

EXHIBIT A

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF MISSISSIPPI**

Will McRaney,

Plaintiff,

v.

The North American Mission Board of the
Southern Baptist Convention, Inc.,

Defendant.

Case No. 1:17-cv-00080-GHD-DAS

DECLARATION OF JONI B. HANNIGAN

I, Joni B. Hannigan, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746 hereby declare as follows:

1. I am over 18 years of age, of sound mind, and otherwise competent to make this Declaration. The evidence set out in the foregoing Declaration is based on my personal knowledge of the matters and facts set forth herein.
2. I have known Will McRaney since September 2002 when we worked together at the Florida Baptist Convention building in Jacksonville. I was Managing Editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness*, the official newspaper of the Florida Baptist State Convention, 2002-2014 and Managing/Executive Editor of the *Christian Examiner* 2015-2017.
3. For 32 years, between 1987 and 2018, I was a journalist covering – among other subjects – the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), and its agencies/entities, including the North American Mission Board (NAMB). I’ve covered controversial issues for Baptist Press (the official news service of the Southern Baptist Convention) which currently hosts thousands of my stories on its news website bpnews.net and in its archives. In 2014 I served as an officer of the Baptist Communicator’s Association and in 2015 won the News Writer of the Year Award and other awards. I have also won awards from the Evangelical Press Association, served 10 years as a trustee at Hannibal LaGrange University in Missouri, and been an adjunct faculty member of California Baptist University in Riverside, the University of North Florida in Jacksonville, and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City. I have also been licensed to teach high school English and journalism in Missouri, Georgia and Florida.
4. JUNE 2018, THREAT- Senior Editor of Baptist Press (BP) told me in 2018 at the SBC meeting in Dallas, I could be on the coverage team again and would be asked to write stories as a freelancer, only if I “*would stop writing Will McRaney stories.*” Previously I had served as BP newsroom editor during the SBC meeting until 2010 and been part of the BP news team since 1994. I was told I should write more “*happy*” stories.

5. In another attempt to silence me from covering NAMB/Ezell/McRaney issues, although I had written only two related stories, I was hard pressed to find the location of the trustee meeting at the 2018 SBC meeting in Dallas. BP is tasked with and carries a minute-by-minute breakdown of the SBC and related meetings and yet claimed to not know the location of the Dallas meeting. When NAMB's VP for Communications, Mike Ebert, did answer my query, he questioned my news presence and told me an incorrect location, causing me to be late. Attendance is not limited to credentialed media in any case, the meeting is open to all members of SBC churches.
6. JUNE 2018, THREAT – At that same 2018 SBC annual meeting in Dallas, I wrote a news analysis, *“Was SBC #METOO resolution on abuse a band aid for larger issues?”* Within hours of posting the analysis on my own personal web page, I received a clear threat from NAMB when its VP for Communications, Mike Ebert texted me: *“Joni — I think you have put yourself into a potentially libelous situation. I am asking you and encouraging you in the strongest way possible to remove what you have posted about Kevin. I wish you had called to discuss this with me ahead of time.”*

And then NAMB piled on more pressure. Just as I sought to resurrect my career as a Southern Baptist news writer (having taken time for therapy and restoration following a series of devastating traumas worsened by sexual assault that occurred years before in the military, described in a blog post which I released just prior to the 2018 Dallas meeting) to launch my website — NAMB distributed a paper titled “Background Information from Kevin Ezell” at the annual meeting of state Baptist papers and editors on June 28, 2018. The meeting was attended by dozens of my colleagues and those in a position to influence news and employment of communications and executive personnel in the SBC. I believe my future as a writer, editor, or professor in Southern Baptist life was sealed with those words. My fate and future had been inexorably linked with that of Will McRaney because I dared to publish what few other legitimate Baptist journalists had; and did so without the backing of any resources but my own.

The damaging document, forwarded to me by a former colleague addresses a “news analysis” posted on a “blog” and mentions two accusers. In the document, Ezell references and maligns Will McRaney and me. McRaney the day before had emailed NAMB trustees a letter that included a reference to Ebert's text message to me as an example of how far Ezell will go to silence those with whom he disagrees. Ebert went on further to malign me in an email sent to NAMB partners at the same time.

What Ebert did not send to me was also telling. He had promised to send me a summary of changes to NAMB's policy manual which were approved in the 2018 meeting. I had been looking for any mention of handling sexual abuse since by that time the International Mission Board and other entities had made efforts in this area. I never received the policy.

7. JUNE 2017 THREAT – In 2017, seeking to confirm with NAMB the time their trustee meeting began in Phoenix at the SBC, NAMB's Ebert took only a moment to reply: “It's a little bit of a moving target. I think if you're over here at 3:00 you will be safe. They are in their closed workshop right now” until later. I had assumed when I got there the plenary session had begun and so, glanced inside through the doors, at the urging of NAMB staff outside. Noting no other media present, however, I waited in the main entryway.

After the plenary session ended, NAMB's Ebert approached me and asked if I had been eavesdropping or recording or planned to report on the closed session. I explained what had happened, although the conversation was decidedly chilly. Later, I told him it was NAMB staff

who were lacking in integrity by encouraging me to look in on the meeting to see if they were in plenary session.

Interestingly, the article I wrote for the *Texan* about this meeting was censored to delete any mention of the ongoing court case with McRaney. Both are attached as exhibits, with my original highlighting indicating the excluded paragraphs. That no one at the *Texan* discussed this with me was troubling since typically edits of this nature were up for discussion.

8. In 2016, I wrote an article outlining claims by SBC leaders of NAMB's secret agreements and practices. The same day "*Southern Baptist State Leaders Accuse Mission Organization of Strong Arming*," was published, NAMB's vice president for communications, Mike Ebert, sent me a series of provocative emails, first asking if he had missed my call and then accusing me of "choosing sides." Subsequently, I posted a "second day story" giving air to statements Ezell released online and in email correspondence to various news editors and individual leaders.

Less than a week later, I received disturbing news from a freelance writer who was going through the process of becoming a full-time employee of the *Christian Examiner*. He had replaced his byline with "staff" on a story about NAMB potentially merging with the SBC's International Mission Board. When questioned about this, he said he was working on several other NAMB initiated stories and did not want to lose potential work. He also said he was no longer interested in becoming the full-time managing editor of the *Christian Examiner*. This was the second person with NAMB connections who had abruptly pulled out of negotiations. I sent an email to NAMB to express my concern.

After querying part time and freelance workers, I was told NAMB and/or Baptist Press had contacted most of them to express "concern" that they were working with *Christian Examiner*. Since I had been recruited by the former chief of Baptist Press who went on to be editor of the *Louisiana Baptist Message*, the state Baptist paper of that convention, I had no concern whatsoever about the nature of the *Christian Examiner*, but I began to fear NAMB was meddling. When my work at *Christian Examiner* abruptly ended in December 2016, along with my contract for teaching at California Baptist University, I finally faced the reality that my dreams had come to an end both as a journalist and a professor.

It finally occurred to me that NAMB was intent on silencing me and further undermining my work in order to cover up its own misdeeds. Up until this point I also had worked together with NAMB on several special projects, to include church planting, disaster relief, and coverage of its 2015 SEND rally in Nashville. What happened in 2017 and 2018 was just further proof that Kevin Ezell must have, as one former colleague described, a target on my back.

9. I have reviewed the document bates numbered WM00970-975 in this case, and it contains a true and correct copy of an email I sent to Will McRaney and others on December 12, 2019.
10. I have reviewed the document bates numbered WM01030-31 in this case, and it is a true and correct copy of an email exchange between me and Mike Ebert of NAMB on May 11 and 12, 2016.
11. Attached as Exhibit A to this Declaration is a true and correct copy of an email exchange between me and Mike Ebert of NAMB on June 11, 2018.
12. Attached as Exhibit B to this Declaration is a true and correct copy of an email exchange between me and Mike Ebert of NAMB on June 11, 2018.

13. Attached as Exhibit C to this Declaration is a true and correct copy of an email exchange between me and Mike Ebert of NAMB on June 13, 2017.
14. Attached as Exhibit D to this Declaration is a true and correct copy of an email exchange between me and Tammi Ledbetter of TEXAN on June 14, 2017.
15. Attached as Exhibit E to this Declaration is a true and correct copy of an original article I wrote for the TEXAN sent on June 14, 2017.
16. Attached as Exhibit F to this Declaration is a true and correct copy of an email from Mike Ebert of NAMB and forwarded to me on June 28, 2018.
17. Attached as Exhibit G to this Declaration is a true and correct copy of an unsigned summary background regarding Kevin Ezell, sent as an attachment to an email sent by Mike Ebert of NAMB on June 28, 2018.
18. Attached as Exhibit H to this Declaration is a true and correct copy of an email exchange between me and Mike Ebert of NAMB on May 16, 2016.
19. Attached as Exhibit I to this Declaration is a true and correct copy of an original article written by my part time employee “staff” and published October 2, 2015.
20. Attached as Exhibit J to this Declaration is a true and correct copy of an original article I wrote for TEXAN sent on June 15, 2017.
21. Attached as Exhibit K to this Declaration is a true and correct copy of an email exchange between me and Mike Ebert of NAMB on July 21, 2015.
22. Attached as Exhibit L to this Declaration is a true and correct copy of an email exchange between me and Mike Ebert of NAMB on June 18, 2018.
23. Attached as Exhibit M to this Declaration are true and correct copies of articles I have written. They are available to the public at a variety of websites, including: baptistnews.com; baptistmessage.com; christianexaminer.com and truthisincrisis.wordpress.com.

<https://baptistnews.com/article/un-friendly-fire-in-the-southern-baptist-convention-unearths-layers-of-deceit-resurfaces-old-wounds/>

<https://www.christianexaminer.com/news/southern-baptist-state-leaders-accuse-mission-organization-of-strong-arming.html>

<https://www.baptistmessage.com/namb-tells-court-mcraney-controversy-ecclesiastical-matter/>

<https://www.christianexaminer.com/article/breaking-nambs-kevin-ezell-defends-confidential-cooperation-agreements/50717.htm>

<https://www.namb.net/news/disciplemaking-at-heart-of-namb-urban-church-planting/>

<https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/renovated-theater-to-be-multiethnic-church/>

<https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/historic-floods-draw-baptist-relief-efforts/>

<https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/urban-church-planting-goes-holistic/>

<https://truthisincrisis.wordpress.com/2018/06/26/news-analysis-was-sbc-metoo-resolution-on-abuse-a-band-aid-for-larger-issues/>

<https://truthisincrisis.wordpress.com/2019/02/03/a-menacing-message/>

<https://truthisincrisis.wordpress.com/2018/06/10/the-metoo-movement-deserves-more-than-the-sbc/>

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on February 27, 2023

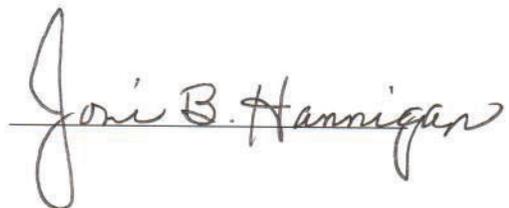
A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joni B. Hannigan". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Exhibit A

Subject: Re: NAMB trustee mtg location

Date: Monday, June 11, 2018 at 4:39:54 PM Eastern Daylight Time

From: Ebert, Mike <mebert@namb.net>

To: Joni <jonibh@gmail.com>

We are in the Hyatt. Come to lower level. Open meeting doesn't start until 4:00 PM but please check with people in hall first. We are currently in trustee workshop which is not open to public.

