

NAMB trustee resigns

December 8, 2010

CUMMING, Ga. (ABP) — A trustee has resigned from the Southern Baptist Convention's [North American Mission Board](#) saying he does not share the vision of the agency's new president.

"I believe that throughout my life, and particularly as I've gotten older, that it's very important to take your body where your heart is," Lester Cooper, [pastor](#) of Concord Baptist Church in Cumming, Ga., [told](#) church members Nov. 28. "If you've got your body somewhere where your heart's not, that just not where it ought to be."

Lester Cooper

"I just wanted to share with you this morning — for whatever it's worth to anybody — that this past week I resigned as trustee of the North American Mission Board," he said.

Cooper added in an interview with Associated Baptist Press that "My heart is not with the North American Mission Board."

Cooper, former director of missions of the Atlanta Association of Southern Baptist Churches elected as a NAMB trustee in 2008, said watching changes made since the election Sept. 14 of Kevin Ezell as the agency's president "is not what I signed on for."

On Sept. 30 Ezell announced an early retirement incentive for employees age 54 and over. The goal is to reduce staff by a net 25 percent by year-end, including new people brought in by Ezell.

Cooper said he agrees with the strategy of focusing on church planting in urban areas with large populations but doesn't think the way to do it is by

losing senior staff members recognized as leading experts in the field.

“I can’t imagine how you can see 80 people leave an organization that has 260 people in it and have any idea of how you are going to function or come to the conclusion of who is going to go before you have been there two months,” Cooper said. “It’s not reasonable, and I cannot get a satisfactory answer from anybody where we are going.”

He also said that since a Great Commission Task Force [report](#) adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention calls for a restructuring of NAMB within seven years, he doesn’t understand why decisions are being handed down so quickly and without vote by the board of trustees.

Cooper, 64, said if he were to serve out his term and be re-elected he would be a NAMB trustee until he was 70 and that at that age “I don’t need any more stress in my life.”

“I do not really see the direction I see it going in as being something that I think is helpful,” he said. “I don’t think that I should stay and stand in the way of what others think need to be done.”

Cooper said three NAMB staff members taking the early retirement option are members of his church.

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” said Cooper, a pastor for more than 30 years with a long record of denominational service. “It’s a new day for Southern Baptists, and I really don’t know what it looks like.”

Ezell said in a statement Dec. 8 that he admires Cooper and appreciates the service he has given as a member of the board of trustees. Ezell said the timing of the voluntary retirement incentive package was driven primarily by changes being implemented by Guidestone Financial Resources.

“The package we offered was as generous as we could make it and we are also providing employment assistance for those who are seeking work after leaving NAMB,” Ezell said. “These reductions are driven by my firm belief that we need to send more resources to the North American mission field.”

Ezell said just over two months on the job he is moving forward as quickly as he can.

“We haven’t shared details of a new direction yet because we are still in the important phase of meeting with and listening to our state partners,” he said. “We will have a clearer direction to share after NAMB’s next board of trustees meeting in February.”

-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.

Related ABP stories:

[Update: Ezell elected NAMB president on split vote](#) (9/15)

[Ezell elected NAMB president](#) (9/14)

[NAMB presidential nominee defends church’s giving record](#) (9/13)

[La. Baptist Convention exec challenges Ezell pick at NAMB](#) (9/9)

[Al Mohler’s pastor recommended as new NAMB president](#) (9/2)