

Task force approved, but motions focus on controversial pastor

June 24, 2009

LOUISVILLE, Ky.—A proposal that could reshape the Southern Baptist Convention received overwhelming approval during the 2009 SBC annual meeting. But relationships with a controversial pastor who is influential among many young SBC pastors drew the attention of multiple motions presented July 23 in Louisville.

Messengers authorized SBC President Johnny Hunt to appoint an 18-member Great Commission task force, which he named the following morning.

The motion mandated the task force to research “how Southern Baptists can work more faithfully and effectively in serving Christ through the Great Commission.”

“We are living in one of these turning times (of) unprecedented opportunity,” claimed Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, who made the motion to create the Great Commission task force.

The convention must respond to churches’ desire to spread the gospel around the globe and to set loose the younger generation’s passion for missions and ministry, Mohler pleaded.

Also, the time is right for the convention to examine itself in light of its missions mandate, he added. “It is right and fitting for the SBC in every

generation to establish a process whereby we ask the hard questions: Is there more we can do? Can we do better?"

Mohler acknowledged some convention leadership resisted the Great Commission proposal but countered: "We have absolutely nothing to fear asking ..., 'Is there more we can do, and can we do even more if we are faithful?'"

Although convention observers questioned whether the Great Commission motion would pass, the vote was so overwhelming, SBC Parliamentarian Barry McCarty said, "Wow!" when messengers raised their ballots in support of the proposal.

The task force proposal was the only one of 31 motions put to a vote. Messengers heard eight motions that directly or indirectly related to a pastor who is not even affiliated with the SBC.

They focused on [Mark Driscoll](#) , pastor of 7,000-member Mars Hill Church in Seattle and leader of the Act 29 church-planting movement.

Less than a week prior to the SBC annual meeting, Driscoll was the subject of an exposé in Baptist Press, the convention's information service. The report focused on his preaching on oral and anal sex, use of profanity and apparent approval of drinking wine.

Of the eight Driscoll-related motions, three were referred to boards of SBC agencies and institutions. They included calls for:

- *All SBC entities to monitor and report their "expenditure of funds for any activities related to or cooperative efforts with Mark Driscoll and/or the Acts 29 organization." The motion was referred to all SBC boards.*
- *All SBC organizations to "refrain from inviting speakers ... who are known for publicly exhibiting unregenerate behavior, including but not*

limited to speech such as cursing and sexual vulgarity, or who publicly state their support for the consumption or production of alcohol.” This motion also was referred to all SBC boards.

- *Trustees of LifeWay Christian Resources to investigate one of their employees, Ed Stetzer, and trustees of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary to investigate their president, Danny Akin, and evangelism professor, Alvin Reid. Stetzer has worked with Driscoll in church planting, and Driscoll has preached at Southeastern Seminary. Messengers referred the motion to the boards of LifeWay and Southeastern.*

Five Driscoll-related motions were ruled out of order. They included requests that:

- *SBC organizations refrain from inviting speakers who are known to be unregenerate and curse, speak vulgarly and support alcohol.*
- *LifeWay remove books written by Driscoll from its bookstores.*
- *The SBC “biblically distinguish between consuming alcohol, which is an issue of individual conscience, and being drunk, which is categorically a sin.”*
- *SBC organizations and affiliated churches “support and partner with other Christian agencies and individuals of like-minded primary theological convictions for the sake of the Great Commission and the glory of God.”*
- *The Executive Committee invite Driscoll “to address the concerns of his accusers and all other interested parties” when the convention meets next summer.*

In addition, the convention referred six other motions to the Executive Committee. They included proposals to:

- *Change distribution of SBC world hunger offering receipts to be consistent with Cooperative Program allocations, providing 66 2/3 percent to the International Mission Board and 33 1/3 percent to the North American Mission Board.*
- *Form a committee to study how to involve more ethnic churches and ethnic church leaders in “serving the needs of the SBC through cooperative partnership on the national level.”*
- *Consider allowing churches to designate contributions to “particular convention causes” and still consider the money part of the Cooperative Program.*
- *Revise how funding is allocated to the six SBC seminaries to accommodate enrolment at extension centers away from their main campuses.*
- *Adopt the U.S. Christian Flag “as a tangible symbol to unify the American believers under one flag to fulfill the Great Commission.”*
- *Amend Article VI of the SBC Constitution to change how trustees of SBC entities are allocated and selected.*

LifeWay Christian Resources received three additional referrals, including requests that the convention’s publishing house:

- *Research “more affordable educational alternatives to traditional Christian schools.”*
- *Mark the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible in 2011.*

- *Produce only American-made Vacation Bible School resources.*

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission also received three referrals. They asked the convention's public-policy organization to:

- *Join with the American Family Association in "calling on the Pepsi-Cola Company to remain neutral in the culture war in our country by refraining from promoting the gay/lesbian lifestyle and agenda."*
- *Declare a "Sanctity of Life Year" in the near future.*
- *Start a petition to "end abortion in America and the funding of Planned Parenthood, along with all other abortion-providing entities."*

The SBC seminaries received a motion calling upon them to publish information regarding the "state conventions or affiliated national conventions from which their ministerial students or master's-level students originate."

All SBC entities received a proposal asking them to "submit any action which acts to interpret the Baptist Faith & Message ... so that the action may be approved by a majority of the messengers" to SBC annual meetings.

The Order of Business Committee received a motion stipulating that the convention post the American flag, accompanied by an honor guard, at the convention's annual meetings.

In addition, seven other motions were declared out of order for various reasons. They focused on:

- *Prayer for "the safety and welfare of Iranian citizens."*
- *Banning "the Holman Christian Standard Bible and any translation that questions the validity of any Scripture passage or verse" from use in*

convention literature.

- *Claims that the world will come to an end May 21, 2011, and the end of the “church age.”*
- *Banning books by pastors T.D. Jakes and John Hagee, Catholic Bibles, and 90 Minutes in Heaven and The Shack from LifeWay Christian Stores.*
- *Disallowing use of secular music in any promotional materials produced by the convention.*
- *Imploring Congress and President Obama “to seek biblical direction with respect to blessing, and not cursing, the nation of Israel.”*
- *Condemning President Obama for declaring June 2009 as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Pride Month.*