Thanks!

Mike E.

On 6/11/18, 3:26 PM, "Joni" <jonibh@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi Mike,

Been trying to find out where you all are meeting. Art in BP doesn't know.

Joni

Joni B.Hannigan
Jacksonville, Florida

Exhibit B

Subject: Re: NAMB trustee mtg location

Date: Monday, June 11, 2018 at 5:03:01 PM Eastern Daylight Time

From: Joni <jonibh@gmail.com>

To: Ebert, Mike <mebert@namb.net>

I am credentialed.

Joni B.Hannigan
Jacksonville, Florida

> On Jun 11, 2018, at 3:27 PM, Ebert, Mike <mebert@namb.net> wrote:

>

> Hi Joni! Are you covering for a media outlet?

>

> Mike E.

>

> On 6/11/18, 3:26 PM, "Joni" <jonibh@gmail.com> wrote:

>

>

> Hi Mike,

>

> Been trying to find out where you all are meeting. Art in BP doesn't know.

>

> Joni

>

> Joni B.Hannigan

> Jacksonville, Florida

>

Exhibit C

Subject: Re: Moved up!!!!????

Date: Tuesday, June 13, 2017 at 1:29:22 AM Eastern Daylight Time

From: Ebert, Mike <mebert@namb.net>

To: Joni <jonibh@gmail.com>



Mike Ebert

Executive Director, Public Relations
North American Mission Board
4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022
[770.410.6502](tel:770.410.6502)
NAMB.net

On Jun 12, 2017, at 10:12 PM, Joni <jonibh@gmail.com> wrote:

Mike,

If you look at the time of my email, that's when I was outside the doors trying to find out after talking to the two gentlemen outside whether you were in full board or workshop. I definitely didn't think it was until 3 ... but was afraid of missing part of the meeting if you perchance had started earlier. I didn't see this because I began talking to a worker from Denver and then Jennifer and Hayley Catt right after I sent it.

My apologies and you should know I have no idea what anyone specifically was talking about nor would I ever report on something said behind closed doors.

Not sure who those guys told me they were, but if they were staff, even field staff, I consider them lacking in integrity for suggesting first that I walk in and second that I look in -- IF they knew workshop was happening and it was not full board. In retrospect I think I asked if they were trustees and they said no. Of course not. Trustees would have been IN the meeting!

Besides, the VA has determined I have mild to moderate hearing loss and I'm no lip reader.

I report what I can document on the record.

Sorry if I caused you any concerns or confusion.

Regards,

Joni

Sent from my iPhone

On Jun 12, 2017, at 2:37 PM, Ebert, Mike <mebert@namb.net> wrote:

It's a little bit of a moving target. I think if you're over here at 3:00 you will be safe.

They are in their closed workshop right now

Mike E.

From: "Hannigan, Joni" <jonibh@gmail.com>

Date: Monday, June 12, 2017 at 5:36 PM

To: Mike Ebert <mebert@namb.net>

Subject: Moved up!!!!????

I was told 3! Is full board meeting??

Exhibit D

Subject: NAMB trustee meeting
Date: Wednesday, June 14, 2017 at 12:57:12 AM Eastern Daylight Time
From: Joni B Hannigan <jonibh@gmail.com>
To: Tammi Ledbetter <tledbetter@sbtexas.com>, Keith Collier <Kcollier@sbtexas.com>
Attachments: NAMBstoryTEXAN.docx

Ezell to trustees: 'I think it's time for another GCR'

Exhibit E

Ezell to trustees: 'I think it's time for another GCR'

By Joni B. Hannigan

PHOENIX – Now that the North American Mission Board has been “completely transformed” by the Great Commission Resurgence, NAMB’s president, Kevin Ezell, told trustees it’s time for another GCR, this time the “Gospel Conversation Resurgence.”

Delivering his report during the plenary session of the June 12 meeting of the board of trustees prior to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Phoenix, Ezell said of the GCR that, “some liked it and some didn’t, but God used it to get us to where we are today.”

Seven years ago NAMB started “beating the drum” to focus on church planting” and now – more than any time in SBC history -- churches are so aware of the idea that a banner can hang from church rafters, Ezell said.

That said, with 15,000 of 47,000 churches not baptizing a single person, Ezell said part of NAMB’s ministry assignment is to also emphasize the importance of gospel conversations so that people can come to faith in Jesus Christ.

“I think it’s time for another GCR. But this time it needs to be a,“ Gospel Conversation Resurgence,” Ezell said.

“[E]verything we do is about sharing our faith so that people will come to know Christ,” Ezell said. “I think it’s one of the best times to be a Southern Baptist. But it’s also a time to help churches focus.”

Ezell said Send Network for church planting, and Send Relief will continue, but he also pledged, “every ounce of energy that we possibly can in helping our convention see the importance of having Gospel conversations.”

NAMB will be producing podcasts and other resources that capture pastors and entity leaders sharing their last conversations.

“We are going to do everything we have at the North American Mission Board to stir ... the passion for evangelism in our churches,” Ezell said. “The North American Mission Board has never baptized anybody. We are not a church. We come alongside of churches; we come alongside associations; we come alongside state conventions. I am thankful for that work. We are not going to step back one inch.”

WEATHERING STORMS & LAWSUITS

Chairman of the NAMB board of trustees, Mark J. Dyer, an attorney and member of Parkway Baptist Church in Plano, Texas, in his devotion, said the North American Mission Board has made big strides in “penetrating lostness,” despite storms like the one headed in the direction of the recent Send North America conference in Frisco, Texas.

“We serve an amazing God,” Dyer said. “We are going to weather some storms we are going to have some disagreements. We are going to deal with some lawsuits ... but ... God is in control ... and He has a plan for this organization.”

TRUSTEES RELEASE LAWSUIT STATEMENT

Dyer, speaking as the chairman of an ad hoc committee on litigation, read a statement on behalf of trustees regarding a lawsuit filed by Will McRaney, formerly the executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware (BCMD).

The lawsuit, filed April 7 in Winston County, Miss., but moved to a federal district court in northern Mississippi, alleges NAMB interfered in his employment with the BCMD in 2015 and engaged in “slander and/or libel.”

“We are taking these allegations seriously and have studied them carefully. We believe they are without merit,” the statement reads in part. “As we have on several occasions in the past, we would like to restate our willingness and desire to meet with Dr. McRaney, in an appropriate setting, to explore how this situation might possibly be resolved in a Biblical manner and in a Christ honoring fashion.

“In the meantime, we have been praying for Dr. McRaney and will continue to do so,” Dyer read.

BOARD REPRESENTATION QUESTIONED

After hearing a report about Canada, Ezell wondered aloud whether the North American country should be represented on the board. Trustees affirmed a resolution calling for the ad hoc bylaws and policy committee to study and make recommendations to the board regarding its makeup -- specifically as it relates to smaller conventions and Canada.

“I agree with some of the comments that were made earlier today that the North American Mission Board has a different focus and while we can listen to our sister entity [the SBC Executive Committee] that we ought to be a group and a body making these decisions on our own,” Dyer said.

TEXANS HONORED FOR SERVICE

In other business, trustees:

- Authorized changing the name of FamilyNet, Inc. to Send Relief, Inc., with further approval to be sought by the Executive Committee at its next regular meeting.
- Approved the Fiscal Year 2018 Operating Budget of \$125,400,000 and Fiscal Year 2018 Capital Budget of \$6,865,625.
- Heard regional reports highlighting mission activities throughout North America, including a financial report which reflected 100 missionary housing units in all but one of the Send Cities.

Among those honored for their service on the board for eight years were Dyer, and Heath C. Peloquin, director/minister church relations, Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.

New trustee officers are: chairman, Stephen "Spike" Hogan, lead pastor, Chet's Creek Church, Jacksonville, Fla.; first vice chairman, Danny Wood, Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala.; second vice chairman, Daniel (Danny) de Armas, senior associate pastor, First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla.

The next NAMB board meeting is Oct. 4 in Montreal.

-- Joni B. Hannigan is a freelance writer living in Jacksonville Fla.

Exhibit F

Subject: FW: QUESTION(S)
Date: Saturday, February 25, 2023 at 7:41:16 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: jonibh@gmail.com <jonibh@gmail.com>
Attachments: ATT00001.htm, Ezell Background Re Louisville sex offender.pdf

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Ebert, Mike" <mebert@namb.net>
Date: June 28, 2018 at 7:29:04 PM CDT
To: "Ebert, Mike" <mebert@namb.net>
Subject: Re: QUESTION(S)

Good Evening

We are sending you this email because earlier this evening you received an email from a person calling himself "Danny Jones." He claims in the email that he has been seeking answers from us for weeks, but tonight's email was the first we heard directly from him, although several people have forwarded emails they received.

His account misstates virtually every key fact of this situation, so we have attached a written statement from Kevin which explains what happened, the timeline and how Kevin and the church handled things at the time.

If you have any questions about this, please don't hesitate to call or email. You can reach me on my cell phone at 404-483-4056.



Mike Ebert

Executive Director, Public Relations
North American Mission Board
4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022
770.410.6502
NAMB.net

Exhibit G

Background information from Kevin Ezell

We are making the following background information available to address allegations made against Kevin Ezell in a recent blog post and in an email circulating to Baptist newspaper editors and others. Please contact Mike Ebert at mebert@namb.net if you have further questions.

In the mid-1970's a public-school teacher in Louisville, Kentucky, allegedly sexually molested a number of minors on multiple occasions at the elementary school where he taught and at his home. To my knowledge, the alleged molestation did not come to light until 2003 when someone familiar with what this man had done spotted him at Highview Baptist Church, where I began pastoring in 1996, and urged some of his accusers to notify the police.

Recently, an email began circulating to Baptist state paper editors and a blog was posted, both implying that I mishandled and even tried to cover up the situation. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In light of this, I want to share some key points:

1. None of the alleged incidents occurred at Highview Baptist Church, its school or any other Highview ministry. The incidents all took place when the individual served at a public school in the 1970's.
2. These alleged incidents took place in the mid-1970s and early 1980s, years before I arrived at Highview in 1996. The individual was briefly employed by Highview's school before I became pastor, but he was no longer in that role when I came to the church.
3. Seven years after I began at Highview, it came to my attention that the individual had been accused of inappropriate conduct while at the public school in the 1970's. We immediately removed him from his volunteer role as a records keeper in our youth department, and we promptly notified the police. In fact, we helped arrange for his voluntary arrest.
4. The individual was charged, entered a plea agreement, and served time in prison.

I pastored Highview Baptist Church in Louisville from 1996 to 2010. This individual was one of over 6,000 members of Highview.

