

Southern Baptists consider name change

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) - After 166 years as the [Southern Baptist Convention](#), the nation's second-largest religious body could be getting a new name.

SBC President Bryant Wright announced Sept. 19 the appointment of a committee to study whether it is a good idea to change the convention's name, what a new name might be, legal ramifications and potential cost.

"First, the convention's name is so regional," Wright, pastor of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., said during the opening session of a two-day meeting of the SBC Executive Committee. "With our focus on church planting, it is challenging in many parts of the country to lead churches to want to be part of a convention with such a regional name. Second, a name change could position us to maximize our effectiveness in reaching North America for Jesus Christ in the 21st century."

In 2004 then-SBC President Jack Graham made a similar argument when he proposed a committee to study a new name to better reflect the convention's scope as a national rather than regional body. Messengers at the 2004 annual meeting in Indianapolis debated the idea vigorously before

voting 55 percent to 45 percent against a name-change study.

Southern Baptists have rejected attempts to rename the denomination eight times since 1965. Presented in 1999 with a motion by Executive Committee member Blaine Barber of Michigan to become the “International Baptist Convention,” the Executive Committee decided a new name was neither warranted nor desired.

According to Baptist Press, Wright said the new committee, led by former LifeWay Christian Resources President Jimmy Draper, has no formal authority but simply would advise him as president on whether he should bring the matter before the convention. He said members would travel to meetings at their own expense.

Wright said rank-and-file Southern Baptists could give input about a possible new name at the website Pray4SBC.com.

For years there has been a trend in the denomination of congregations dropping “Baptist” from their name, especially outside the Bible Belt but also in the South. Earlier this year, Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn., rebranded itself as “The Fellowship at Two Rivers” in an attempt to put conflict that occurred a couple of years earlier behind.

Previous efforts to rename the SBC have met resistance for reasons both traditional and practical, such as the cost of changing legal documents and signs and then passing the new identity on to more than 45,000 churches.

-Bob Allen is managing editor of Associated Baptist Press.