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BGCT missions study committee recommends few funding changes

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- While voicing a number of concerns about missions work done by the Southern Baptist Convention, a study committee of the Baptist General Convention of Texas is suggesting little change in funding of SBC missions.

The most significant recommendation of the BGCT's Missions-sending Agencies Study Committee report, released May 3, is to keep about \$1.28 million of Cooperative Program money that the state currently sends to the North American Mission Board to be spent by NAMB in Texas.

The Mississippi Baptist Convention took similar action several years ago.

The committee says the change is not technically a "defunding" of the agency in Alpharetta, Ga., "but simply is administering more efficiently that portion of Texas funds which would be returned to Texas under the current agreement."

The BGCT would continue to send to NAMB about \$4.6 million in Cooperative Program funds for use in North American missions outside Texas. This would not decrease Texas funding of mission work outside Texas.

While urging no major changes in the funding relationship with NAMB, the Texas committee voiced concerns about the effectiveness and efficiency of the 4-year-old agency created by a merger of the SBC's former Home Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission and Radio and Television Commission.

The committee's report recommends no change in funding for the SBC's International Mission Board. Nor does it recommend adding any direct BGCT funding of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The 19-member committee, created by vote of messengers attending the BGCT annual session in 1999, is chaired by Jim Denison, pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas.

Denison presented the committee's final report to the BGCT Administrative Committee May 4 in Dallas. The same report, along with any additional input from the Administrative Committee, will be presented to the BGCT Executive Board May 22.

The committee's report doesn't go nearly as far as a similar committee that last year recommended significant reductions in BGCT funding to SBC seminaries. And the study process was more cordial this time than the adversarial tone of much of last year's talks.

Unlike the Seminary Study Committee, which reported a lack of cooperation from the six SBC seminaries, the missions study committee reported full and gracious cooperation from all three agencies it studied -- the IMB, NAMB and CBF.

The missions committee's 21-page report includes seven recommendations:

-- That the overall missions efforts of the BGCT, though strong and exemplary, should be strengthened, "focusing on connecting Texas Baptists with Baptist groups around the world" and involving more people in volunteer missions.

-- That the BGCT make no change in its current budgetary relationship to the IMB, although several areas of concern are noted.

-- That a new cooperative agreement be negotiated between the BGCT and NAMB no later than next January, with multiple areas of concern noted.

-- That an amount of Cooperative Program funding equal to what NAMB currently spends on BGCT cooperative projects in Texas be retained for use in Texas by the BGCT, thus "reducing paperwork, bureaucracy, time-consuming documentation and delays."

-- That the BGCT "continue to honor the designations of affiliated churches which wish to contribute to and partner with CBF." Currently, the BGCT only funds CBF through designated contributions from churches. This recommendation would not change this pattern or expand it.

-- That the study committee disband after adoption of its report and that a monitoring group be named by the BGCT president, Executive Board chairman and executive director.

-- That leaders of the SBC be urged to include more individuals supportive of the BGCT to serve on trustee boards of the IMB and NAMB.

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BGCT committee notes six concerns about IMB

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- While recommending no reduction of funds for the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board, a study committee of the Baptist General Convention of Texas nevertheless noted six concerns about IMB methods and strategies.

The concerns are detailed in the 21-page report of the Missions-sending Agencies Study Committee, released May 4. The committee, created by vote of messengers to the 1999 BGCT annual session, has been working more than a year.

A subcommittee chaired by Ron Lyles of Pasadena, Texas, met for two days with key IMB leadership, including IMB President Jerry Rankin and five vice presidents. The committee also interviewed current and former IMB missionaries and conducted independent research.

Out of this research, the BGCT committee noted six concerns:

-- That the current strategy of the IMB has abandoned meeting the "total needs of humanity" in order to focus almost exclusively on church starting. This new focus, adopted by IMB administrators three years ago, is called New Directions and has been somewhat controversial among missionaries and some IMB trustees.

"We affirm all efforts to plant churches and believe everyone should have the opportunity to hear, understand and respond to the gospel in each person's own language," the committee says. "However, we are

concerned that missionaries who trained and have served as doctors or administrators or teachers are being required to redirect their work into church starting at the expense of their training and calling."

An accelerated redirection of personnel and funding by the IMB has created hardships for some leaders of national Baptist conventions, who are scrambling to assume responsibility for ministries started and previously staffed and funded by the IMB, the committee says.

"While we believe New Directions does have positive qualities, we have significant concerns about repercussions from the implementation of this strategy," the report concludes.

-- A decrease in the number of people appointed as career missionaries through the IMB.

While the IMB has reported an increase in total missionary numbers, "the number of career missionaries has not grown for some years," the committee notes. For example, the IMB had 3,365 career missionaries in 1990 and 3,323 in 1999.

Most of the increase in the IMB's missionary count has come through short-term workers who serve for two years, the committee explains.

The committee calls on the IMB to be clearer in its public reporting of missionary totals and to begin replenishing the ranks of career missionaries.

-- Reports by IMB missionaries that they have experienced a "less meaningful voice in strategy planning and determining how to do their work" as a result of the New Directions strategy.

