

SBC updates criteria for church affiliation

June 12, 2014

BALTIMORE—Messengers to the June 10-11 [SBC annual meeting in Baltimore](#) approved without discussion changes to the SBC constitution defining what it means to be “in friendly cooperation” with the convention—language used for congregations that qualify for representation at the annual meeting.



Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee chairman Ernest Easley gives recommendations from the Executive Committee to messengers. (BP Photo by Van Payne) Prior to 1992, Southern Baptists defined friendly cooperation solely by financial support. That changed after one Southern Baptist church ordained an openly homosexual person and another blessed a same-sex union. A constitutional amendment excluded congregations that “act to affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior.”

The newest amendment, which must be ratified by a second vote next year,

retains the homosexuality prohibition as an example of a church that does not have “a faith and practice which closely identifies with the convention’s adopted statement of faith.”

The SBC Executive Committee announced its intent to consider at its June 9 meeting prior to the SBC annual meeting limiting membership to churches that have “not intentionally operated in any manner demonstrating opposition to the doctrine expressed in the convention’s most recently adopted statement of faith.”

Ernest Easley, pastor of Roswell Street Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., and chair of Executive Committee, said the tweaked phrasing of “closely identifies” is borrowed from the report of the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message study committee.

Expansion of old wording

The new membership article additionally defines a cooperating church as one that has “formally approved its intention to cooperate with the Southern Baptist Convention,” such as regular filing of the Annual Church Profile report requested by the convention and tabulated by LifeWay Christian Resources.

It expands the old descriptor of “a bona fide contributor to the convention’s work” to a congregation that has made undesignated financial contributions through the Cooperative Program unified budget, made designated gifts through the SBC Executive Committee for convention causes or contributed to any convention entity during the previous fiscal year.

Each cooperating church is entitled to two messengers at the SBC annual meeting. The convention will recognize additional messengers, up to a maximum of 12, for each \$6,000 in financial gifts or full percentage of a church’s undesignated receipts contributed to the SBC. The previous

threshold for financial support, \$250 for each additional messenger, has been used since 1888.

'Small-church friendly'

Easley said the new language "is small-church friendly," because it recognizes that many smaller Southern Baptist churches give a significant portion of their budget to the Cooperative Program, a unified missions funding plan used since 1925.

The new membership article drops a former method for accruing messengers by numerical growth in lieu of financial contributions. The old formula allowed one additional messenger for each 250 members or \$250 in financial contributions with a maximum of 10.