Neither of the people circulating misinformation about me contacted me to ask for my side of the story. By their actions, I must conclude that at least part of their goal is to assassinate my character, attack my credibility and undermine my leadership of NAMB, so I am obliged to address these attacks, regardless of how unethical the tactics of those who are attacking.

Both of these attackers accuse me of invoking "clergy-penitent privilege" in the individual's prosecution in order to avoid testifying. Again, nothing could be further from the truth. In Kentucky, like most states, the "privilege" in these situations lies with the "penitent" (in this case the alleged perpetrator), not with the clergy. The individual invoked this privilege under

Kentucky law. Once he did, I was advised by legal counsel that I was obliged by law to abide by it. I could not have invoked the privilege on my own behalf even if I had wanted to.

The crimes for which this man was convicted were reprehensible. As a father, pastor and person in authority, I have always made it a top priority to ensure that children and everyone else on the campus of a church, school or workplace that I oversaw were safe and treated with respect. During my tenure at Highview, all of our volunteers who worked with students were given background checks. That included the individual in this case, whose background check came back clean.

I believe a discussion of how we as churches, leaders and a denomination handle abuse cases can be healthy and constructive. However, twisting stories by leaving out important facts and efforts to accuse, imply, or impugn in the name of "news analysis" are not the way to conduct such a discussion.

If you have further questions about this situation I would encourage you to contact me.

Exhibit H

Subject: Tobin Perry employment

Date: Monday, May 16, 2016 at 9:58:19 AM Eastern Daylight Time

From: Joni Hannigan <jonibh@gmail.com>

To: Ebert, Mike <mebert@NAMB.NET>

Good Morning Mike,

I wanted to let you know that last Thursday morning I went to edit a news story by Tobin Perry and in place of his name, "staff" was inserted. When I contacted him, he indicated that he believed since the story posted Wednesday night involving NAMB, he thought it would be better for him if he removed his name.

He also indicated that he believed he should not write stories for CE at least for the time being because he was working on several NAMB stories.

I believe he is fearful that he will lose NAMB work. I hope this is not the case, since he has implied this is very important to him.

It was at SNA that I became aware of Tobin and his need for work last year. He was highly recommended and we were in the process of training and transitioning him into a full-time position as quickly as resources would allow.

It is my sincerest hope that Tobin will not be in danger of losing future work for NAMB or any other SBC entity because of his previous work for us.

Regards,

Joni

Exhibit I

Home / U.S.

SBC President talks of merging mission agencies; questions future of state conventions, associations

by [Staff](#), | 02 October, 2015



Ronnie Floyd, president of the Southern Baptist Convention and pastor of Cross Church in Arkansas, speaks during AVANCE 2015 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center June 14, 2015. In late September at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City. | Paul W. Lee/Baptist Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (Christian Examiner)—For the second time in the past decade, a key Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) leader publically suggested the nation's largest Protestant denomination will soon have to grapple with the possibility of merging its North American Mission Board (NAMB) and International Mission Board (IMB). The comments from
WM06247

SBC president Ronnie Floyd came earlier this week at the 2015 Symposium on the SBC and the 21st Century at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

While this has been true before, is this still true within the global culture we experience daily and with the reality that ethnicities live everywhere across this world? Is this true when technology is helping shape the culture today and can assist us in our mission? Furthermore, with an undeniable global mindset in America today, is this still the right strategy?"

"This is not a new question at all," Floyd told symposium attendees. "Some of us who have been involved in shaping the future have asked this question and tried to answer it honestly. With our present matters at hand, this question is being asked more today than ever before. It should be asked. And there is nothing wrong with asking it by the way."

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary President Danny Akin made a similar suggestion, among others, during a seminary chapel sermon in 2009. Thanks in part to that sermon, Southern Baptists formed a task force, led by Floyd, to look at how the denomination could more effectively pursue evangelism and discipleship.

Though the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force recommended significant changes to the work of the North American Mission and some changes to the International Mission Board, they did not recommend the merger of the two entities.

The foreign and domestic missions entities, as they were known at the time, have been a part of the convention, as separate agencies, since its 1845 founding. In its latest ministry report to the convention, the IMB reported 4,793 missionaries on the field. NAMB supports 5,611 missionaries, according to its report. The two entities receive a total of 73.2 percent of the convention's 2014-15 Cooperative Program allocation.

Floyd, who was elected to his second consecutive term as convention president at the 2015 SBC in Columbus, Ohio, prefaced his comments by telling attendees that spiritual revival had to proceed any structural change. To make his point, he turned to scriptural illustrations of

Jacob, Moses, Hezekiah, Josiah, Nehemiah, Peter, Paul and ultimately Jesus who modeled the priority of spiritual revival before structural changes.

"When God renews His people, things change," said Floyd, who has pastored Cross Church in Northwest Arkansas since 1986. "The way things are done change. The attitude of doing things change."

After explaining the priority of spiritual revival, Floyd turned his attention to six probing questions about the convention's future:

When conversing about this subject, is the real question what is best for the entire Southern Baptist Convention and its future together; or is the real question what is best for the advancement of the Gospel through our Southern Baptist Convention?

Do we exist to preserve our present brand, structure and systems or do we exist to advance the Gospel together regionally, statewide, nationally and internationally?

For the sake of Gospel advancement, should the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board become one mission board, the Global Mission Board of our Southern Baptist Convention?

Do state conventions and associations have a future in Southern Baptist life?

How will we finance our work together in the future in the most effective way?

Is there anything new we need to create for today or for the future that will help our churches in their mission of going, baptizing and making disciples of all the nations?

Floyd said he had opinions as to the answers of many of the questions, but only hinted at them in his message. Although many of the questions have been debated in the Baptist blogosphere for years, they've rarely been suggested by sitting SBC presidents.

Besides talking about the potential of combining the two mission boards, he openly discussed the possibility of SBC associations and state conventions merging for greater efficiency. He also suggested the possibility of a new entity focused around compassion ministries and the need for a concerted effort to bring existing other churches into the convention's fold.

"As the current president of the Southern Baptist Convention there is some level of risk for me to be open and honest concerning this subject," said Floyd, speaking of the overall topic of the SBC's future. "Yet this is not about me, and in reality it's not even about the Southern Baptist Convention. It's about the progress and the advancement of the Gospel to the nations through the cooperative work of our churches through the Southern Baptist Convention."

During his message, Floyd systematically questioned objections past leaders have had about merging the two boards.

Most notably, he responded to the objection that the uniqueness of the mission field internationally and in North America required the SBC to have separate sending agencies.

"While this has been true before, is this still true within the global culture we experience daily and with the reality that ethnicities live everywhere across this world?" Floyd asked. "Is this true when technology is helping shape the culture today and can assist us in our mission? Furthermore, with an undeniable global mindset in America today, is this still the right strategy?"

Floyd's questions about a potential merger of the two missions sending agencies come two months after NAMB and the IMB partnered together for the Send North America Conference, a missions conference with more than 13,000 in attendance.

The two entities have done an increasing number of activities together since David Platt became president of the IMB in August of 2014.

During last summer's Southern Baptist Convention, the two entities held a joint luncheon where leaders discussed how they could serve the needs of churches more effectively if they worked more closely together.

For more information on the North American Mission Board, visit www.namb.net. For more information on the International Mission Board, visit www.imb.org.

Search here	Go
-------------	----

Like us on



Latest News

Should churches comply with California's ban on singing?

Jailed pastor's son 'bludgeoned' with baton, detained by Vietnamese police amid US ambassador's visit

Abortions in Indiana fell by 5% in 2019: gov't report

Calif. issues ban on singing in churches amid ongoing pandemic

'Uncertain and unsettling': China approves controversial Hong Kong security law

Most US Christians uncomfortable with returning to church: survey

Spike in violence, profanity on TV shows rated OK for kids

Bioethics panel: Why ignoring ethics yields horrors, abuses; media deceives about human costs

Christians risk arrest if they display Bible in Saudi Arabia, persecution watchdog group warns

Russell Moore warns Christians face spiritual warfare 'all the time;' identifies 2 ways Satan attacks

Resources

[Finding God](#)
[Movie Reviews](#)
[Online Bible](#)

Ways To Get CE

[Facebook](#)
[RSS](#)
[Twitter](#)

Sections

[US](#)
[World](#)
[Church & Ministry](#)

[Society](#)

[Life](#)

[Entertainment](#)

[Comment](#)

[Archives](#)

[Finding God](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

Exhibit J

News

Ezell seeks “Gospel Conversation Resurgence” in report to trustees

BY JONI HANNIGAN | 📅 JUNE 15, 2017

PHOENIX – Now that the North American Mission Board has been “completely transformed” by the Great Commission Resurgence, NAMB President Kevin Ezell told trustees it’s time for another GCR—this time a “Gospel Conversation Resurgence.”

Delivering his report during the plenary session of the June 12 meeting of the board of trustees prior to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Phoenix, Ezell said of the GCR that, “some liked it and some didn’t, but God used it to get us to where we are today.”

Seven years ago NAMB started “beating the drum to focus on church planting,” and now, more than any time in SBC history, churches are so aware of the idea that a banner can hang from church rafters, Ezell said.

That said, with 15,000 of 47,000 churches not baptizing a single person last year, Ezell said part of NAMB’s ministry assignment is to also emphasize the importance of personal evangelism so that people can come to faith in Jesus Christ.

“Everything we do is about sharing our faith so that people will come to know Christ,” Ezell said. “I think it’s one of the best times to be a Southern Baptist. But it’s also a time to help churches focus.”

Ezell said Send Network for church planting and Send Relief will continue, but he also pledged “every ounce of energy that we possibly can in helping our convention see the importance of having gospel conversations.”

NAMB will be producing podcasts and other resources that capture pastors and entity leaders sharing their recent gospel conversations.

“We are going to do everything we have at the North American Mission Board to stir ... the passion for evangelism in our churches,” Ezell said. “The North American Mission Board has never baptized anybody. We are not a church. We come alongside of churches; we come alongside associations; we come alongside state conventions. I am thankful for that work. We are not going to step back one inch.”

After hearing a report about Canada, Ezell wondered aloud whether the North American country should be represented on the board. Trustees affirmed a resolution calling for the ad hoc bylaws

and policy committee to study and make recommendations to the board regarding its makeup, specifically as it relates to smaller conventions and Canada.

SBC bylaws specify the number of church members each state or territory must have to qualify for trustee representation on various entities, with that number set at 20,000 at both NAMB and the International Mission Board. A trustee subcommittee of the IMB is currently studying the impact of decreasing numbers of Southern Baptists in several states.

The Executive Committee of the SBC addressed the problem by granting exceptions to four areas that lack the number of churches stipulated in Bylaw 30, a move approved by messengers to this year's annual meeting. A motion referred to NAMB, IMB and LifeWay asked each entity to amend their governing documents to ensure their trustee boards include members from each state convention.

NAMB board chairman Mark Dyer of Plano recognized the value of hearing how a sister entity handled the matter but stated, "We ought to be a group and a body making these decisions on our own."

The board elected new officers, including Stephen "Spike" Hogan of Jacksonville, Fla., as chairman; Danny Wood of Birmingham, Ala., as first vice chairman; and Daniel de Armas of Orlando as second vice chairman.



Joni Hannigan

Explore more Southern Baptist news and history with us.

