

Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Greg Warner
Associate Editor: Bob Allen
Phone: (904) 262-6626
Fax: (904) 262-7745

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Implementation of reorganization plan dominates Executive Committee agenda

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee initiated the daunting task of implementing a major reorganization of the nation's second-largest faith group Sept. 18-19 in Nashville, Tenn.

The Executive Committee, the SBC's administrative board, appointed a 10-member committee to implement a major downsizing approved at the convention's annual meeting in Atlanta last June. Bob Reccord, pastor of First Baptist Church of Norfolk, Va., will chair the committee, nominated by Executive Committee chairman Ronnie Floyd.

"This is a mammoth task, and I want us to approach that task in the most able manner, the most orderly manner as possible," said Floyd, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Springdale, Ark.

The Executive Committee also added a new staff position to oversee the restructuring, hiring Louisiana pastor David Hankins as the first vice president for convention policy. Hankins, 45, a former Executive Committee member and chairman, has been pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Lake Charles, La., for 10 years.

By policy, the Executive Committee does not disclose individual salaries, but the salary range for the new job is between \$56,000 and \$84,000 a year, said Morris Chapman, Executive Committee president and chief executive officer.

Action on implementing the restructuring dominated the two-day meeting, at which business was unusually light. In other business the committee:

-- Amended a policy on granting exhibit space at annual convention meetings to exclude schools that condone the use of alcohol on campus. Stetson University, a Baptist college in DeLand, Fla., recently dropped its century old ban on drinking in student dorms.

-- Authorized the Executive Committee president to fill a vacancy for vice president for convention relations before the next committee meeting in February.

While not yet ready to bring a recommendation, said Bob Sorrell, chairman of the board's administrative subcommittee, "our staff is praying about the person" to replace Mark Coppenger, who resigned from the Executive Committee staff to become president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

Should Chapman and his advisers fill the position before February, the full Executive Committee will be asked to ratify the choice, said Sorrell, associate pastor at Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tenn.

Heard a report by Chapman projecting a second-straight record year in giving to the convention's unified budget, the Cooperative Program. Receipts for the fiscal year, which ends in September, are projected at \$145.6 million, Chapman said, more than \$2.7 million over last year's all-time record total.

The record years followed three straight years of declines in denominational support following the 1991 startup of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a group started by disenfranchised moderates to provide alternatives to SBC programs.

"God owns the cattle on a thousand hills and he will more than replace anything lost for standing on the truth," Chapman said.

Conservatives dislodged moderates from power in the SBC during the 1980s by winning a string of SBC presidencies under a banner of inerrancy, meaning the Bible is factual and must be interpreted literally.

-- Took action on several matters referred to the Executive Committee at last June's SBC annual meeting in Atlanta. The Executive Committee approved a referred motion adding "In obedience to the divine will of our Heavenly Father" to the convention's mission statement. The change will be considered at next year's convention in New Orleans.

The committee voted not to recommend other referrals, including prohibiting convention employees from recommending nominees to their own boards of trustees, seeking ways to include "all Southern Baptists" in the work of the convention and creating a national SBC newspaper.

Also at the meeting, SBC president Jim Henry urged leaders to allow a historic resolution denouncing racism, adopted at the recent annual meeting, to "take on flesh" through new denominational programs aimed at helping minorities and encouraging dialogue with black Baptist groups.

"This will speak of the nobility of our intentions" about the resolution, which some have criticized as being insincere, Henry said.

Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church of Orlando, Fla., also pledged to draw attention to the role of women in Baptist life by appointing at least one female chair to the four committees he will appoint prior to the New Orleans meeting.

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-- By Bob Allen

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is updated from yesterday's version. New information is in the fourth, 13th and 14th paragraphs.

Task force named to steer restructuring of SBC (revised)

By Mark Wingfield

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- A 10-member task force has been appointed to implement the massive restructuring of Southern Baptist Convention agencies approved by messengers to this year's SBC annual meeting.

Bob Reccord, pastor of First Baptist Church of Norfolk, Va., will chair the committee, which includes one woman and one Hispanic. The seven-member Program and Structure Study Committee, which proposed the restructuring, had been criticized for having no black, ethnic or female representation.

Ronnie Floyd, chairman of the SBC Executive Committee and a member of the Program and Structure Study Committee, nominated the implementation task force, which was approved by the SBC Executive Committee Sept. 18 without dissent or discussion.

The next day, the Executive Committee elected David Hankins, a Louisiana pastor and former Executive Committee chairman, to the new staff position of vice president for convention policy. Hankins will carry the primary staff responsibility for implementing the restructuring, which is expected to take several years. Although Hankins' salary was not announced, an SBC official said it is in a range between \$56,000-\$84,000.

