

# Paul Chitwood elected as IMB president

November 15, 2018

ROCKVILLE, Va. (BP)—About a decade ago, Paul Chitwood became convinced God was calling him to mobilize missions and missionaries, he told International Mission Board trustees. That call culminated Nov. 15, he said, with his election as IMB president.

“Being a member of this board for eight years changed my ministry and it changed my life, so much so that my wife Michelle and I questioned whether God had called us to overseas missions,” Chitwood, who served as an IMB trustee from 2002-10 and chaired the board from 2008-10, said upon his election.



International Mission Board trustees surround and pray for newly-elected IMB President Paul Chitwood and his wife Michelle. (BP Photo / David Roach)

“During that time on the board of wrestling with that call, it became clear that God’s call upon our lives was to be mobilizers of the mission and of the missionaries. And what an incredible privilege it is to have that role. To be

able to now see the culmination of that role by sharing in the work of the IMB and leading the IMB is overwhelming to us,” Chitwood said.

The IMB trustees elected Chitwood unanimously as the entity’s 13th president during a 20-minute executive session at the IMB’s International Learning Center near Richmond, Va. They also elected IMB interim president Clyde Meador as interim executive vice president.

The results of both elections were announced in an open trustee session by Chuck Pourciau, chairman of the trustees’ presidential search committee. Announcement of Chitwood’s election, which occurred by secret ballot, was greeted with a standing ovation.



Paul Chitwood

Chitwood, who has been the Kentucky Baptist Convention’s executive director since 2011, announced Nov. 6 that, if elected, he would recommend a permanent executive vice president with significant mission field experience. Prior to Chitwood’s tenure leading Kentucky Baptists, he was pastor of Kentucky churches for 18 years.

Pourciau, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport, La., said any

presidential candidate “is going to be stronger on one side of the ocean than he is on the other,” having more experience in either overseas missionary service or stateside pastorates and denominational service.

While Chitwood’s vocational ministry has been entirely in the United States, the search committee “came to unanimous agreement” he was “the man who would minister effectively and excellently on both sides of the ocean,” Pourciau said.

Chitwood will “excel” at working with overseas IMB personnel, Pourciau said, because of his experience as a trustee and “the way God captured his heart at that time and how it changed everything he did from that time on.”

Prior to David Platt’s tenure as IMB president from 2014 to earlier this year, every IMB president since 1945 had previous experience as a career overseas missionary. Overall however, eight of the 13 men to serve as president of the IMB, formerly known as the Foreign Mission Board, have not served as career missionaries.

The last time the IMB or FMB elected a state convention chief executive as its president was 1929, when it tapped Charles Edward Maddry of North Carolina. Counting Chitwood, three state executives have served as IMB president.

## **Balanced budget, smaller missionary force**

Chitwood inherits an IMB budget that has been balanced since 2017 but a career missionary force at its lowest levels in more than 30 years.

Two years ago, trustees adopted a balanced budget for 2017 following six years in which the organization’s expenditures exceeded the gifts it received from churches by a total of \$210 million. To balance the budget,

the IMB downsized its missionary force and stateside staff by 1,132 individuals in 2015-16.

The Southern Baptist Convention Annual reported a total of 3,596 IMB missionaries in 2016. In 2017, the number dropped to 3,563, but it increased slightly to 3,667 as of October 2018, according to data from [sbc.net](http://sbc.net).

“I believe it is the desire of every Southern Baptist to once again see our career mission force growing in number, and I believe that can happen,” Chitwood told trustees. “It will require, however, a greater generosity and a greater willingness to sacrifice.

“Thankfully, Southern Baptists are a generous people. And while there are many wonderful causes and organizations out there that we help fund, I want to call on Southern Baptists today to make funding of the work of getting the gospel to the nations through our own Southern Baptist missionaries our first priority in giving.”

Chitwood noted several characteristics of the approach he will take at the IMB.

## **He told trustees:**

- “I do not plan to bring a new vision to the International Mission Board.”

“The International Mission Board’s vision is not ours to fashion,” Chitwood said. God has given his vision to the church. That vision, expressed so clearly in Revelation 7:9 of a multitude of every language, people and tribe and nation, is his vision.”

- “I’ll work to continue to form and fashion an organization that is strong and stable.”

“We don’t need another reorganization of the International Mission Board, in my estimation,” he said. “But we do need to reestablish a missionary pipeline of God’s choice servants, ready to take the gospel to the nations. And I believe we also need to establish a leadership pipeline where our existing personnel are equipped and empowered to use their God-given gifts to the fullest potential at every level of the organization.”

- “I will seek to guard” the IMB’s relationships, reputation and integrity.

That includes guarding relationships with SBC entities, state conventions, local associations and churches, he said. Increased ethnic and gender diversity will be an important part of guarding the IMB’s reputation, he stressed.

“I will seek to make the mission force and our IMB staff look more and more like the churches that we serve,” Chitwood said. “In order to do that, I believe we need more ethnic diversity, more African-Americans in leadership, and we need to be more intentional about including females in appropriate leadership roles in order to guard our integrity before the churches.”

Championing the Cooperative Program, Chitwood said, is another key facet of guarding the IMB’s integrity.

“I’ll also seek to use the IMB presidency to champion the Cooperative Program,” he said. “The Cooperative Program is the lifeblood of the Southern Baptist system of missions.”

## **Praised by peers**

Two executive directors of Baptist state conventions were present for the vote—Brian Autry of the SBC of Virginia and Kevin Smith of the Baptist

Convention of Maryland-Delaware. Both praised Chitwood's election.

As a former state executive, Chitwood "is going to bring an understanding of the entire cooperative gospel partnership that we have," Autry said in an interview, adding Chitwood understands churches, "from the typical church to the very large church."

Smith emphasized Chitwood will continue the SBC's emphasis on ethnic diversity. Chitwood "has done a wonderful job" in Kentucky "of engaging a variety of languages and ethnicities as regards church planting and revitalization work," said Smith, a former KBC president.

"He's been a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, which entails dealing with students from all over the world. So, I think he will continue to enhance our missionary" force's ethnic diversity," he added.

Trustees also approved a 3 percent endowment appropriation for 2018, authorized the IMB's registration with a foreign nation in which the board works, and voted to appoint 42 new missionaries.