

SBC to cut BWA funds to start network of 'like-minded' Christians

By Philip Poole and Greg Warner

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) – The Southern Baptist Convention plans to cut its contribution to the Baptist World Alliance by 30 percent next year to begin its own international network of "like-minded Christians."

Although the SBC plans to remain a member of the Baptist World Alliance for now, it will begin developing a "new concept" for worldwide relationships, under a plan approved by the SBC Executive Committee Feb. 17-18.

The move stems from Southern Baptist dissatisfaction that BWA is poised to grant membership to the rival Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The Southern Baptist Executive Committee asked a task force to explore a new program, tentatively called "Kingdom Relationships," to "look toward strengthening relationships with other like-minded Christian bodies" worldwide. The program will become part of Empowering Kingdom Growth, an evangelism initiative launched at the 2002 SBC annual meeting in St. Louis.

The recommendation was made by a nine-member study committee reactivated in September 2002 to consider the SBC's membership in BWA. The recommendation was approved Feb. 17 with no dissenting votes and with virtually no discussion. The 88-member Executive Committee conducts Southern Baptist Convention business between SBC annual meetings.

One day later, the Executive Committee approved a \$182 million SBC budget for 2003-04 that reduces its current \$425,000 annual funding for BWA by \$125,000 and redirects those funds to the new initiative.

The SBC is the largest contributor to BWA and traditionally accounts for the majority of the organization's budget. Founded in 1905, BWA is an umbrella organization of 200 Baptist unions and conventions worldwide, representing 45 million baptized believers in 193,000 churches.

The background report provided to Executive Committee members said the study committee is not recommending withdrawal from BWA "at the present time" despite growing concerns by some Southern Baptist leaders about the possibility that BWA will approve a membership request from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. CBF is a breakaway group of moderate Southern Baptists that employs its own missionaries and has its own funding plans.

The written report and comments by Executive Committee president Morris Chapman focused on the CBF membership application. The report said the SBC study committee was "offering no statement on the issue of the [CBF's] membership in the BWA" but noted that the SBC has "much more than a passing interest" in BWA's decision.

Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Virginia-based Baptist World Alliance, was not immediately available for comment.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship declined to comment on the SBC action. "We are in due diligence in our application process with the BWA," said CBF spokesperson Ben McDade. "When we hear from that body, we will have a response."

Chapman said it is "not the place" of the SBC to tell BWA how to act on the membership question but that Southern Baptists are "grappling with the question of whether the Baptist World Alliance or the Southern Baptist Convention is the best representative of Southern Baptists around the world."

Chapman later told reporters that he was "deeply disappointed" in the procedure used by the BWA membership committee in considering the CBF request. In July 2002 the membership committee reported to the BWA executive committee that it was considering approval of the request if the CBF would distinguish itself as "separate" from the SBC, which the CBF did last September.

Chapman said the usual procedure for membership was not followed during the July discussion. "[The membership committee] seemed determined to report their recommendation before they made a formal recommendation," he said. That action made the "300-member body a membership committee of the whole" and seemed to turn the process "on its head."

"For the first time in my 12 years of involvement with the BWA, I felt disappointment," Chapman said.

The issue is not so much that there was a "glitch" in the process but in the procedure, Chapman said. "It caused us to stop and rethink that maybe we'd been spinning our wheels rather than making progress" in relationships with BWA.

He also expressed concern about who would monitor whether or not the conditions are being followed. "If [CBF] separates from the SBC, does that mean that from now on they will build churches from the historical perspective of starting new churches rather than soliciting funds from existing Southern Baptist churches?" Chapman said.

Chapman told reporters that the new SBC-led worldwide emphasis "won't be a duplication of the BWA." Initiatives might include Bible conferences and church-growth conferences that would involve "primarily Southern Baptist entities" around the world. He emphasized that Empowering Kingdom Growth is "not a formal organization with formal membership" and the focus would be "on relationships, not organization." It will take 18-24 months to "determine how that will evolve," he added.