Discover our online home of Texan Newsjournal editions from years past.

[Visit the Archive](#)

CONTACT US

PO Box 1988
Grapevine, TX
76099-1988

817-552-2500

877-953-SBTC toll-free

QUICK LINKS

[Print Archives](#)

[About Us](#)

[Advertise with Us](#)

[Church Positions](#)

[Resources](#)

Current Events. Relevant Topics. Gospel Stories.

TYPE IN YOUR EMAIL HERE

© 2021 Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. All Rights Reserved.

Exhibit K

Subject: Send Conference

Date: Tuesday, July 21, 2015 at 2:50:03 PM Eastern Daylight Time

From: Ebert, Mike <mebert@NAMB.NET>

To: Hannigan, Joni <jonibh@gmail.com>

Joni

We are looking forward to having you with us in Nashville in less than two weeks!

We will cover one night of your hotel. Hope that makes things a little easier on the budget!

About a week from now we will send you details about conference check in for media, press accommodations while there and a detailed schedule.

In the meantime you might want to get the conference app for your phone or tablet and give things a look. There is an [iOS version](#) and an [Android version](#).

The [conference web site](#) is a good source of information as well.

In the meantime, let me know if there is anything I can help with.

For His Glory,

Mike Ebert

Executive Director >> Public Relations

North American Mission Board, [NAMB.NET](#)

4200 North Point Parkway, Alpharetta GA 30022

(o) 770.410.6502 | (f) 678.410.6006 | @mebert

Exhibit L

Subject: Re: Agenda

Date: Monday, June 18, 2018 at 7:04:25 PM Eastern Daylight Time

From: Joni B Hannigan <jonibh@gmail.com>

To: Ebert, Mike <mebert@namb.net>

Date: Monday, June 18, 2018 at 3:59 PM

To: Joni B Hannigan <jonibh@gmail.com>

Subject: Re: Agenda

Sorry took a couple of days off after SBC. No, we haven't changed our alcohol policy. Staff and NAMB funded missionaries all sign a conduct expectations sheet that states no alcohol consumption.

I'm working on a summary for you.

Mike E.

From: "Hannigan, Joni" <jonibh@gmail.com>

Date: Tuesday, June 12, 2018 at 10:25 PM

To: Mike Ebert <mebert@namb.net>

Subject: Re: Agenda

Hi Mike,

I'd still like a copy of the new policy manual or brief description of changes. Please!

Did any involve alcoholic beverages?

Joni B.Hannigan
Jacksonville, Florida

On Jun 11, 2018, at 4:55 PM, Ebert, Mike <mebert@namb.net> wrote:

Here you go.



Mike Ebert

Executive Director, Public Relations
North American Mission Board
4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022
770.410.6502
NAMB.net

<Full Board Agenda - June 11 2018.pdf>

Exhibit M



Global

News Analysis **Opinion** Curated Storytelling More

DONATE

SUBSCRIBE

SEARCH Q

'Un-friendly' fire in the Southern Baptist Convention unearths layers of deceit, resurfaces old wounds

OPINION JONI B. HANNIGAN | JUNE 2, 2022



The bombshell investigative report of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee by Guidepost Solutions comes as no surprise, given each of the items mentioned is hardly new. What is new is that these items have been "objectively" considered by a third party and gathered into one document that lays bare Southern Baptists propensity to cover up sin at the highest levels in order to maintain a façade of being without perpetrators and bullies.

It's about time we come clean with our own accounts of "unfriendly" fire that are neither mistakes nor are they anything but deliberate withholdings of information that should cause those in the pews to pause at what our appointed and elected leadership consider of no import for the rest of us to know.

Key in this is the responsibility of our communications teams and those who lead them. Many have looked the other way while some have provided misleading or incomplete information that skirts critical issues facing our denomination.

Some have purposefully sabotaged the truth in order to push their own agendas — claiming they are doing the "Lord's" work.

"Doublespeak" is a phrase tossed about in our SBC world. This goes beyond even doublespeak, however. It has been deliberate and ambiguous at the same time.

How I was sidelined



Joni Hannigan

Get BNG headlines in your inbox

SUBSCRIBE

FEATURED



'Something wonderful and of God is happening at Asbury,' church historian believes

ANALYSIS



Abortion safe havens and deserts: Where a woman can and cannot access an abortion in the United States right now

ANALYSIS



Beth Moore's memoir doesn't name names, but it tells a story of grit and grace

NEWS



Why do politicians lie? Because it works — and shame on us

OPINION

In 2018 — just as I sought to resurrect my career as a Southern Baptist news writer, having taken time for therapy and restoration following a series of devastating traumas worsened by sexual assault that occurred years before in the military — I was sidelined by one of Southern Baptists most popular current leaders.

Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board, apparently took exception to the fact that I placed his name in a post-convention news analysis, “[Was SBC #METOO resolution on abuse a band aid for larger issues?](#)” that I posted on my own fledgling new website.

The charismatic, Mr. Friendly, church planting leader threatened to sue me for libel.

Within hours of posting a story about the abuse resolution passed by messengers in Dallas at the 2018 SBC annual meeting, I received a threatening [text message](#) to my cell phone from Mike Ebert, NAMB’s executive director of public relations.

“The charismatic, Mr. Friendly, church planting leader threatened to sue me for libel.”

“Joni — I think you have put yourself into a potentially libelous situation. I am asking you and encouraging you in the strongest way possible to remove what you have posted about Kevin. I wish you had called to discuss this with me ahead of time.”

Out to dinner with my family, I quickly glanced at the message and then promptly lost my appetite. I was somewhat confused at first. Never would I have so casually referred to Ezell as “Kevin.”

I was pretty dumbfounded a man wielding such a great amount of power threatened to come after me for a few paragraphs analyzing previously written news stories. But by this point I had an epiphany and wondered if Ezell also was the reason I was offered no classes as an adjunct at a Southern Baptist College, where I’d taught 24 classes in two years, or whether he was the reason I had virtually no contract work with Southern Baptists, despite just two years previously having earned [top awards](#) for my [news writing and coverages](#).

It also struck me that months before, at the 2018 annual meeting, the Baptist Press newsroom editor told me I might be invited back to work with the team if I didn’t write any more “Will McRaney” updates. I dismissed his remark out of hand because I had written only one, for a state paper editor who asked.

What I wrote

As for my news analysis, it did not spare other top leaders by name. It includes, among others, Frank Page, Paige Patterson, Albert Mohler and C.J. Mahaney. It includes a quote by SBC Resolutions Committee Chairman Jason Duesing and refers to Russell Moore. The story includes references to Boz Tchividjian and Rachael Denhollander, along with Willy Rice, a Florida pastor and NAMB trustee.

My reference to Ezell concerned a situation that occurred at the church he served as pastor before he went to NAMB in 2010. According to documented news reports and court records, he was asked to appear before a grand jury in 2004 to testify in the case of a subsequently convicted child molester who had served at the church’s ministry and school for more than a dozen years. At the center of the

“As for my news analysis, it did not spare other top leaders by name.”

CURATED



Poll: Support for abortion rights is strong, even among most religious groups



How big Christian nationalism has come courting in North Idaho



Investments

LDS Church And Investment Fund To Pay \$5 Million To SEC For Failing To Disclose Equity



Neo-Nazis rally outside Broadway preview of ‘Parade,’ about an antisemitic murder

issue was the use of clergy/penitent privilege, something that had been invoked in this case — and something about which Ezell has given various reports. At that time, Ezell also apparently **told media** he did not expect the church would announce the attacker’s arrest to the congregation.

Given that no others had objected to my analysis and NAMB had not responded to a brief description I wrote and posted Feb. 3, 2019, I was beyond surprised at what happened next after the ominous text message sent by Ebert.

How I was accused

A document titled “Background Information from Kevin Ezell” was distributed at the annual meeting of state Baptist papers and editors on Feb. 12 and emailed to the same and others.

The letter, forwarded to me by a former colleague (I resigned my position at *Florida Baptist Witness* in 2014), addresses a “news analysis” posted on a “blog” and mentions two accusers. There is no doubt Ezell, in the document sent out, is referencing me and Will McRaney. McRaney the day before had emailed NAMB trustees a letter that included a reference to Ebert’s text message to me.

In the document, Ezell states: “Neither of the people circulating misinformation about me contacted me to ask for my side of the story. By their actions, I must conclude that at least part of their goal is to assassinate my character, attack my credibility and undermine my leadership of NAMB, so I am obliged to address these attacks, regardless of how unethical the tactics of those who are attacking.”

In fact, Ebert goes further to malign me in an email sent to NAMB partners at the same time and says NAMB welcomes “any questions,” but follows up by offering the same document, from Ezell’s personal viewpoint, which Ebert says, “is an example of a situation that was handled well by a church and a pastor.”

What happened in Louisville?

However, there is no report in Baptist Press of Ezell’s excellent handling of this sex abuse situation, if indeed it is such a shining example of how a church and pastor are to operate, nor is there a report in any other news outlet of which I am aware, of the perspective he presents. I am astonished by this glaring lack of news reporting, given the current climate of churches and the reporting of sex abuse and safety.

Indeed, my brief reference, in the context of #MeToo and the resolution passed at the 2018 SBC in Dallas, simply glanced on issues I believe continue to be problematic. Chiefly, I asked the question of the Resolutions Committee chairman about “clergy/penitent privilege” because I suspect many younger people might not even know of its existence or use.

To ignore the question seemed reckless and misguided, or at the very least, ignorant.

A news analysis provides a perspective that goes beyond basic newswriting. It could be said an expert considers the facts and draws a conclusion. Inferences can be made, and typically are made. Events that occur could be explained in particular ways. A news analysis also can address consequences.

“I asked the question of the Resolutions Committee chairman about “clergy/penitent privilege” because I suspect many

I shared the same information in an email I copied to members of the SBC Executive Committee Dec. 12, 2019, briefly describing the threatening text from NAMB following my disclosure of mistreatment by Baptist Press personnel and publication of my story about the sex abuse resolution at the 2018 SBC annual meeting. Included in the email were Jonathan Howe, Ronnie Floyd, Mike Stone, Rolland Slade and James P. Guenther.

younger people might not even know of its existence or use.”

My credentials

I am not the most learned person in any given room, but I will claim some knowledge in this field. I have been a writer for more than 40 years. I have taught journalism at the collegiate and high school level and trained interns. I was managing editor of a Baptist state paper for nearly 12 years and editor of a religious paper for another two. I have covered the SBC annual meetings from 1987 until 2018 and served as news editor in the Baptist Press newsroom for the Executive Committee during SBC annual meetings from 2002 until 2009.

I also am a sexual assault survivor. My attacker was both a Naval officer and a Southern Baptist deacon. I knew how important it was for me to heal after years of therapy and how I attempted to move on and to do what God has gifted me in. Writing.

It took one text, preceded by years of Baptist bullying, to knock me back down.

“It took one text, preceded by years of Baptist bullying, to knock me back down.”

Dallas might seem distant now; it was the last time I went to the SBC annual meeting. But I simply cannot be victimized time and again by the thoughtless and senseless folks who have no apparent compassion for those of us who unconsciously and consciously carry the scars of abuse.

