

COOPERATION IS THE WAY FORWARD

In August 2020, the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee and the North American Mission Board (NAMB) received a letter of request from six Baptist state convention leaders who were concerned about the Strategic Partnership Agreements sent to them by NAMB. Their appeal to the SBC Executive Committee was to intervene for the sake of partnership, collaboration, and cooperation with NAMB.

According to SBC Bylaw 18.E(5), the SBC Executive Committee is, “To act in an **advisory** capacity on all questions of cooperation among the different entities of the Convention, and among the entities of the Convention and those of other conventions, whether state or national.” Understanding this responsibility, the SBC Executive Committee Officers and Executive Leadership Team felt the need to respond to this appeal regarding matters of cooperation between state conventions and NAMB.

This resulted in the SBC Executive Committee Officers and Executive Leadership Team meeting with the six state convention leaders who were accompanied by six additional state convention leaders. All of these represented non-south Baptist bodies.

At a later date, a similar meeting occurred with Dr. Kevin Ezell, NAMB President, one of his staff members, and three key NAMB trustee officers. SBC Bylaw 18.E(9) instructs the Executive Committee “to maintain open channels of communication between the Executive Committee and the trustees of the entities of the Convention, to study and make recommendations to entities concerning adjustments required by ministry statements or by established Convention policies and practices,”. We are grateful for the helpful engagement of these NAMB trustees.

In both of these extensive meetings, the SBC Executive Committee Officers and Executive Leadership Team listened intently to both groups. We are grateful the non-south state executive directors and NAMB leaders were very open and clear in sharing their experiences and the details of their situations.

During this process, each time the SBC Executive Committee Officers met, these matters were discussed as we searched for ways we could advise these Baptist bodies to have a renewal in their cooperation. Additional meetings and conversations occurred with other state convention leaders. The purpose was to seek counsel on how to move forward through this challenge. The input and wisdom of these state convention leaders have been important in this process.

The SBC Executive Committee has completed our role with respect to this request from the six state conventions, and we issue our advice toward cooperation to all parties involved in these matters. With humility, we submit these advisements to you.

1. It is very important that each of us remember Jesus desires for us to walk in unity together. Jesus’ prayer recorded in John 17:21, “May they all be one, as you, Father are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me.” We appeal to all parties to walk in unity together as a testimony to the world.

2. Our Great Commission work is dependent on our cooperation. Article 14 of *The Baptist Faith and Message* clearly reminds us of this united confession of cooperation. Indeed, cooperation is the way forward. Our cooperation will never be any greater than our relationships. Relationships and cooperation are built through effective, constant communication. Cooperative relationships demand a commitment to communicating honestly, clearly, and consistently.

According to the SBC Organization Manual and NAMB's approved mission statement, the SBC has instructed NAMB "to work with churches, associations and state conventions in mobilizing Southern Baptists as a missional force to impact North America with the Gospel of Jesus Christ through evangelism and church planting." Cooperation is the only way forward to mobilize all Southern Baptists as a missional force to impact North America with the Gospel of Jesus Christ through evangelism and church planting.

Southern Baptists are deeply concerned for the overwhelming lostness that clearly exists across the non-south regions of North America. In response, we encourage 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. We appreciate NAMB for allocating resources linked to collaborative strategies in order to penetrate lostness. The SBC also strongly desires for associations and state conventions to cooperate with NAMB in these efforts. We affirm that each state convention is unique with its own needs and opportunities, and therefore, a "one size fits all" approach is inadequate. We encourage each state convention to meet with NAMB to develop a path for your future partnership together. Each state convention has value; therefore, please do all you can to allocate resources through the Cooperative Program as we work together to advance the gospel across the entire globe. Cooperation is the Baptist way; therefore, each of us needs to renew our efforts to cooperate together through communication, collaboration, and relationships to reach North America for Christ. The desperate needs of lost people and the call of the Gospel demand this of us all.

3. The greatest resource our Southern Baptist family has is one another. We are thankful for how many state conventions in the South have partnerships with non-south state conventions. Therefore, we encourage the leaders of all our state conventions to work in cooperation with one another and with NAMB to advance the gospel to places and people groups where the gospel is needed. This kind of willingness, assistance, and cooperation demonstrates the strength of everyone working together for the cause of Christ today and serves as a good example of cooperation for the future.
4. Since the SBC Executive Committee has begun meeting with these entities, NAMB has reestablished an ongoing schedule of meetings with non-south conventions to establish a path forward for the future. We are thankful for the willingness of these state conventions and NAMB to continue working toward cooperation in this manner. It is

vital to the testimony of our efforts to mobilize our churches to work together that we all be mutually accountable in these renewed efforts to cooperate together. We will continue to pray for and affirm these meetings.

Through the years, Southern Baptists have demonstrated a great desire to advance the Gospel across North America. Our cooperation has led to planting thousands of churches in North America and enabling us to minister to the thousands of existing churches. Cooperation is our path forward.

Finally, for the sake of reaching lost people and advancing the Gospel to all of North America and across the entire world, we call upon our churches, our state conventions, and our national entities to a renewed cooperation so we can give Good News to the whole world.

One of the best examples of cooperation within the SBC is the Cooperative Program. We affirm the Cooperative Program is the most efficient, effective system for funding the ministries of state conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention. Our cooperation together in reaching the lost leads our churches to cooperation with us through the Cooperative Program. This is why we must do all that we can to prioritize, elevate, and accelerate our giving through the Cooperative Program.

The Cooperative Program is the financial fuel to reach every person for Jesus Christ in every town, every city, every state, and every nation. We must all reaffirm our commitment to work together, collaborate together, cooperate together, and pray together. This is why we believe cooperation is the way forward.