

SBC president's sexual abuse advisory study underway

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NASHVILLE (BP)—Southern Baptist Convention President J.D. Greear's sexual abuse advisory study is "actively involved" in the first phase of its two-year process, the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission announced Sept. 19 following appropriation of \$250,000 for the study by the SBC Executive Committee.

[Greear announced](#) in late July he would form a working study group, in partnership with the ERLC, to "consider how Southern Baptists at every level can take discernable action to respond swiftly and compassionately to incidents of abuse, as well as to foster safe environments within churches and institutions."



J.D. Greear

The study will receive the first \$250,000 of any money received beyond the 2017-18 Cooperative Program Allocation Budget, the Executive Committee voted. Expenditures for the study will be administered by the ERLC and reimbursed quarterly by the Executive Committee.

The budgeted goal of \$192 million for the SBC portion of the Cooperative Program allocation budget was surpassed Sept. 21, said Bill Townes, vice president for convention finance.



Russell Moore

“It was a joy to see on display this week at Executive Committee meetings such generosity and unity in mission,” ERLC President Russell Moore. “I am deeply thankful that the SBC Executive Committee showed their commitment to the sexual abuse advisory study by providing these resources.

“Southern Baptists have made it clear that we must address this crisis with the gospel and for the sake of the gospel. And these funds will make it possible for this study group to provide the very best resources and recommendations possible for our churches. I’m thankful for the opportunity to partner with this study group in order to serve our churches every way possible.”

Assessment, development, implementation

ERLC Executive Vice President Phillip Bethancourt wrote in a Sept. 19 update on the [ERLC website](#): “The study group is already actively involved in the assessment phase. The purpose of this phase is to review existing organizations, strategies, experts, and resources in order to better understand the landscape of needs and opportunities when it comes to sexual abuse.”

Next, during the “development phase,” the study group will “develop recommendations, resources, strategies, and partnerships that will address the needs and opportunities that have been identified.”

Then an “implementation phase” will “launch a wide-scale, comprehensive effort to educate, saturate, and motivate Southern Baptist churches, entities, and leaders to embrace and incorporate the recommendations and findings of the study group,” Bethancourt wrote.

Unlike previous task forces in SBC life, the Sexual Abuse Advisory Study will not be limited to one “representative group of leaders and experts,” Bethancourt wrote. Rather, the study will comprise “a constellation of various work groups specializing in particular areas like orbits in a solar system. As the study group progresses, various orbits will be identified and addressed such as resources, church-based strategies, seminary and higher education, state convention and association initiatives, and more.”

One “orbit” in the study, Bethancourt wrote, will involve “a collaborative effort among the (six SBC) seminaries in order to identify common principles and outcomes that can be appropriately implemented in each unique seminary context.”



August Boto

August Boto, interim president of the SBC Executive Committee, thanked Cooperative Program-funded convention entities for sacrificing funds for the study and others for “offering to contribute needed support and resources.”

“Of course, behind the national ministry demonstration of willingness is the fact that the funding originates at the local church level where believers contribute their tithes and offerings, and then vote to support ministry through the Cooperative Program,” Boto said in written comments. “In other words, this effort is truly one supported by all Southern Baptists.

“Joining together sacrificially, collaboratively and voluntarily to address evil, human failure and the consequences of sin is a Southern Baptist characteristic,” Boto said. “More importantly, it is biblical (as passages such as Matthew 22:36-40 and John 4:23-24 indicate) and as ‘people of the Book,’ Southern Baptists can do no less.”

Questions, comments and suggestions regarding the study can be emailed to studygroup@erlc.com.