

Firm selected to conduct review of SBC Executive Committee

September 13, 2021

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (BP)—A task force appointed by Southern Baptist Convention President Ed Litton has selected Guidepost Solutions to oversee a third-party review of the SBC Executive Committee’s past handling of sexual abuse issues.

According to a statement released by the task force, Guidepost Solutions was selected in part due to its “extensive background in abuse, trauma, and abusive dynamics, with considerable background involving abuse in religious contexts, significant experience with corporate and legal dynamics which contribute to the mishandling of or proper responses to, sexual abuse, survivor care and abuse prevention.”

The task force also cited Guidepost Solutions’ “robust understanding of and focus on the impact of leadership, with significant skill assessing and reporting on cultural dynamics of an institution and their impact on abuse and abuse prevention.”

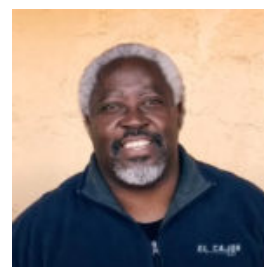
Guidepost’s “in-depth understanding of best-standards practices for investigations and assessments with the ability to provide clear guidance and input to the task force on best methods for pursuing transparency, accountability, and reform in the investigative process” was also commended in the task force release.

Mandated by SBC messengers

Messengers approved the formation of the task force at the 2021 SBC annual meeting in June, just five days after the Executive Committee had

announced Guidepost would conduct a similar review at its own request. The Executive Committee-commissioned review was subsequently put on hold pending the actions of the task force.

In a statement released to Baptist Press, the SBC Executive Committee welcomed the announcement saying: “Now, nearly three months after the annual meeting, the Executive Committee welcomes the announcement that Guidepost Solutions has been chosen by the task force to conduct the third-party inquiry of the Executive Committee.”



Pastor Rolland Slade of Meridian Baptist Church in El Cajon, Calif., is chair of the SBC Executive Committee.
(Screen Capture)

Rolland Slade, Executive Committee chairman, also affirmed the Guidepost selection, saying: “I thank the task force for their diligence in selecting Guidepost Solutions. Now that we know the firm, we can all move forward to the next steps. As I asked in June, please be patient with all of us as we walk this road together. We want to make sure we do things right.”

The task force previously had released a statement Sept. 3 posting answers to frequently asked questions regarding the task force and its work.

Recommendations in the statement ranged from the scope of the independent review to methods of funding the probe.

Regarding funding for the review, the task force noted that the “Executive Committee is responsible for figuring out how” to fund the review but recommended the Executive Committee use its cash reserves to cover the associated costs, though the original motion stated that “the review shall be funded by allocations from the Cooperative Program.”

Probe does not include abuse at local-church level

The task force also clarified that while the time frame of the independent review goes back to Jan. 1, 2000, its scope should focus on the actions of the Executive Committee alone, saying the parameters of the third-party independent review “do not include any allegations of sexual abuse or mishandling of abuse at the local church level, except to the extent that those allegations against local church pastors impacted or were impacted by the words and actions of the Executive Committee.”

The group is also calling on members of the Executive Committee to waive attorney-client privilege, saying that “an overwhelming majority of SBC messengers has requested it.”

The task force said it believes waiving attorney-client privilege “is necessary for assessing any mishandling, for accurately making recommendations for reform, and for accountability and transparency. Waiver is absolutely critical to ensuring that the third-party firm has full access to relevant and material information.”

Regarding the questions related to attorney-client privilege, the Executive Committee statement said “the Executive Committee leadership is not

opposed in principle to requests for the waiving of attorney-client privilege considerations when it is relevant, it is appropriate, and it is in consultation with the third-party commissioned to conduct the inquiry, Guidepost. Speculation to the contrary is internet rumor and untrue.

“Ultimately, these are decisions for the Executive Committee’s board of trustees, and we are working to provide information to the board of trustees so they can make informed decisions they deem appropriate within the confines of all legal (i.e. fiduciary) considerations as everyone seeks to appropriately implement the will of the messengers. We urge the public to leave this review now to Guidepost and the Executive Committee to be handled in an appropriate and professional manner on behalf of all Southern Baptists.”

Executive Committee meets next week

The SBC Executive Committee will meet Sept. 20-21 and is expected to address items related to the independent review at that time.

Task force members are Chair Bruce Frank, lead pastor of Biltmore Baptist Church of Arden, N.C.; Vice Chair Marshall Blalock, pastor of First Baptist Church of Charleston, S.C.;

John Damon, chief executive officer of Canopy Children’s Solutions, Jackson, Miss., and member of Broadmoor Baptist Church, Madison, Miss.; Liz Evan, judicial law clerk at Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals, Nashville, and member of Hilldale Baptist Church, Clarksville, Tenn.; Heather Evans, director of Evans Counseling Services, Coopersburg, Pa., and member of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church in Center Valley, Pa.; Andrew Hébert, lead pastor of Paramount Baptist Church, Amarillo; and Bucas Sterling III, senior pastor of Kettering Baptist Church, Upper Marlboro, Md.

Rachael Denhollander, an attorney, advocate and educator from Louisville, Ky., and Chris Moles, an ordained minister from the Christian and Missionary Alliance and ACBC certified counselor, serve as advisers to the group.

According to the task force release, survivors, witnesses and other members of the public who wish to communicate with the Guidepost team can email ECCInvestigation@guidepostsolutions.com.

The task force also stated that “persons reporting information to this email address can do so anonymously. Names and other personally identifying information of survivors and witnesses who choose to report information to this email address will remain private so long as permitted by law. Only Guidepost will have access to the information submitted to this email address; it is not accessible to the task force or the SBC.”