Other members of the implementation task force are Michael Hamlet, pastor of North Spartanburg First Baptist Church in Spartanburg, S.C.; Rudy Hernandez, a vocational evangelist from Grand Prairie, Texas; Bill Hogue, retired executive director of the California Southern Baptist Convention; Sarah Maddox, a women's ministry consultant from Nashville; T.C. Pinckney, retired U.S. Air Force general from Alexandria, Va.; Joe Reynolds, an attorney from Houston; Ted Warren, executive vice president and chief operating officer of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board; Don Wills, a businessman from Dallas; and John Yarbrough, pastor of First Baptist Church in Perry, Ga.

Four members of the task force also are members of the SBC Executive Committee, which has ultimate responsibility for implementing the restructuring. They are Reccord, Pinckney, Reynolds and Yarbrough.

The restructuring, called Covenant for a New Century, will consolidate 19 SBC agencies into 12 by dissolving several entities and merging others. The most far-reaching change will be a merger of the Home Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission and Radio and Television Commission into a new North American Mission Board.

Floyd said the primary goal of the SBC's new structure is to speed the spread of the gospel. "I want us to leave here this evening on course to do what is our main agenda -- to get the gospel to the world," he said.

Floyd described the purpose of the implementation task force as being "to analyze, study and take actions necessary, including monitoring the transitional actions of all Southern Baptist Convention entities to facilitate the orderly and timely transitions approved by the Southern Baptist Convention in adopting the Covenant for a New Century."

"That is a mammoth task, and I want us to approach that task in the most able manner, the most orderly manner as possible," Floyd said.

According to an outline Floyd distributed to Executive Committee members, the implementation task force will relate primarily to the Executive Committee but may receive counsel from the Program and Structure Study Committee.

Although trustee boards of the Home Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission and Radio and Television Commission have appointed their own transition teams -- reportedly with the hope of having some influence over the merger of their agencies -- Floyd's document makes no provision for any formal input from these trustee committees. Nor did it say how potential conflicts between trustees and the task force will be resolved.

Larry Lewis, president of the Home Mission Board, later cautioned Executive Committee members against usurping the role of trustees, who are legally responsible for running their agencies.

But Floyd, in response to reporters' questions, said the task force will interact with agency trustees "to some degree" but won't adjust the new SBC structure to please trustees. While the task force will be "fair," he promised, "the role of the implementation task force is not to rethink the [restructure] plan but to carry out the plan."

The task force "may choose to call upon other Southern Baptists, professional groups or individual specialists and consultants to assist them in their responsibilities," according to the recommendation adopted by the Executive Committee.

Three of the six broad areas of responsibility Floyd outlined for the implementation task force carry instructions to "develop and propose for consideration by elected trustees" certain things. The other three areas apparently will be handled entirely by the implementation task force and Executive Committee.

The six broad responsibilities Floyd has assigned to the implementation task force are:

-- Legal issues, such as dissolution of charters for the Brotherhood Commission, Education Commission, Historical Commission, Stewardship Commission, Home Mission Board and Radio and Television Commission, as well as development of a new charter for the North American Mission Board and revision of charters for the renamed International Mission Board and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

Financial issues, such as obtaining cost analyses of relocating the Radio and Television Commission and Brotherhood Commission to Atlanta, of relocating personnel and of reducing the total number of SBC trustees.

-- Physical assets, such as determining what to do with the property, buildings, furnishing and fixtures owned by the Radio and Television Commission, Brotherhood Commission, Home Mission Board, Education Commission, Historical Commission, Stewardship Commission, Southern Baptist Foundation and Commission on the American Baptist Seminary, which are being eliminated or merged.

-- Financial assets, including proposing what to do with the operating capital, endowment funds, investments and financial liabilities of the entities being dissolved or merged.

-- Personnel issues, such as developing a compensation plan for employees whose positions are discontinued, paying insurance premiums for retirees of entities being dissolved, paying relocation expenses for personnel asked to move and providing career transition support for employees displaced by the restructuring.

-- Ministry assignments, including monitoring the implementation of new ministry assignments already outlined in the restructuring plan and proposing changes in ministry statements as necessary.

The implementation task force is required to report to the Executive Committee each time the Executive Committee meets, Floyd said. And the Executive Committee, in turn, will report each year to the SBC annual meeting.

Although the overall restructuring plan was approved by messengers to the June SBC annual meeting in Atlanta, one bylaw change required by the restructuring must be approved again when the SBC meets in New Orleans next June.

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