

State executives and NAMB urged to settle dispute

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NASHVILLE (BP)—After meetings with both parties, the SBC Executive Committee has issued a white paper to six state conventions and the North American Mission Board urging cooperation among the groups and the settlement of a dispute over cooperative missions.



Ronnie Floyd

Titled “Cooperation Is the Way Forward,” the document advises the states and NAMB to walk in unity; to communicate honestly, clearly and consistently; to work in cooperation with one another; and to mobilize Southern Baptist churches to work together.

The document also encourages NAMB “to find every way possible to push more resources into these areas through increases in financial resources, missionaries, evangelism strategies, and more strategic partnerships and platforms with every Southern Baptist body and with Southern Baptist churches in these areas.”

Executive Committee President Ronnie Floyd echoed this sentiment, saying: “Southern Baptists have invested millions and millions of dollars in

areas outside of the South and will continue to do so to the glory of God and to advance the gospel. These areas are in desperate need for more resources, more missionaries and more churches. This is why we believe cooperation is the way forward for churches, for state conventions, and for NAMB.”

“Cooperation is work,” Floyd said. “It takes relationships, it takes trust. It is not easy. We have been through some challenging times, but it is time for us to move forward together.”

The advisory comes in response to a “request from six Baptist state convention leaders who were concerned about the Strategic Partnership Agreements sent to them by NAMB.”



Kevin Ezell

A letter, sent to Floyd and NAMB President Kevin Ezell in August 2020, outlined concerns the state executive directors had over funding changes as well as strategy changes related to the implementation by NAMB of SBC-approved recommendations from the Great Commission Task Force.

The six state convention leaders who signed the letter were Randy Adams of the Northwest Baptist Convention, Bill Agee from the California Southern Baptist Convention, Joseph Bunce with the Baptist Convention of New Mexico, Randy Covington of the Alaska Baptist Resource Network, Jack Kwok with the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio and Christopher Martin from the Hawaii Pacific Baptist Convention. Kwok has retired;

Bunce will retire at the end of February.

Following receipt of the letter, SBC Executive Committee officers and executive staff held separate meetings in fall 2020 with the state executives and NAMB leaders and trustees. The Executive Committee officers and executive staff acted out of duty to SBC bylaws to serve in an “advisory capacity on all questions of cooperation among the different entities of the convention.”

Mixed response

In recent weeks, three state conventions—New Mexico, Ohio and Hawaii—reported productive discussions toward renewed cooperation agreements with NAMB. In the document, the Executive Committee applauded that progress, saying it is “thankful for the willingness of these state conventions and NAMB to continue working toward cooperation in this manner.”

“I appreciate the investment of time Ronnie Floyd and the Executive Committee officers have made in bringing together these conversations,” Ezell said in a statement. “I have always believed that Southern Baptists are at our best when we work together and that is our goal at NAMB.”

Adams, the executive director of the Northwest Baptist Convention and an announced candidate for SBC President, called the response “dismissive and damaging” and “an abdication of leadership.”

Since 2010, NAMB provided the Northwest Baptist Convention with more than \$16 million in funding for church planting and evangelism. In 2020, the Northwest Baptist Convention reported 415 member churches, compared to 409 in 2010.

Over the past decade in California, NAMB funding for church planting and

evangelism totaled nearly \$28 million, and the convention has grown by 122 churches. But in response to the Executive Committee's white paper, Agee indicated his dissatisfaction, telling Baptist Press "the can has been successfully kicked down the road one more time."

Of the six state conventions, only California and the Northwest conventions have yet to resume cooperative talks with NAMB.

A NAMB spokesman told Baptist Press it is optimistic about progress made with another state convention—Alaska—and said further discussions are scheduled in the coming weeks.

Covington, the executive director of the Alaska convention, noted that "cooperation doesn't happen automatically," adding that trust and "healthy and vibrant" relationships must be built.

"If trust is broken or there is a lack of respect, it takes time and mutual commitment to rebuild trust," Covington said in an email. "My prayer is that a cooperative spirit can be renewed."