

Prestonwood to resume undesignated Cooperative Program giving

April 28, 2017

PLANO, Texas (BP)—Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano announced it will resume giving through the Cooperative Program after two months of evaluating its support of Southern Baptist missions and ministries.

Renewed commitment

“After a time of prayerful evaluation, Prestonwood is renewing our commitment to Southern Baptist missions by giving to the Cooperative Program without designation,” Executive Pastor Mike Buster said.

“For more than 40 years, Prestonwood has been a steadfast supporter of the Cooperative Program and its mission to advance the gospel through this vital giving program. We are grateful for the Southern Baptist Convention and our longtime ministry partnership and look forward to fulfilling the Great Commission together in the days ahead.”

SBC Executive Committee President Frank S. Page expressed gratitude about the congregation’s decision.

“I am so delighted to hear of this news,” Page said. “In an earlier conversation with (Pastor Jack) Graham, he promised that Prestonwood would be back in to CP sooner than later, and he is a man of his word.”

Prestonwood concerned about ERLC positions

Prestonwood announced in mid-February it would escrow CP funds over “various significant positions taken by the leadership of the Ethics &

Religious Liberty Commission.” During the escrow period, the congregation said, it would evaluate how to proceed with future financial support of SBC and state convention ministries.

In a December 2016 interview with *The Wall Street Journal*, Graham, a former SBC president, alleged “disrespectfulness” by ERLC President Russell Moore toward evangelical supporters of Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential campaign. Graham served on Trump’s evangelical executive advisory board.

In March, Moore and the ERLC executive committee released an extended statement “seeking unity in the Southern Baptist Convention.” Shortly after the ERLC’s statement was released, Graham tweeted, “This is a gracious and unifying statement” from Moore.

In a statement issued April 26, Moore said: “Prestonwood Baptist Church is a faithful, vibrant, missions-minded congregation. I’m grateful to God to partner with them as we seek to reach our world for Jesus Christ.”

SBC Executive Committee creates ad hoc committee

Prestonwood’s decision to escrow—and reports by other churches that planned to take similar action— prompted a unanimous vote in February by the SBC Executive Committee’s Cooperative Program Committee to create an ad hoc committee to “study and recommend redemptive solutions to the current reality in Southern Baptist life of churches’ either escrowing or discontinuing Cooperative Program funds, with the report being brought back to the September 2017 Executive Committee meeting.”

In response to an Executive Committee member’s request, the body’s officers also said they would “monitor the activities of our various Southern Baptist entities since our last convention ... in relation to how those activities might adversely affect” Cooperative Program receipts and “our churches and other stewardship structures of Southern Baptists.”

Stephen Rummage, chair of the Executive Committee and pastor of Bell Shoals Baptist Church, in Brandon, Fla., said in March a decision by Prestonwood to resume CP giving could indicate resolution of “most of the concerns that have been raised” by the Executive Committee, adding Prestonwood appears representative of other concerned congregations.