My heart still aches with bittersweet memories when I think of how much I used to love telling the stories of the good news of God’s people at home and around the world, and for that opportunity, I will always be thankful.

It is bitter, however, to realize that instead of learning from our mistakes and being better, my worst fears have come true. The Guidepost report has revealed Southern Baptists did merely put a band-aid on a far larger problem.

No, certainly not, dear Jonathan Howe, now leading Baptist Press, I don’t wish to “burn down” anything, nor did I ever. I gave my life to building the kingdom. And as for Johnny Hunt and the trustees of our entire North American Mission Board, and indeed, our entire SBC leadership, you have some housecleaning and repenting to do. I hope you get to it.

Joni Hannigan is a veteran Southern Baptist journalist who lives in St. Augustine, Fla. This article originally appeared on her own [website](#) and is reprinted here with permission.

Related articles:

Home / U.S.

Southern Baptist state leaders accuse mission organization of strong arming

by [Joni B. Hannigan](#), Editorial Staff | 11 May, 2016



NOTE: Since this article was first published, NAMB president Kevin Ezell, has written an article "How NAMB-State Convention Cooperation Agreements Work" and has stated NAMB's preference is Cooperative Agreements "be available to anyone" but that because of the "stated preference of some of the conventions" there is a "confidentiality" clause in the documents. [Read full article here](#)

ATLANTA (Christian Examiner) – Several Southern Baptist state conventions leaders have accused the denomination's North American Mission Board (NAMB) of linking financial support from the national entity — funding for church planting and other ministries — to secretive Cooperative Agreements which include a clause that threatens to withhold ministry funds to the states if disclosures about the agreement — or concerns — are shared publicly.

Cooperation is the essential bond among Southern Baptists whose 46,500 churches are autonomous, but historically have rallied together around a common theology and the desire to work together in evangelistic missions at home and abroad.

Local associations, state conventions and the national denomination (which includes domestic and overseas mission boards and an extensive seminary education system) each adhere to a system of independent governance — driven by elections, boards and appointments — that provides accountability to the churches which ultimately are the centers of sustainability for a massive system of financing and budgets which includes special offerings, but for long-term health and growth relies heavily on the systematic and regular offerings of its members.

Increasingly, however, the particulars of how funds are distributed to state conventions (essentially returning a portion of what was sent to the national convention from the churches of these same state conventions) has come under scrutiny after revelations that NAMB places a restriction on the distribution of funds tied to the silence of state leaders about the "Cooperative Agreements" which in essence places 100 percent control of church planting in these states with NAMB.

Breaking the secrecy not only puts funding from NAMB at risk, but may even lead to dismissal, some state convention executive directors say.

The gag orders come at a time when Southern Baptists have [reorganized](#) their domestic missions strategy to focus on church planting as the primary means of evangelizing North America.

But statistics show, after five years, NAMB has fallen [far short of the goals](#) set as part of its reorganization.

Four current state executive directors — and a former one who claims he was terminated, in part, over disagreements related to the terms of a Cooperative Agreement — recently agreed to interviews with the *Christian Examiner*.

FORMER STATE EXECUTIVE CLAIMS WRONGDOING

Following an [assertion](#) by Will McRaney, former executive missional strategist of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, whose two-year tenure ended June 9 of last year, that he was fired after Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board, threatened to withdraw mission funding for the state convention unless state leadership dismissed him – *Christian Examiner* spoke with Randy Adams and Nate Adams, and two other state executives who confirmed there are concerns about the way the Cooperative Agreements are written.

"Unfortunately, I can't really discuss our state's Cooperative Agreement with you," one state executive told *Christian Examiner*. "I signed an agreement with them that I couldn't say anything critical of them and since I can't really define what that means – I can't say anything further. Our funding is dependent upon that."

Another state executive answered questions about his state and NAMB and how they partner together for church planting and evangelism, and are able to determine the location and number of church plants – but drew the line at talking about funding for these initiatives.

"There is a non-disclosure clause" in the agreement he signed, the state executive told *Christian Examiner*. "If I violate the agreement, that jeopardizes our agreement and I'm respectful of it."

On further thought, that executive stated "this is a new piece of the puzzle" and that previously the state executives worked under a collective agreement he believed was more "helpful" to all involved.

"I personally don't see a need for it to remain confidential," he said. "It is a little cumbersome."

The new confidentiality does not hinder the work between state executives, however, he admitted. "I can call any of the directors and they tell me where they stand. I'm sure this violates the letter of the law and violates the Cooperative Agreement; so it's a little awkward."

FUNDING, SUPERVISION, HEALTHCARE

Until the last few years, NAMB provided funding and health insurance at various levels in a number of non-traditional state conventions for missionary/employees, while the states provided supervision and the remaining funding.

Increasingly and with a new strategic plan, NAMB moved to grant 100 percent of funding and health insurance for positions while also providing direct supervision for those positions – which states counted on to continue to do ministry. In addition, NAMB is increasingly working directly through Send North America (SNA) cities and through what is called sending churches.

In order for NAMB to agree to fund those missionaries at 100 percent, it required the state to enter into a Cooperative Agreement with a non-disclosure statement, according to Randy Adams, executive director of the Northwest Baptist Convention.

More than 20 states initially entered into 100 percent agreements, but an estimated 6-7 states, including the NBC, opted against such an arrangement, after which time they were notified that their workers would lose health insurance if they would not agree to the new arrangements, Adams said.

Although Adams said he believes "NAMB's leveraging of health insurance pressured states into entering into the 100 percent agreement," the NBC was able to work out a plan by which the strategy for the state convention is localized.

"I felt like it was vital and important that the staff in the Northwest Convention had one employer and the strategy in the Northwest should be a local strategy and not a national strategy," Adams told *Christian Examiner*.

Adams previously addressed church planting in a [commentary published](#) in a Baptist state newspaper. He noted several state conventions had reduced staffs in order to send more money to mission enterprises via the Cooperative Program, but even so, "we are also planting fewer churches than we did a decade ago."

With the churches of the Northwest Convention contributing over \$3.5 million to the Cooperative Program, Annie Armstrong Offering, and Lottie Moon offering (over \$1.5 million of which is sent on to the SBC executive committee from the pioneer state), Adams said he is aware of the importance of cooperation.

That's why he appreciates NAMB's efforts, he said. Still, the difference is, "we used to collaborate with them ... but now we are told the decisions that are made for us."

Adams told *Christian Examiner* he believes McRaney raised several of these concerns in his recent postings regarding NAMB and although he has not yet heard NAMB address specifics of the situation, he said, "I trust Will."

"To me the accusations are very serious allegations and the specifics of those allegations, I think, require a response," said Adams, who told *Christian Examiner* he previously served as a trustee for a Southern Baptist seminary for 10 years. "They have basically just dismissed [McRaney's accusations] without dealing with the particulars of the allegations."

McRaney told *Christian Examiner* he believed NAMB trustees were "dismissive" and "uninformed" in rebuffing several requests he made to meet with them and discuss his situation.

Other than being sent a letter by NAMB attorneys within hours of receiving a letter from trustee officers who denied any wrongdoing — which McRaney characterized as an attempt to "shut me down again" — he claims the situation has received scant attention.

NAMB JUSTIFIED IN CONFIDENTIALITY

Nate Adams, executive director of the Illinois Baptist State Association and no relation to the Northwest Convention's Randy Adams, spoke with *Christian Examiner* with the understanding that his state has entered into a Cooperative Agreement with NAMB that puts limits on what he can say about it.

Speaking positively, however, he said, "so far so good, we are cautiously optimistic" about the arrangement.

Offering an explanation for the rationale behind the agreements, Nate Adams said he believes there has been a "rocky road" between some state conventions and NAMB and that in an effort to provide strategic and focused efforts, they have moved ahead in this manner.

"NAMB is providing the funding," Adams said, adding that initially Illinois did hold out on the 100 percent agreement but the additional expense of health insurance was "a financial burden we couldn't bear."

Making it clear this is NAMB's "prerogative," Adams added that when it came to the states initially reluctant to enter into an agreement, "Will [McRaney] had the most severe conflict and Randy (in the Northwest Baptist Convention) is the last man standing, but most of the mid-size states saw the inevitability."

UNITY DESPITE DIFFICULTIES

Randy Adams said despite the difficulties, churches in the Northwest are experiencing a "resurgence" of growth with increased baptisms and Cooperative Program giving.

"At the same time, I believe fear has kept people from standing together and speaking out and addressing serious concerns and questions," Adams said.

Real unity is dependent on leaders standing up "under the light of day," he said.

Although secrecy about a Cooperative Agreement may keep a particular state executive and others mum about issues they would rather lay out on the table, one state executive (who asked for anonymity) said this "won't breed division" among state leaders.

In his opinion, "somewhere along the line there is a breakdown of trust ... and it's not between the executive directors," he said.

Forecasting what he hopes are better days ahead, the state executive said: "We all strive for unity and we would like to see nothing more than that there would be a return to a broad scale union between the state conventions, the associations, and the entities. That would be the pinnacle in the Southern Baptist Convention work for the future — that we have no boundaries, feel no concerns, and have no pressure.

"I do see more of a drive towards unity and would really love to see that continue on," he mused. "To not look for anyone to be raked over the coals."

Search here	Go
-------------	----

Friday February 24, 2023

Like us on



Latest News

Should churches comply with California's ban on singing?

Jailed pastor's son 'bludgeoned' with baton, detained by Vietnamese police amid US ambassador's visit

Abortions in Indiana fell by 5% in 2019: gov't report

Calif. issues ban on singing in churches amid ongoing pandemic

'Uncertain and unsettling': China approves controversial Hong Kong security law

Most US Christians uncomfortable with returning to church: survey

Spike in violence, profanity on TV shows rated OK for kids

Bioethics panel: Why ignoring ethics yields horrors, abuses; media deceives about human costs

Christians risk arrest if they display Bible in Saudi Arabia, persecution watchdog group warns

Russell Moore warns Christians face spiritual warfare 'all the time;' identifies 2 ways Satan attacks

Resources

- [Finding God](#)
- [Movie Reviews](#)
- [Online Bible](#)

Ways To Get CE

- [Facebook](#)
- [RSS](#)
- [Twitter](#)

Sections

- [US](#)
- [World](#)
- [Church & Ministry](#)

[Society](#)

- [Life](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Comment](#)

[Archives](#)

- [Finding God](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)

Christian Examiner® © 2023 All Rights Reserved. info@christianexaminer.com

[Click to Login or Sign Up](#)



February 24,
2023
1:49:50 PM

- [About](#)
 - [Archive](#)
 - [Contact](#)
 - [John 3:16](#)
 - [Louisiana](#)
 - [U.S. & Intl](#)
 - [Facts & Finds](#)
 - [Culture & Society](#)
- [Editorial](#) [Cartoons](#)



Will McRaney, formerly the executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware (BCMD), filed the 7-page lawsuit April 7 in Winston

MESSAGE TRUSTEES TO MEET MARCH 7
ALEXANDRIA, La. (LBM) -- Trustees of the Baptist Message will gather for the regular spring meeting on March 7 in the Louisiana Baptist Building in Alexandria. Committees will meet in the morning, and the general session will begin at 1 p.m.