Chapman noted that Southern Baptists "have strong relationships with other Baptist groups who are not part of the BWA." He said that he expected mixed response to the new plan but that any new idea "often has room for misunderstandings."

The study committee will continue to meet "as needed in carrying out its assignment of evaluating the relationships between the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist World Alliance."

He said there is uncertainty about the process "at this time" but the ultimate decision may be for the SBC to be members of BWA while still "reaching out in kingdom relationships" with other groups.

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--Editor's Note: This article is revised.



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BWA leader laments 'rupture' in Southern Baptist relationship**By Greg Warner****Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com****February 19, 2003****Volume: 03-18-3463**

McLEAN, Va. (ABP) -- The plan to cut \$125,000 from the Southern Baptist Convention's contribution to the Baptist World Alliance is "a rupture in the long history of cooperation" between the SBC and the international fellowship it helped form, said a BWA spokesperson.

"The Baptist World Alliance began in 1905 by Southern Baptist leadership that gave input to this worldwide organization," said Wendy Ryan, BWA communications director. "This is one of the reasons why this decision to significantly reduce financial support to BWA is a cause for much sadness today. For a charter and founding member to do this is a rupture in the long history of cooperation and involvement."

The SBC Executive Committee voted Feb. 17-18 to cut its BWA contribution from \$425,000 to \$300,000 next year and use the money to begin its own international network of "like-minded Christians." The move stems from Southern Baptist dissatisfaction that BWA is poised to grant membership to the rival Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Baptist World Alliance is an umbrella organization of 200 Baptist unions and conventions worldwide, representing 45 million baptized believers in 193,000 churches.

Denton Lotz, executive secretary of BWA, was traveling and unavailable for comment.

Southern Baptists are the largest contributor to BWA, which has an annual budget of \$1.8 million. The SBC's \$425,000 contribution accounts for about 80 percent of the member-body contributions and 24 percent of total revenue, which includes church and individual donations.

Ryan said it's too early to gauge what impact losing the SBC funds will have on BWA's budget. "I don't even want to speculate, but it certainly will have a big impact on our budget," she said.

Already the organization has tightened its belt because of the slow economy, and that is hampering the work, she said. If more cuts are on the way, "we have to be extremely careful and make very wise decisions," she said.

Other BWA members "will be asked to step up their support," Ryan said, but most of those national organizations are small and have limited resources. "The big challenge for us is that the parts of the world where Baptists are growing are the poorest parts of the world. Even if they step up their giving, they can't keep pace."

The reduction from Southern Baptists must be approved as part of the SBC's proposed \$182 million 2003-04 budget. The budget will be presented to the annual SBC meeting in June and approval is usually routine.

"We are thankful for the continued support of the Southern Baptist Convention and we hope they could reverse this decision," Ryan said.

Southern Baptists plan to remain a member of the Baptist World Alliance for now, leaders say, even though they will begin a new initiative to organize "like-minded" Christians worldwide. That could include more conservative Baptist groups in the United States and elsewhere who are not part of BWA, as well as non-Baptist groups with a similar ideology.

Ryan said BWA would not comment on those plans. She said most Baptist groups in BWA are conservative, and added, "Certainly Baptists of the world need the cooperation and support of Southern Baptists."

Should free market determine how much to pay the preacher?

By Mark Wingfield

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DURHAM, N.C. (ABP) – A free-market economy drives pastors of many churches, including Baptist congregations, to climb a career ladder in order to maintain a decent standard of living, according to a new study from Duke University.

This pattern imperils the health of smaller congregations that cannot afford to pay a middle-class salary and threatens the prophetic role of ministers who are trapped by climbing the ladder, conclude the authors, Becky McMillan and Matthew Price.

"How Much Should We Pay the Pastor?" is the title of the report produced by the Pulpit & Pew research unit of Duke Divinity School. The study was funded by the Lilly Endowment.

"While pastors may feel called to serve small or poor congregations, the costs of doing so might be considerable," the authors note. "In order to accumulate savings and pay off educational debt, they need to progress to larger congregations with correspondingly larger salaries.

