increase over the previous year,” he said. “But if we are to reach North America for Christ, our church plants must look like North America. That is why I am pleased to report that 58 percent of the churches Southern Baptists started in 2014 were non-Anglo.”

Ezell told messengers former SBC President Fred Luter has accepted the role of NAMB ambassador to African-American churches. In addition to continuing as senior pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, Luter will help NAMB increase SBC African-American congregations from 4,000 to 5,000 by 2020.

Part of “NAMB Phase II” and the continuing Send North America strategy to reach North America through evangelistic church planting includes the Boulevard Experience, Ezell said. Boulevard is a focused effort to bring biblical discipleship to the urban context. Ezell introduced Dhati Lewis, director of NAMB’s urban initiatives, to outline Boulevard.

Problems in the city

“A sociologist once said if we are to solve the problems we face in North America, we must solve the problems we face in the city,” Lewis said.

Ultimately, Lewis said, the foundational challenge is to address the lack of men and solid male role models in the homes within cities.

“The Boulevard Experience exists for one reason alone. We want to be the last generation who had to leave the urban environment to receive sound theological training,” Lewis said. He outlined the initiative’s “four pillars” as church-centered, discipleship-driven, local-church-based and urban-focused.

“We want to embrace the density and diversity—the beauty and the complexity—that come with the challenges in the city. Our desire is to equip urban practitioners to make disciples in the city,” Lewis said.

Reporting on the “church-planting class of 2010,” Ezell said the 757 surviving churches represent 80 percent of the original number planted that year. The same cohort gave \$3.3 million to SBC missions in 2014. The class of 2011 has a survival rate of 87 percent.

'We want as many churches as possible'

"In 'NAMB Phase II,' numbers are still important. We want as many churches as possible," Ezell said. "But we will not sacrifice quality for quantity. We are raising the bar in every area. We will stop at nothing to have the very best assessment, training and coaching for Southern Baptist church planters."

Ezell told messengers the *3 Circles: Life Conversation Guide*, introduced at the 2014 annual meeting in Baltimore, has 1.4 million print copies in circulation with an additional 38,000-plus phone and tablet app downloads.