

Messenger motions deal with ERLC, censure, other issues

June 13, 2024

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)—Messengers presented 50 motions at the 2024 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting and acted on several, rejecting calls to abolish the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and censure Southern Baptist leaders and approving a motion to unseat messengers from a Virginia church.

Abolishing an entity requires two successive two-thirds votes of approval. The crowd in the Indiana Convention Center fell well short of that margin on a motion brought by Tom Ascol, pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Fla., getting an estimated quarter of the vote. Attempts in recent years to abolish the ERLC have failed by bigger margins.

Louis Cook, pastor of Oak City Baptist Church in Oak City, N.C., presented a motion to censure Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Al Mohler, Lifeway Christian Resources President Ben Mandrell and then-SBC President Bart Barber in relation to signing an amicus brief in a Kentucky-based statute of limitations case. The messengers ultimately overruled the Committee on Order of Business by ruling the motion out of order.

The motion to unseat messengers from First Baptist Church in Alexandria, Va., was brought by Aaron Decker, a messenger from Red Village Church in Madison, Wisc. The Credentials Committee followed Decker's motion with a recommendation to deem the church not in friendly cooperation with the SBC based "on the grounds of their public endorsement of egalitarianism." The messengers' agreement with that recommendation unseated the church's messengers.

Messengers responded with a vote of 6,759 to 563 in agreement with

Decker and the Credentials Committee.

Messengers rejected the following motions:

- To appoint a blue-ribbon committee to review the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 and return with proposed revisions. Brought by Allen Featherstone, pastor-elder of Deepening at Mosaic Church in Provo, Utah.
- To request a fact-finding committee to review the work of the Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force. Brought by Sean Dennis, chairman of deacons at Vine Street Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky.
- To direct the convention to remove pledges of allegiance to earthly kingdoms from all convention activities. Brought by Michael Sherwood, a messenger from Gore Springs Baptist Church in Gore Springs, Miss.
- To request the SBC president to appoint a task force to examine all legal matters related to NAMB between 2017 and 2024. Brought by Joel Breidenbaugh, lead pastor of Gospel Centered Church in Apopka, Fla.
- To allow the ERLC to raise funds from outside the SBC. Brought by Ben Cole, a messenger from Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano.

Motions referred to the Executive Committee were:

- To consider how Southern Baptists from every cooperating state convention can serve on SBC boards, committees, commissions and institutions, submitted by Jon Ballard of South Dakota.

- To amend the Baptist Faith & Message to include affirmation of the Nicene, Apostles' and Athanasian Creeds, submitted by John Michael LaRue of Ohio.
- To study the feasibility of remote participation in the SBC annual meeting, submitted by Wally Contreras of Ohio.
- To prioritize funds to update SBC.net, submitted by Tyler Pearce of Florida.
- To enable remote participation by messengers in the SBC annual meeting, submitted by Brandon Booth of California.
- To amend the Business and Financial Plan to ensure greater financial transparency, brought by Wade Thomas of Ohio.
- To require a two-thirds vote from messengers to approve all alterations to the Baptist Faith & Message 2000, brought by Chelsea McReynolds of Oklahoma.
- To reallocate all Cooperative Program funds from ERLC to the International Mission Board, brought by Kenny Cody of Tennessee.
- To form an ad hoc committee to study elders and deacons in local churches, brought by John Boquist of Virginia.
- To amend Article 6 of the SBC Constitution related to qualifications for trustee service, brought by Ethan Jago of Florida.
- To amend Bylaw 26B to allow for additional time for questions during entity reports, brought by Brian Dembowczyk of Tennessee.
- To require all entities to publish their conflict-of-interest policies, brought by Clay Hall of Kentucky.
- To amend the Baptist Faith & Message to include the Nicene Creed, brought by Stephen Lorange of North Carolina.
- To request the Executive Committee create a task force to study how best to minister to the special needs community, brought by Benjamin Hankin of New Jersey.
- To direct the Executive Committee to publish a schedule of all money spent on legal matters between 2021 and 2024, brought by Casey Fender of North Carolina.