"The salary structure is such that clergy wishing to maintain a middle-class lifestyle must take on a 'career' as opposed to a 'calling' mentality. Local congregations, rather than focusing on their mission to the world around them, must focus inordinately on 'church growth' strategies in order to increase their market power to attract good clergy."

The study compares clergy compensation among three types of churches – Catholics, "connectional" Protestants and congregational Protestants. Connectional Protestants, such as Methodists, allow a denominational structure to play a major role in clergy placement and in setting standards for clergy qualifications and pay. Congregational Protestants, such as Baptists, allow congregations free reign to hire whomever they desire and pay whatever they choose.

Baptists and other congregational churches exemplify the strongest correlation to free-market economics, the authors explain.

Data for the report were gleaned through a national survey of 883 clergy in 2001. Among the key findings:

- In all but the largest churches, connectional churches pay their ministers better than congregational churches and provide better benefits.
- Church size matters when it comes to salary. Among Protestant churches of both kinds, landing a job at a larger church translates into a larger income.
- Smaller churches struggle to pay a high enough salary to attract and retain qualified clergy. An increasing number of smaller churches are moving toward part-time or less experienced clergy as a solution.
- Regardless of polity, "only a small percentage of pastors earn what most Americans would consider a professional-level salary."

The problem begins with the assumptions upon which clergy salaries are based, the authors contend. "Most congregations attempt to answer that question by looking at what they have paid pastors in the past and what they can afford given their current membership."

But what is the purpose of a clergy salary? the authors ask. "Is it to reward good preaching? Is it to attract a much-sought-after visionary? Is it to pay a professional for ministerial services rendered? Or could it simply be to provide hospitality and a well-lived life for persons and their families who are compelled by a call from God to proclaim the gospel?"

Catholics approach these questions from an entirely different perspective than Protestants by removing financial incentive as a motivator for excellence in ministry. The variation between compensation for Catholic priests varies relatively little between larger and smaller parishes.

That allows Catholic priests to move more freely between parishes of different sizes, the authors note. But on the other hand, the relatively low pay of Catholic priests may discourage young adults from entering the ministry.

Likewise, connectional Protestant churches are more likely than congregational Protestant churches to offer clergy a livable wage. The down side of that policy, however, is that some smaller connectional churches go without clergy because they cannot pay the minimum salary required by the denomination.

For example, in the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1999, 62 percent of churches with membership less than 100 were without pastors.

Another reason clergy salaries may be higher in connectional churches than in congregational churches is the typical economic status of those churches. "Churches within connectional polities also happen to be on average larger and richer, and they hire clergy with higher education," the study explains.

The researchers applied their data to compare what a particular pastor might expect to earn in a congregational church versus a connectional church and in churches of various sizes. This John Doe has 20 years' experience in the ministry, an earned seminary degree and serves a church with an average lay income of \$49,000.

The smaller the congregation, the better off financially the pastor would be in a connectional church. The larger the congregation, however, the better off he or she would be in a congregational church.

Under this model, in churches under 100 in attendance, the pastor would earn about \$35,000 in a congregational church and about \$40,000 in a connectional church. At about 180 attendees, the salary offered by the two kinds of churches meets at \$52,000. From there, the projected salary in the congregational church soars much faster than in a connectional church, so that in congregations of 1,000 attendees, the congregational church would pay about \$35,000 more than the connectional church.

Among other findings:

- Clergy salaries correspond much more to church size than to years of experience held by the pastor.
- Median salaries for clergy have grown to become comparable to those of teachers and social workers. The gap between clergy salaries and those of other professionals such as doctors and lawyers has widened.
- African-American churches are more likely than Anglo churches to offer pastors less than a livable wage, although some African-American churches have broken through this barrier. On average, African-American pastors earn two-thirds of what white clergy earn, even though African-American laity are more likely to tithe and report similar income levels to white laity.
- Female clergy on average earn \$6,500 less than male clergy, although average household income for female clergy is higher than for male clergy households due to working spouses.

The complete report, "How Much Should We Pay the Pastor?" is available at www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu.



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