

Great Commission Task Force approved by SBC messengers

June 24, 2009

LOUISVILLE, Ky.—Overwhelming approval of a Great Commission Task Force climaxed 25 minutes of discussion during the Tuesday evening session of Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting.

Messengers authorized SBC President Johnny Hunt to appoint a task force to determine how “Southern Baptists can work more faithfully and effectively together in serving Christ through the Great Commission.” The task force is to report its findings and recommendation to the 2010 annual meeting of the SBC in Orlando.

Member of the task force appointed by Hunt are: Ronnie Floyd of Springdale, Ark., chair; Jim Richards, executive director, Southern Baptists of Texas Convention; Frank Page, of Taylors, S.C.; David Dockery, president of Union University in Jackson, Tenn.; Simon Tsoi, IMB trustee from Arizona; Donna Gaines of Cordova, Tenn.; Al Gilbert, Winston-Salem, N.C.; J.D. Greear of Durham, N.C.; Tom Biles, director of missions, Tampa Bay Baptist Association; Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary; Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; John Drummond, layman from Florida; Harry Lewis of the North American Mission Board; Mike Orr of Chipley, Fla.; Roger Spradlin of California; Bob White, Georgia Baptist Convention executive director; Ken Whitten of Tampa, Fla.; and Ted Traylor of Pensacola, Fla.

Mohler offered the motion. He told messengers there was no reason to fear asking if there is a better way for Baptists to work together. He called the present “a turning point in history” and said churches need to be more active in getting the gospel to the ends of the earth.

California messenger Ron Wilson offered a substitute motion calling for the North American Mission Board and the International Mission Board each to study how better to reach their respective assignments with the gospel.

The substitute failed after Mohler countered that the thrust of the Great Commission Task Force motion was not to address how the two boards should do their work but how to get the resources needed by the boards.

Jerry Nash of Florida called the motion “a waste of time, funding and other resources.” He charged Southern Baptists no longer are agreed on the “heart of the gospel.” He pointed out 30 percent of seminary graduates are Calvinists, and Calvinists occupy leadership throughout the SBC.

“If we cannot agree that God loves everyone and that Jesus died that everyone may have the opportunity to hear the gospel, how can we expect evangelical churches to support the convention?” he asked.

Former SBC president Frank Page of South Carolina responded that the Great Commission Task Force rose above any single contentious issue. He reminded the messengers that more than 20 years ago, messengers asked the SBC president to appoint a Peace Committee to examine a difficult issue.

At a press conference earlier in the day, Hunt said Southern Baptists face a defining moment in history. Anticipating adoption of the Great Commission motion, he told reporters, “Southern Baptists need a Great Commission Resurgence to reemphasize reaching the lost, to inspire us to do more church plants, to penetrate the darkness of lostness.”

While he has led the charge for the Great Commission Resurgence, Hunt said he has never been alone. He noted an influx of e-mails from international missionaries urging him to “stay the course” in its support.

Hunt said he had no desire to touch the structure of the SBC. He declared

his respect for the responsibility of trustees who are charged with directing the various SBC ministries and said he had communicated that position to state executives with whom he had talked.

Hunt said he wanted the Great Commission Task Force to come to its work “at ground zero and begin there.” He added he was encouraged that IMB and NAMB had already started to examine their work to see how more funds could be directed to primary responsibilities.

Still, Hunt said he expects to find overlap of programs and services in the denomination. He called some overlap good. Other overlap, he said, was bad because it takes money that could go to “piercing the darkness of lostness.”

Hunt said he expects to find some state convention models to celebrate. He added that the task force will challenge others to do more.

When asked if a 50-50 division of Cooperative Program funds between state and national conventions was a goal, Hunt said that was a good place to start.

“When can a state convention or a church say: ‘Enough is enough? We are big enough. Now we can give to penetrate the darkness.’”

Hunt said the starting point is with the church. They will be asked to examine their priorities, he said. Associations and state conventions will also be examined as well as the SBC.

In a theme interpretation Tuesday afternoon, Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., and author of the Great Commission Resurgence document, urged approval of the task force motion.

“Southern Baptists are compelled to get the gospel to the places where the

gospel is not known,” he declared. He added that figures provided by the IMB indicated 1.6 billion people never have heard the name of Jesus.

“That is not acceptable,” he said. “We have to loose the passion of Southern Baptists for the lost.”

In the Tuesday morning opening session of the annual meeting, Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, raised questions about the Great Commission Resurgence proposal.

“Is a Great Commission Resurgence more about the Great Commission than about the Southern Baptists Convention?” he asked.

“Does the Great Commission Resurgence seek to bring together all Southern Baptists—at the national, state and associational level—or does it unnecessarily alienate certain demographics?”

He also questioned whether the proposed task force honored the long-established principles of trustee governance of entities.

Finally, Chapman asked messengers to consider whether the proposal seeks “personal transformation of our hearts or institutional transformation of our structure.”