— Louisiana Baptist Children's Home & Family Ministries —

IMMEDIATE JOB OPENINGS!

Social Workers Needed

Two full-time social workers needed: one for Alexandria and one for Baton Rouge. Positions include salary, benefits, and paid vacation. Minimal requirement: LMSW. Must demonstrate proficient speaking and writing skills. Must be able to work independently. Some travel required. Must have a sense of call and commitment to a ministry of service to children and families.

Send resume to: Susan.Nolan@lbch.org or LBCH, PO Box 4196, Monroe, LA 71211.



WM06274

County, Miss., alleging numerous instances of "slander and/or libel." He also claimed "intentional interference by NAMB leaders" had caused him to be "uninvited" to a large mission emphasis scheduled there in October of 2016 and to the Florida Baptist Pastors' Conference in November of 2016.

NAMB tells court McRaney controversy is 'ecclesiastical' matter

MAY 26, 2017

By Joni B. Hannigan, Special to the Message

ABERDEEN, Miss. – Claiming state and federal courts have no jurisdiction in "ecclesiastical matters," the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board filed an official response May 18 to a lawsuit by a former state convention leader which accused the mission board of ongoing interference in the minister's employment relationships and continued business dealings.

Will McRaney, formerly the executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware (BCMD), filed the 7-page lawsuit April 7 in Winston County, Miss., alleging numerous instances of "slander and/or libel." He also claimed "intentional interference by NAMB leaders" had caused him to be "uninvited" to a large mission emphasis scheduled there in October of 2016 and to the Florida Baptist Pastors' Conference in November of 2016.

BACKGROUND

Previously McRaney publicized claims on his website and through communications with reporters that NAMB's president, Kevin Ezell, initially had become involved in his affairs by unfairly inserting himself into the business of the Maryland convention – a move McRaney said resulted in his June 8, 2015, termination.

McRaney told the *Baptist Message* that only four months earlier, Feb. 2015, the BCMD board of trustees had voted unanimously to express their support and confidence in his leadership, and, also unanimously rejected the new SPA being pushed by NAMB.

BCMD leaders chose instead to keep in place the 2012 agreement which was still governing their relationship with the SBC entity, he said.

NAMB acknowledged in its 10-page response it did notify BCMD on Dec. 2, 2014 of its intent to terminate its church planting and evangelism partnership agreement with BCMD effective the following year, which meant cutting \$1 million in funding from the state, but denied any wrongdoing in its actions, claiming, "NAMB was entitled to issue such notice under the SPA [Strategic Partnership Agreement] given the facts and circumstances as they existed at the time."

OUR SHORT TERM FUND RATE IS
12X BIGGER
THAN BANK RATES

One of the highest in the state for churches and other ministries on cash savings

LOUISIANA BAPTIST FOUNDATION
877-523-4636
contact@LBInfo.org

SHORT TERM FUND RATE
2.56%
CURRENT RATES

RATES SUBJECT TO CHANGE. **BASED UPON INTERNAL DATA.

INSURANCE FOR CHURCHES
Since 1916

Spengler-Stewart
agency, inc.

100 YEARS
Serving the Insurance Needs of Louisiana

Call 318.442.0269

lardoin@spenglerstewart.com
www.spenglerstewart.com

LOUI ARDOIN & PAUL D. STEWART

EDITORIAL



Twenty presidents who spoke on Bible and Christianity

On the rare occasions America looks to her history, the legacy media reports her presidents' virtues and vices (real or imagined). Yet they purposefully omit American presidents' firm conviction in Jesus Christ, the Bible, and the indispensable role the Christian religion has played in establishing, undergirding, ... [Read More](#)

SEARCH

WM06275

"Those facts included Plaintiff's causing BCMD to violate the agreement and his efforts to hinder and interfere with the SPA," NAMB's response reads.

McRaney, in the interview, said he became increasingly marginalized and estranged from NAMB leadership when he asked questions about a new SPA the entity desired state conventions to sign.

At that time, BCMD contributions through the Cooperative Program to national causes typically resulted in a distribution of about \$500,000 to NAMB.

Search this website

Trending

Recent

Must Read

Trending



**Fire destroys
New Friendship
facilities** By

Baptist Message POLLOCK, La.
(LBM) – A fire destroyed the...



**Former Angola
inmate Hyde
begins**

**Mississippi prison
ministry** By Brian Blackwell,
Baptist Message staff writer
PARCHMAN, M...



**FIRST PERSON:
My Asbury
Journey** By Don

Pucik, Special to the Baptist
Message ASBURY, Ky. (LB...



**Beth Moore
charges SBC
conservatives**

**with 'sin', recants 2009
statement on
'homosexual sin'** By Will
Hall, Executive Editor
HOUSTON (LBM) -- LifeWay's
be...

Picture behind Welcome Desk at NAMB



McRaney said there was talk among state leaders about responding to NAMB's threat to withhold \$1 million in funding by simply withholding NAMB's portion of the BCMD's Cooperative Program gifts to national causes to partially make up (about \$500,000) for the shortfall NAMB was threatening to create.

He said this proposal likely mobilized NAMB to act quickly to pressure BCMD to terminate him.

WM06277

"This new SPA was designed by NAMB and contained numerous changes that gave NAMB more controls over the financial resources and the hiring, supervising and firing of staff positions of the state conventions, and eliminated all jointly-funded staff positions," McRaney alleges in his lawsuit.

NAMB's legal response comes nearly a year after NAMB trustees in June 2016 adopted a recommendation indicating they had investigated the issues involved in McRaney's termination from BCMD and were "satisfied that this matter has been reviewed thoroughly and consider this matter concluded."

In its response, though NAMB denies publishing any defamatory statement regarding McRaney or interfering with his "alleged business or contractual relationships," it also argues on several counts it is protected by "absolute privilege," and/or "qualified privilege" to publish negative statements about McRaney.

MCRANEY RESPONDS

McRaney told the Louisiana Message he is "saddened" by the NAMB response he believes is "full of deceptions and false statements."

"My hope is that God's Word and the word of love would have guided this, and I'm disappointed that truth hasn't won out," he said. "It's beneath them — the North American Mission Board and their attorneys — to write this kind of reply."

Responding to NAMB's assertions they had offered to meet with him, McRaney said he would rather they had done the "biblical" thing — he says he had requested for 20 months before he felt he had no other option but file his lawsuit — which would have been to admit wrongdoing and make restitution.

As for NAMB's claim this is an "ecclesiastical" matter not in the court's jurisdiction because of a "ministerial exemption," McRaney said Southern Baptist agencies and entities, unlike other denominations, are autonomous.

"There is no hierarchy in the SBC," McRaney said. "I did not work for or report to NAMB. I was never an employee of NAMB as it related to my work in Maryland."

At the root of his lawsuit, McRaney said are two issues that beg for answers:

— "Will Southern Baptists and the courts tolerate Dr. Ezell's lies and interference with state partners and executive directors and then to continue to damage ministers by posting pictures and making calls to interfere with their employment?"

— "Will NAMB trustees actually seek truth and administer justice or whether they want a court to seek truth and administer justice for them?"

McRaney, in his lawsuit, references evidence given to him by a "national SBC agency board member" which shows an 8 x 10 mug shot of the former state executive taped inside the ledge of the front desk at NAMB's headquarters in Alpharetta, Ga., apparently for security purposes.

"It was sad and a reflection on the character and person of Kevin Ezell to instruct someone to take my picture print it and put it up or to just give approval to it," McRaney said.

NAMB's response acknowledges McRaney's photo was "situated" in its reception area at some time, but denies causing "additional damage" to him.

McRaney – who earned two degrees from New Orleans Seminary: a doctor of philosophy degree in evangelism and discipleship in 1992 and a master of divinity degree in biblical studies in 1989 – disagrees. "Posting my picture was continuing harm," he said. "It was vindictive. It was as if I was a criminal or dangerous. It was a warning against me and I am the one who has already been victimized by the strong-arming of Kevin Ezell and the North American Mission Board."

FLORIDA LEADER AFFIRMS MCRANEY'S CLAIM

Without naming the president of the Florida Baptist Pastors' Conference, McRaney's legal filing accuses Ezell of continuing to interfere with his employment possibilities as recently as November of 2016.

McRaney said Ezell called an influential pastor, who in turn called the pastors' conference president to interfere with him speaking.

Joel Breidenbaugh, pastor of First Baptist Sweetwater in Longwood, Fla., and the president of the 2016 Florida Baptist Pastors' Conference, confirmed he received a phone call from an influential Florida Baptist pastor about McRaney's participation in the pastors' conference.

"I was contacted by a Florida pastor who had received a call from Kevin Ezell, who was really upset that I was having Will McRaney as a speaker for the pastors' conference," Breidenbaugh said. "The implication was I should not have him speak, but if he did, I was to ensure he would not bring up anything about NAMB and his role in Maryland-Delaware."

ABOUT MCRANEY

Originally from Dade City, Fla., McRaney was unanimously recommended for the Maryland post in 2013, after serving as team strategist for Florida Baptist Convention's English-speaking church planting team in Jacksonville, Fla. Previously he directed the convention's evangelism strategy department.

He was a professor of evangelism and church planting at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996-2007, and also has served as adjunct

professor of evangelism and church planting at Liberty Baptist Seminary in Lynchburg, Va., and as adjunct professor at Denver Seminary and Colorado Christian University.

He is the author of several books, including "The Choice: Life's Most Important Decisions — 40 Day Experience," published by LifeWay Christian Resources, 2005, and the widely used "The Art of Personal Evangelism: Sharing Christ in a Changing Culture," published by Broadman & Holman, 2003.

McRaney was the founding pastor of Life Church in Mandeville, La., 1997-99; lead pastor at Daybreak Community Church in Littleton, Colo., 1992-1996; and pastor of Jackson Avenue Baptist Church in Pascagoula, Miss., 1987-1991.

LAGNIAPPE

NAMB is asking for dismissal of the lawsuit, but also asks that if it proceeds the case be transferred from the U.S. District Court Northern District of Mississippi to the U.S. District Court Northern District of Georgia, where NAMB's corporate offices are located.

For more information, go to NAMB.net and WillMcRaney.com.

Joni B. Hannigan is a veteran Southern Baptist journalist living in Jacksonville, Fla.

Related articles:

<http://christianexaminer.com/article/southern-baptist-state-leaders-accuse-mission-organization-of-strong-arming/50691.htm>

<http://christianexaminer.com/article/breaking-nambs-kevin-ezell-defends-confidential-cooperation-agreements/50717.htm>

<http://christianexaminer.com/article/namb-trustees-end-investigation-involving-former-state-convention-leader/50793.htm>

<http://christianexaminer.com/article/former-sbc-state-leader-charges-mission-board-with-cover-up-of-wrongdoing/50796.htm>

Comments

Home / U.S.

NAMB's Kevin Ezell denies confidential 'Cooperation Agreements' are 'gag orders'

by [Joni B. Hannigan](#), Editorial Staff | 18 May, 2016



ALPHARETTA, Ga. (Christian Examiner) – Kevin Ezell, president of the Southern Baptist Convention North American Mission Board, May 17 refuted accusations that "Cooperation Agreements" signed by state executives are "gag orders," but instead said they are "simply a commitment of charity and trust."