- To request the Executive Committee publish the names of messengers on both sides of the nametags issued at each annual meeting, brought by David Miller of Nebraska.
- To direct the Executive Committee to publish a schedule of all money spent on legal matters between 2021 and 2024, brought by Gregg Kite of Kansas.
- To direct the Executive Committee to publish the contact information for all entity trustees, brought by Wesley Russell of Kentucky.
- To direct the Executive Committee to form a task force to study the long-term effects of vaccine mandates on International Mission Board missionaries, brought by Jared Burdick of Kentucky.
- To amend Bylaw 8, requiring the Credentials Committee to schedule a vote of messengers when a church is considered to be not in friendly cooperation and for the messengers' vote to be final, brought by Jonathan Raffini of Texas.
- To amend the SBC Business and Financial Plan to require all SBC entities to disclose all financial information included in Form 990, brought by Rhett Burns of South Carolina.
- To amend Bylaw 20 related to the Resolutions Committee, brought by Kristen Ferguson of California.
- To amend the ministry assignment of the ERLC to address sexual abuse awareness and prevention or request the Executive Committee to create a new entity to address sexual abuse awareness and prevention, brought by Megan Lively of North Carolina.

Motions referred to the North

American Mission Board were:

- To submit a forensic audit from the previous fiscal year, brought by Parker Roberts of Georgia.
- To request a task force to study the need for Christian schools in impoverished and rural communities, brought by James Briggs of Missouri.
- To appoint a task force to study how churches can be more effective in evangelism and baptisms, brought by Scott Talley of Florida.

One motion to publish textbooks for homeschool students, brought by Tim Overton of Indiana was referred to Lifeway Christian Resources.

Motions referred to all entities were:

- To only use outside legal counsel whose values reflect the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 on gender and sexuality, brought by Paul Montgomery of Oklahoma.
- To request that all convention entities revise their codes of conduct related to alcohol, brought by Jonathan Parramore of California.
- To request entity trustees explain how Calvinism / Reformed theology is compatible with the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 and consider not promoting those beliefs in their entities, brought by Curtis Kentmer of Kentucky.

A motion by Ethan Hester of North Carolina to direct the Executive Committee to publish a schedule of payments of more than \$5,000 paid to another entity was referred to all entities and the Executive Committee.

A motion by Talmadge Fogg of Florida to request the president to adopt a task force to study Philippine indigenous Baptist pastors was referred to the International Mission Board.

A motion by Joe Sneed of Texas to direct the ERLC to issue a formal apology to the Executive Committee for accusations of covering up sexual abuse was referred to the ERLC.

The following motions were ruled not in order, followed by the reason why:

- To request the SBC president appoint a task force to investigate how Southern Baptists have responded to sexual abuse, brought by David Morrill of Colorado. As stated, the motion requests Cooperative Program allocations be directed to a task force which is not in line with the Business and Financial plan.
- To direct the Executive Committee to disallow any politicians from speaking or advertising at the SBC annual meeting during election years, brought by Ken Rucker of Georgia. As stated the motion would infringe on the rights of certain messengers to the convention, including registration secretary Don Currence, who also serves as mayor of Ozark, Mo.
- To request the Executive Committee examine all North American Mission Board court documents since 2017, brought by Kenneth Carey of Maryland. It was determined to be identical to another motion that was discussed on the floor.
- To request the resignation of Brent Leatherwood as president of the ERLC, brought by Michael Borghese of Texas. Motion instructed an entity employee.
- To ask messengers to affirm the Nicene Creed, brought by Andy Brown of Mississippi. Motion was in the nature of a resolution.
- To request Pastors' Conference presidents to set apart time for guided prayer during the event, brought by Zack Reno of Alabama. The SBC may not direct the Pastors' Conference schedule.
- To prohibit Cooperative Program funds being used to pay for entity

personnel to attend the SBC annual meeting to serve as messengers, brought by Charles Johnson of Kentucky. The motion directs entities.

- To request all convention entities release a statement supporting the nation of Israel, brought by Matt Dunn of Missouri. The motion was in the nature of a resolution.