

Task force calls for more cooperation between SBC entities

February 23, 2010

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) — A task force studying ways to make the Southern Baptist Convention more effective recommended greater flexibility and cooperation among state and national entities in a progress report to the SBC Executive Committee Feb. 22.

[Ronnie Floyd](#), pastor of the First Baptist Church of Springdale, Ark., and chairman of a 22-member task force appointed last summer by SBC President Johnny Hunt, said the group will meet at least once more before releasing a final report May 3 to be presented at the SBC annual meeting June 15-16 in Orlando, Fla.

"We believe the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention in Orlando expect change and expect the leaders in our convention to lead us toward the changes that are needed," Floyd said.

Six components

While any structural changes suggested in the report would fall under purview of boards of trustees of various SBC entities, the task force proposed six specific components of a vision for Southern Baptists to champion in the future.

<p>Task force chairman Ronnie Floyd, right, confers with SBC President Johnny Hunt during a press conference Feb. 22.</p>

The first calls for a "new and healthy culture" that provides local Southern Baptist churches with a "missional vision" to present the gospel and make disciples in North America and around the globe.

Floyd said a new denominational structure should be characterized by qualities including Christ-likeness, unity, trust and recognition of the responsibility of the local church for fulfilling the Great Commission.

"Our present culture represents First Corinthians 3 much more than First Corinthians 13," Floyd said. "Envy, strife and division need to become unacceptable. Instead, let this world know us by the depths of our love for Jesus, the gospel and one another."

The second component calls for the convention's North American Mission Board to be "reinvented and released" in order to prioritize church planting in America's cities and among under-served people groups.

Stark realities

To do that, Floyd said, Southern Baptists must address "one of the stark realities" of the way the convention currently functions. Two thirds of Cooperative Program dollars are spent on one third of the population that lives in the Bible Belt, while one third of the unified budget goes to the two thirds of Americans living in states in the West and Northeast with a much smaller Southern Baptist presence.

The task force recommends phasing out over four years cooperative agreements with Baptist state conventions, funding mechanisms that evolved in the 20th century to divide Cooperative Program funds between state and national conventions and then kick back \$50 million to state conventions for missionaries funded jointly with NAMB.

Floyd said ending the agreements would give NAMB freedom to budget for a national strategy instead of committing the bulk of its funds to

established Baptist state conventions in the South. Future partnerships between state conventions and NAMB would be project-driven and determined as part of the national board's overarching strategy for North America.

Globalization

At the same time, Floyd said, globalization has flattened the world so that people groups engaged by highly trained International Mission Board missionaries are also found on American soil. A third component would allow the IMB to reach "unreached and under-served people groups without regard to any geographic limitations."

Task force members said the strategy would create "a new synergy" between the North American and International mission boards.

"I think in Southern Baptist life it's time for all hands on deck," task force member Robert White told reporters. "If we can't work together we need to learn how to work together."

White, executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention, acknowledged that changes suggested by the task force would require improved communication between Southern Baptist entities.

"I think a lot of this can be solved if the president of the International Mission Board and the president of the North American Mission Board will just sit down and meet," White said. "I hate to say that hasn't happened, but it ought to happen and it can happen on a regular basis. If they wanted to these two gentlemen could form a panel that would work together from both of these different agencies."

Let states lead in Cooperative Program promotion

The fourth component recommended by the task force is to move ministry

assignments for promotion of the Cooperative Program and stewardship education from the SBC Executive Committee, which assumed them in a denominational restructuring in 1997, to the Baptist state conventions, which were understood to be primarily responsible for promoting and gathering funds for the unified budget when the plan was developed in the 1920s.

A fifth component reaffirms the Cooperative Program as the "central means" for supporting work of the convention, but also proposes a new nomenclature of "Great Commission Giving" for gifts designated to the Southern Baptist Convention, a state convention or local association instead of through the unified budget.

Task force members said that would shift the focus on churches that give smaller amounts than a traditional benchmark of 10 percent of undesignated offerings through the Cooperative Program away from being "competitive" with the CP to instead "complementing it for the sake of the gospel."

Let IMB receive 51%

The final component calls for increasing the International Mission Board's Cooperative Program allocation in the 2010-2011 budget by 1 percent to 51 percent, a both "symbolic and substantial" change that for the first time in history would mean that more than one half of monies collected through the CP goes to international missions.

Viewing distribution of the Cooperative Program as a pie chart, that would require reducing spending to other ministries by 1 percent. The task force said moving assignments for Cooperative Program promotion and stewardship education from the Executive Committee to state conventions should free up at least 1 percent of "facilitating ministries" that can then be reallocated to international missions.

Floyd acknowledged the realignment would blur boundaries delineated in program assignments for various SBC entities developed over the years.

"We have a choice to make," he told reporters. "Either we can sit back and play it safe with lines so clearly drawn you get your hand spanked if you cross over, or we can say: 'Hey, let's roll up our sleeves for the gospel. There's plenty of lost people. Let's go, and let's make a difference.'"

-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.