Last week, several Southern Baptist state leaders accused NAMB of linking financial support from the national entity to the agreements that were said to include a non-disclosure agreement. NAMB declined to respond to *Christian Examiner's* request for comment, but posted an [article](#) on the organization's website May 17.

If the allegations presented by these Southern Baptist state executives are true, then Dr. Ezell has overstepped his bounds and forfeited the trust of all Southern Baptists. Appropriate action should be taken.

"Though NAMB's preference has always been that these documents be available to anyone, currently, the agreement includes a sentence stating 'confidentiality' because that was the stated preference of some of the conventions," Ezell wrote. "Funding amounts for non-south states differ by state based upon convention size, lostness and other factors."

Other than funding, Ezell said the basic terms of the agreements with the non-south states are "the same in content."

"While I would prefer that Southern Baptists, and all the state conventions, know what the funding budgets are for the other states, NAMB has honored the request for confidentiality and will continue to do so," he said.

States that want to share Cooperation Agreements may do so by notifying NAMB, Ezell said, noting the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana agreed to publicize its [partnership agreement](#).

Ezell also noted in 2010 when he became president "NAMB was commonly criticized for not having a strategy and not being focused," he wrote. "With leadership from our trustees, we narrowed NAMB's focus. It is NAMB's assigned responsibility to provide accountability for every dollar spent on the mission field."

'PETITION' TO NAMB TRUSTEES

Ezell's comments came a day after Rick Patrick, pastor of First Baptist Church in Sylacauga, Alabama, and founding director of Connect 316, posted a [petition](#) on the SBC Today blog calling for NAMB trustees to engage in an "independent investigation" of how Ezell interacts with state conventions.

In the petition, Patrick references the non-disclosure agreements noted in a [Christian Examiner article](#) published May 11, and issues raised by five state executives including Will McRaney, the former executive missional strategist of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware whose tenure ended June 9 of last year.

"If the [allegations](#) presented by these Southern Baptist state executives are true, then Dr. Ezell has overstepped his bounds and forfeited the trust of all Southern Baptists," Patrick wrote in the petition. "Appropriate action should be taken."

EZELL SAYS PARTNERSHIPS POSITIVE

In the blog, Ezell said, "NAMB's partnerships are positive and working well," explaining the mission organization works with churches, associations and state conventions. We are grateful for all of our partners."

He noted "Southern Baptists entrust NAMB with about \$120 million annually "to help our churches reach North America for Christ. That is a trust I guard carefully."

There are 27 non-south state conventions that Ezell said rely on NAMB for much of their ministry funding, from a total of 42 state conventions.

"We have an enormous and important task, and we face an enemy that doesn't play fair," Ezell wrote. "It's a privilege to work with state leaders who are passionate about reaching people for Christ and committed to pushing back lostness in North America.

'The overwhelming majority of state executives we work with are very competent and strategic leaders," Ezell continued. "They deserve your full support and engagement at the state level."

Ezell's article did not directly reference the McRaney controversy, nor the petition being circulated.

<input type="text" value="Search here"/>	<input type="button" value="Go"/>
--	-----------------------------------

Like us on



Latest News

Should churches comply with California's ban on singing?

Jailed pastor's son 'bludgeoned' with baton, detained by Vietnamese police amid US ambassador's visit

Abortions in Indiana fell by 5% in 2019: gov't report

Calif. issues ban on singing in churches amid ongoing pandemic

'Uncertain and unsettling': China approves controversial Hong Kong security law

Most US Christians uncomfortable with returning to church: survey

Spike in violence, profanity on TV shows rated OK for kids

Bioethics panel: Why ignoring ethics yields horrors, abuses; media deceives about human costs

Christians risk arrest if they display Bible in Saudi Arabia, persecution watchdog group warns

Russell Moore warns Christians face spiritual warfare 'all the time;' identifies 2 ways Satan attacks

Resources

[Finding God](#)
[Movie Reviews](#)
[Online Bible](#)

Ways To Get CE

[Facebook](#)
[RSS](#)
[Twitter](#)

Sections

[US](#)
[World](#)
[Church & Ministry](#)

[Society](#)

[Life](#)

[Entertainment](#)

[Comment](#)

[Archives](#)

[Finding God](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)



About

Disciplemaking at heart of NAMB urban church planting



By *Joni B. Hannigan*

RIDGECREST N.C. – Dhati Lewis wants to remind pastors and church planters that a call to the pastorate is not merely a call to preach.

Fresh from leading a workshop at the Black Church Leadership and Family Conference at Ridgecrest Conference Center July 21–26, Lewis said he wants pastors to understand their role is more than preaching, and that church planting and discipleship are two sides of the same coin.

“Discipleship needs to be at the heart of church planting,” said Lewis, director of the Send North America Rebuild Initiative. “I wasn’t called as a pastor so I could preach. I was called as a pastor so I could make disciples.”

Discipleship is holistic

Discipleship is more than one-on-one mentoring, Lewis said, and involves a “holistic” approach to capturing the culture and creating a unique environment.

Preaching can be used as a platform, but putting a lot of pressure on something reduced to a 35-minute time slot can take the focus off the task Jesus put forth in Scripture “to make disciples,” Lewis said.

Young African American pastors attending the event produced by LifeWay Christian Resources were excited about planting churches in urban areas, Lewis said.

Other North American Mission Board (NAMB) staff who led workshops included Gary Frost, vice president, Midwest Region and Prayer and Jeff Christopherson, vice president, Northeast and Canada Regions. Frost led sessions on urban revival and awakening and Christopherson presented *Kingdom Matrix*.

Frost, experienced in leading congregations in the urban core, agrees with Lewis’ assessment of discipleship as more than just on-on-one mentoring, or what Frost further described as “intellectual engagement.”

“We need churches that can engage the school systems, provide sports mentoring and drama, and physical education and art,” Frost said, noting that many public schools have dropped what they consider non-essentials.

“We can step up and step in and we can’t preach the gospel [at schools], but we can go and be the light,” Frost said. “We need churches in the city that will engage the jails and the

medical system to bring light.”

Frost said many people have been turned off from going to church by negative personal encounters and so “living out Christ” in the presence of the community is key to church planting.

“We want to plant churches in the urban core that have in their DNA community involvement so that it’s not just something they do on the side, but it’s who they are—without losing their Christ-anchor. That’s true salt and light,” Frost said.

The urban church misunderstood

Lewis, pastor of the urban Blueprint Church launched in downtown Atlanta in 2010, said he is concerned urban is often misunderstood to mean “inner city.”

“Urban does not mean inner city,” Lewis said, quoting statistics he said indicate more than 50 percent of the world’s population—including professionals, young families and people of all ethnic and culture groups—now live in urban areas.

He defines urban as the places where density and diversity thrive in the cities.

“We have to realize what is going on with globalization and secularization,” he said, and in an effort to make disciples, the pastor and church members look around to see who their “neighbors” next door are.

People relocating from the city to the suburb have created “a huge shift that impacts everyone,” and there are no longer neighborhoods where all the “people look like me and talk like me,” for example, he said.

The implications for the church are staggering, Lewis predicted.

“If the church is going to be relevant in North America, we have to go from an ethnic missiology to a neighbor missiology,” he said. “There will be no majority culture.”

If Southern Baptist churches plant congregations in major urban centers—where much of the density and diversity is occurring rapidly—as the cities evolve and adapt, they will

become models of how local churches can stay relevant for the future, Lewis believes.

And as globalization rapidly increases, “We get a picture of how America will be; versus our preferences and our likes,” he said.

Citing a recent mission trip to Honduras where a team ministered among the Miskito Indians, Lewis said the Miskito’s first language was original to its people, its second language was Spanish, and its third language was hip hop.

“Here you have those people who don’t even speak English, rapping,” he laughed. “Globalization is already happening.”

No doubt social media and the Internet have increased the means by which globalization has occurred, Lewis said, but the diversity of the urban centers are merely reflected in the common space shared through such phenomena.

None of that, however, can take the place of human relationships.

“People are craving human touch and human relationships,” Lewis said. “That is where the disconnect is and that’s where the Church can make a difference—and that’s a critical component.”

Prayers for spiritual awakening

During the conference, Frost brought greetings at a NAMB-sponsored dinner for ministers and their wives and introduced a variety of leaders, including K. Marshall Williams Sr., president of the National African American Fellowship of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Williams, also pastor of Nazarene Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Penn., said afterwards that he was praying for a spiritual awakening that will bring “repentance for the sinner and revival for the saints.”

Stating his desire for church planting in the form of a prayer, Williams said: “We also pray that as we disciple or teach new believers how to walk with God, it will not only revive our churches but raise up New Testament churches not only in the urban community but everywhere in our nation.”

BLVD Conference—NAMB’s first gathering for and about the urban church—takes place October 23–25. For more information visit rebuildnetwork.org/blvd.

Joni B. Hannigan, a freelance writer in Houston, writes for the North American Mission Board.

PUBLISHED AUGUST 25, 2014



PRAY • GIVE • GO

Connect with Us



NEWS ARTICLES

Renovated theater to be multiethnic church

By **Joni B. Hannigan**, posted **November 24, 2014** in **North American Mission Board**

METADATA:

Topic(s): NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD

Format(s): TEXT ARTICLES

SHARE THIS POST:



[SLIDESHOW=39155,39156,39157]HOLLYWOOD, Fla. (BP) — When the house lights dim in South Florida’s historic Hollywood Playhouse and the spotlight trains on pastor Martin Vargas, he intends for a message to be center stage: “God knows; He changes lives; there is growth in the truth; and we are fulfilling the Great Commission.”

Vargas, a native of the Dominican Republic, appreciates the vision Hollywood Playhouse had for more than six decades in bringing live theater to its community.

But within a few months, Real Church, or Iglesias Real, will share the Gospel in Spanish, English and Portuguese at the newly renovated theater and will serve as a hub for church plants.

“I wanted to plant a church that is doctrinally sound and that has authentic Christians,” Vargas said. “If they speak English, fine. If they speak Spanish, fine.”

Reflecting on the meaning of the church, Vargas discovered “Real,” which in Spanish forms an acronym for, “know God, changing lives, growth in the truth and fulfilling the Great Commission.”

When Vargas saw the vintage theater in 2012 — a vandalized building with broken skylights — he wasn’t deterred. He saw a gift from God.

Just five years earlier, the theater had undergone a restorative facelift. A magazine described the 18,000-square-foot facility as a “full-service venue” with recording and dance studios, a sound stage, film-editing suites and a design shope.

In 2004, Vargas left a lucrative business to start a church in South Florida. Eight years later, with a passion to move the congregation to where they could have the greatest impact, he prayed about the \$1.5 million price tag for the two-acre theater property with its 300-seat auditorium.

The timing was not right and soon the bank that owned the property sold it to a Miami man who hoped to restore the declining theater.

“It was hard to compete with cash,” Vargas said.

After a two-year search Vargas led his congregation in a 40 Days of Prayer campaign. On the final day, he got a call. The bank wanted to meet. The man with the cash had been jailed on federal charges.