Some missionaries report that New Directions has created a centralized decision-making post at IMB headquarters in Richmond, Va., and that they now feel more like corporate employees than God-called missionaries.

-- The role of women in IMB leadership. "We see a neglect of the leadership gifts of women in the IMB," the committee notes. "No woman serves as part of the senior administration, nor does a woman serve as one of the 14 regional leaders."

This is important to the BGCT, the committee says, because "Texas Baptists will continue to encourage women who are called to missions, whether married or single, and will urge them to continue doing the work of God. We will pray for and hold up the hands of all who follow the example of Lottie Moon, who served God by starting churches, witnessing for Christ and seeing people come to salvation."

-- Relation to Woman's Missionary Union. "We encourage the IMB to value and to strengthen its relationship with this necessary and vital organization," the report urges.

-- "Baptist Faith and Message" 2000. Although IMB officials have said the controversial 2000 version of the "Baptist Faith and Message" will not be imposed upon anyone, the committee notes that the revised faith statement is used by the IMB as a primary doctrinal statement missionary candidates must affirm.

"For the first time, the Southern Baptist international missions agency is examining candidates with reference to a specific theological document with which many Texas Baptists disagree and which the BGCT has chosen not to endorse," the report says.

"Based upon dialogue with IMB leadership, the committee understands that a candidate who does not agree in totality with the new "Baptist Faith and Message" would experience greater scrutiny. We call upon those who screen missionary candidates from Texas and other states to hear carefully their biblical convictions . and to measure them by Scripture alone."

BGCT study committee urges new agreement with NAMB

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- The Baptist General Convention of Texas needs to renegotiate its "cooperative agreement" with the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board, according to a BGCT missions-study committee.

At the same time, the BGCT should carefully monitor the policies and procedures of NAMB in appointing missionary personnel and in endorsing chaplains, the Missions-sending Agencies Study Committee says in its 21-page report released May 4. Of particular concern is required allegiance to the 2000 version of the "Baptist Faith and Message" doctrinal statement.

If concerns about chaplaincy endorsements cannot be resolved, the BGCT may want to explore becoming an endorsing body for chaplains, the report notes.

A subcommittee of the full BGCT study committee focused on issues related to NAMB, an SBC missions-sending agency based in Alpharetta, Ga. Ophelia Humphrey of Amarillo, Texas, chaired the subcommittee.

The subcommittee met with NAMB President Bob Reccord and eight other top administrators as part of their research.

One problem noted by the study committee is that NAMB requires all missionary personnel to affirm the "Baptist Faith and Message" as revised in 2000. The BGCT has not voted to endorse the new faith statement.

That is an issue for candidates for missionary jobs that are jointly funded by the BGCT and NAMB. The committee further asserts that by unilaterally changing its doctrinal qualifications, NAMB violated a 1991 covenant agreement written between the BGCT and the Home Mission Board, predecessor to NAMB.

The 388 Texas Baptist chaplains who look to NAMB for denominational endorsement that is required in many institutions face a similar dilemma, the committee says. To be newly endorsed or to renew endorsement through NAMB, chaplains must affirm the 2000 version of the "Baptist Faith and Message."

"Discussions with NAMB personnel indicate some long-term chaplains may be in danger of losing their endorsement if they do not or cannot agree with the restated statement of faith," the committee explains. "Some Texas-based chaplains have moved their certification to another agency."

As an example of the problem, the committee reports that "many, if not most" of the 45 Baptist chaplains serving in the Texas prison system have said they will not affirm the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message."

More than 20 chaplains and pastoral counselors have asked the BGCT to become an endorsing body, the report states. "The outcry of chaplains in Texas and other areas may lead the BGCT to re-examine its position and reconsider ecclesiastical endorsement and support of chaplains."

Many of the concerns the BGCT committee notes regarding NAMB stem from confusion over the so-called cooperative agreement last negotiated between the BGCT and SBC in 1991. Historically, every state Baptist convention cooperating with the SBC has signed a cooperative agreement outlining how mission work will be jointly conducted and funded in that state.

The most recent cooperative agreement between the BGCT and SBC was crafted before NAMB came into existence through the merger of three former SBC agencies in 1997. That agreement was between the BGCT and the former Home Mission Board.

A fundamental problem in current conversations is that the study committee regards NAMB as a continuation of the HMB, but NAMB leaders view their agency as an entirely new entity. No new cooperative agreement has been negotiated since NAMB's creation.

Further, since the 1991 cooperative agreement was hammered out, "the population of Texas has increased greatly, and the state now is the second-most-populous state in the nation, with more than 10 million unchurched people," the committee explains.

The percentage of U.S. missions funds expended by NAMB in Texas has not been adjusted to reflect this demographic change, the committee adds. "For example, in 1999, NAMB spent almost \$27 million on church planting. Texas had approximately 20 percent of the church starts in the nation. NAMB supported Texas church starting with less than \$1 million. So with 20 percent of the church starts, Texas was funded less than 4 percent of the total spent by NAMB."

The need for increased attention to the growing mission field in Texas has been addressed by two previous BGCT committees without bringing about change, the report adds. This "underscores the problems created by the lack of a functioning cooperative agreement with NAMB."

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