

‘The mission matters most,’ Jeff Iorg tells SBC

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INDIANAPOLIS (BP)—Jeff Iorg was ready to retire from the presidency of Gateway Seminary and spend more time with family when he was approached about seeking the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

He put the matter before his wife Ann and their three adult children. His daughter Melody’s response helped seal the deal, he said in his Executive Committee report to 2024 SBC annual meeting messengers.

“She said: ‘Dad, from the day you moved our family to the West Coast to plant a church, our family has always been about the gospel. And this is your opportunity to minimize the distractions and help Southern Baptists stay focused on what we’re really here for.’”

His example of a man following God and his mission “above all else” was more valuable to his grandchildren than his watching them play basketball, Melody offered.

Her words mirror Iorg’s words to messengers to uphold the gospel mission above all other congregational and societal concerns, based on Ephesians 3:8.

“A bivocational pastor sharing the gospel with a teenager at an associational youth camp is a better example of fulfilling God’s eternal mission than a seminary student blogger spouting pseudo-gospel insight from a coffee shop couch,” Iorg said.

Accept no substitutes

Political activism, social justice, convention reform and doctrinal conformity are common mission substitutes, Iorg said, affirming their usefulness but negating their primacy.

In a world marked by tribalism, nationalism and prejudice, Iorg said, “Christians are a global community built on one shared allegiance, an allegiance to Jesus Christ.

“When people are changed by the gospel, they become friends with former enemies and brothers and sisters in a new family. This makes no rational sense. It even astounds angels and demons, but the gospel brings this kind of change in our lives.”

Southern Baptists face great challenges focusing on God’s eternal mission while giving other issues appropriate attention, Iorg said.

“The mission matters most,” Iorg said, reciting a phrase he said has helped him stay on track. “This phrase reminds me to prioritize God’s eternal mission, while still recognizing other matters need appropriate attention. The mission matters most means other things do matter—but just not as much as some people advocate—and never ever to the detriment of God’s eternal mission.”

Iorg, who already has invested 30 years in Southern Baptist denominational work, told messengers he himself is committed to staying on mission.

“Southern Baptists, I did not forego my retirement from organizational leadership to manage Baptist bureaucracy,” he said. “I set it aside because I believe in this role I can minimize the distractions, simplify the processes, quietly and efficiently take care of our business, so that we can focus on advancing God’s eternal mission.”

Future generations are dependent upon this generation to spread the gospel now, he said.

“Many issues demand attention,” Iorg said. “But Southern Baptists, nothing else demands our ultimate attention like God’s eternal mission and every single one of us devoting ourselves to that primary task.”