“That Monday was a divine appointment,” Vargas said. “I went to the meeting with my realtor, a member of my church, with the thought that, ‘I’m just a pastor with no money.’ I said, ‘If this is coming from God, I need to see God’s hand clearly.’”

Vargas could not believe what he heard at the meeting. The bank would lower the selling price to \$1.2 million and pay for the installation of new electrical wiring, 17 new air conditioning units and a new roof. The terms came with a “good faith” agreement to wait on part of the down payment and close in 90 days.

The only big expense the banker warned Vargas about was a need to purchase theater seats. At that point, Vargas started smiling. A local synagogue already had offered him 300 seats they no longer needed.

“The banker asked me if I believed in fate. I said, ‘No sir, I believe in God,’” Vargas remembers telling him. “Only God could do that.”

“I left the building that day with the confidence that the Lord was giving this property to us,” Vargas said.

With just three months to raise a quarter of a million dollars, Vargas, and his son Homer, who will lead the English-speaking congregation at Real, started a fundraising campaign. Sacrificial pledges and commitments poured in — some from fellow believers as far away as Bolivia and Nicaragua.

The bank called and moved the closing date up to June 26. They told Vargas to bring whatever he had in his hands. He still needed about \$70,000.

A local restaurant owner gave a large donation. A church member drove by and handed Vargas a check. A BBQ yielded several thousand dollars. Meanwhile renovations began, with members providing skilled labor to return the theater to its former luster.

Send North America: Miami city missionary Alex Comesañas organized a mission team from the Suwanee Baptist Association in the Florida Panhandle to assist through the North American Mission Board’s Send North America church-planting strategy.

The Suwanee team was “so impressed,” Comesañas said, they gave Vargas a check for \$6,000 on the spot.

It was the final amount needed to complete the down payment. Construction should be complete by the end of the year and the church plans to start meeting in the theater in early 2015.

“This has been a journey of faith and miracles,” Vargas said. “When you don’t have a problem, you don’t see miracles. In every situation, we find difficulties and possibilities. God will find a way.”

To learn more about Send North America: Miami, go to www.namb.net/Miami.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JONI B. HANNIGAN

RELATED POSTS

Appalachian Church Boosted by Zion’s Cause Baptist Church in Western Kentucky

Q&A with Mosaic Church Meeting in SBC Building

‘Class of 2018’ Church Plants Seeing Life Change

NEWS ARTICLES

Historic floods draw Baptist relief efforts

By **Joni Hannigan**, posted **May 29, 2015** in **North American Mission Board**

METADATA:

Topic(s): NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD

Format(s): TEXT ARTICLES

SHARE THIS POST:



HOUSTON (BP) — Southern Baptists of Texas Convention disaster relief leaders had “boots on the ground” in Houston Thursday (May 28) following a month of historic rains and tornadoes across Texas and Oklahoma that led to deadly flooding over Memorial Day weekend with at least 15 dead and hundreds evacuated.

While images of separated families in raging waters, floating cars, submerged intersections and uprooted caskets caught the nation’s attention and caused an outpouring of concern, Fritz Wilson, executive director for Southern Baptist Disaster Relief at the North American Mission Board, said it is each individual’s unique situation that becomes the focus of a volunteer’s effort.

Every team sent out by Southern Baptist Disaster Relief — the largest network of trained disaster relief volunteers in the United States — brings “help, healing and hope” to those affected by natural events, Wilson said.

“We are there to walk with them through cleaning and when they are beginning to try and get a handle on things so they can rebuild,” Wilson said. “Our folks are trained in how to provide not only physical needs, but also provide emotional and spiritual care in a disaster setting.

“In sending that team, we hope people see that God loves them and we are attempting to show them that — not just tell them,” Wilson said.

Volunteers ready when Houston waters recede

In Houston, Scottie Stice, director of Disaster Relief Ministries for the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC), said leaders are busy assessing needs after storms over the weekend dumped 6 to 11 inches of rain on the area.

“We want to see exactly which neighborhoods are under water and where they are in the city so that we can formulate our response,” Stice said, noting volunteers must wait until waters recede before they can begin to help.

Houston’s mayor on Tuesday (May 26) said there were at least 4,000 homes and businesses affected by floodwaters. More water may be expected by the weekend.

Texas Baptist Men also has volunteers on the ground in Houston assessing the situation and working with churches, said Terry Henderson, the organization’s director.

Henderson anticipated the Houston response — as well as those throughout other areas of the state — will be long and protracted.

“We will be calling on other states to help us,” Henderson said.

Massive flooding affects half of Oklahoma

Sam Porter, state director of disaster relief for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (BGCO), said this has been an unusual and record year in many ways for the state.

A record 25-30 small tornadoes spotted across Oklahoma were followed by two major tornadoes in Moore, Okla., in March, and then a massive amount of rain in May.

“We had been praying for the drought to break — we now have snorkels up,” he said.

In the past 10 days, Porter said the same system that overwhelmed Texas also impacted Oklahoma.

With a command center set up at First Baptist Church in Norman, Okla., Porter said volunteers are spreading out to meet tremendous needs with homes flooded in 38 of the state’s 77 counties.

With only two mud-out trailers to help, Porter said his greatest challenge has been to think about how to approach the situation.

“This thing is getting to biblical proportions,” Porter said. “We are having floods everywhere. There are not enough mud-out guys across the Southern Baptist Convention to handle this.”

So he prayed, and by Sunday night (May 24) came up with a plan to hold training sessions in order to multiply the laborers — by inviting leaders and volunteers from other faith-based groups and residents.

The training is being held regionally across the state by expertly-trained recovery instructors and there is no charge for those who want to attend, Porter said.

He also brought BGCO leaders on board to film a 30-minute instructional video to post on its website with steps on how to remove water and “wet stuff” and “kill the mold” in order to salvage a home.

“I’m trying to think God-sized here,” Porter said.

At NAMB, Wilson said he has heard from many Southern Baptists who wondered how they could help. In addition to urging prayer, the North American Mission Board sent out a semi-truck loaded down with supplies specifically needed for mud-out operations.

“Coordinating this response through our disaster response center for the body of Christ is really what makes the ministry to the one family, through the team happen,” he said.

Dozens of facemasks, shovels, rakes, wheelbarrows, water, disposable suits and other equipment left NAMB headquarters early Thursday morning (May 28).

In addition to mud-out operations in Norman, a mobile feeding unit began feeding 2,500 a day May 23. Another unit in Poteau is producing 750 hot meals a day.

Other volunteers are working across the state in Atoka, the Tulsa area, Waurika, Lawton and Elk City.

At the end of the day, it’s the recent memory of 21 people who accepted Christ in the middle of their flooded or tornado-torn homes that keeps Porter going.

“We do this because we love God,” he said. “We do disaster relief to earn the right to share the Gospel.”

Baptists across Texas

With “very strange” weather patterns across the Texas plains in May, Stice said its SBTC disaster relief ministry teams have been hard at work primarily in North Texas already — before the most recent severe thunderstorms hit.

When a wall of water forced rivers in Wimberly to rise to nearly 40 feet — 20 feet over what historians call the 500 year flood mark — Stice said he began to focus energy on asking volunteers to do whatever they could.

Flash floods there destroyed more than 350 homes and left up to 1,000 homeless, news reports have said.

“We were in 11 different places in May,” he said. SBTC disaster relief ministry teams are equipped for various operations including feeding, recovery with chainsaw, mud-out and blue tarp duties, communications, chaplains assessment, shower and laundry operations, water purification and more.

Stice said there is also an SBTS clean up and recovery crew working at the campus of Jacksonville College in Texas, and a mud-out team working at the home of a widow in Arlington.

Stice said he is appreciative of “closely coordinated, good relationships” in Texas between Southern Baptists and volunteer organizations like American Red Cross and The Salvation Army.

“It’s just heartbreaking, and we pray for the victims and the volunteers and churches as they volunteer for the ministry,” he said.

Southern Baptists have 65,000 trained volunteers — including chaplains — and 1,550 mobile units for feeding, chainsaw, mud-out, command, communication, child care, shower, laundry, water purification, repair/rebuild and power generation. Southern Baptist Disaster Relief is one of the three largest mobilizers of trained Disaster Relief volunteers in the United States, along with the American Red Cross and The Salvation Army.

For more information on how you can help Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, go to namb.net/disaster-relief-donations/.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JONI HANNIGAN

WM06298

NEWS ARTICLES

Urban church planting goes 'holistic'

By **Joni B. Hannigan**, posted **September 25, 2014** in **Church Planting**

METADATA:

Topic(s): CHURCH PLANTING

Format(s): TEXT ARTICLES

SHARE THIS POST:



ATLANTA (BP) — Discipleship needs to be “at the heart of church planting.”

Dhati Lewis “wasn’t called as a pastor so I could preach. I was called as a pastor so I could make disciples.”

Lewis is director of the Send North America Rebuild, a North American Mission Board initiative helping urban leaders create a culture of discipleship in the local church.

Lewis also pastors the inner-city Blueprint Church in Atlanta, where he is fostering a “holistic” approach to discipleship beyond one-on-one mentoring to transform urban culture.

Preaching can be used as a platform, but putting a lot of pressure on a 35-minute time slot can take the focus off the task Jesus put forth in Scripture “to make disciples,” Lewis said.

Lewis was among several NAMB leaders who led workshops during the Black Church Leadership and Family Conference at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Conference Center in July. Gary Frost, vice president for NAMB’s Midwest Region and for prayer, led sessions on urban revival and awakening.

Frost, experienced in leading congregations in the urban core, agreed with Lewis’ assessment of discipleship as more than just on-on-one mentoring, or what Frost described as “intellectual engagement.”

“We need churches that can engage the school systems, provide sports mentoring and drama, and physical education and art,” Frost said, noting that many public schools have dropped what they consider non-essentials.

“We can step up and step in. ... [W]e can’t preach the Gospel [at schools],” he said, “but we can go and be the light. We need churches in the city that will engage the jails and the medical system to bring light.”

Because many people have been turned off to church by negative personal encounters, Frost said church planting must entail “living out Christ” in the presence of the community.

“We want to plant churches in the urban core that have in their DNA community involvement so that it’s not just something they do on the side, but it’s who they are — without losing their Christ-anchor. That’s true salt and light,” Frost said.

Defining “urban”

Lewis said he is concerned that “urban” often is misunderstood to mean “inner city.”

More than half the world’s population — including professionals, young families and people of all ethnic and culture groups — now live in urban areas, Lewis said, defining urban as places of diversity and density in the cities.

“We have to realize what is going on with globalization and secularization,” Lewis said. People relocating within metro areas have created “a huge shift that impacts everyone,” he said; no longer are there neighborhoods where “people look like me and talk like me.” To make disciples, it has become imperative for pastors and church members to look around and see who their “neighbors” are.

“If the church is going to be relevant in North America, we have to go from an ethnic missiology to a neighbor missiology,” he said. “There will be no majority culture.” As globalization rapidly increases, he noted, “We get a picture of how America will be, versus our preferences and our likes.”

Citing a recent mission trip to Honduras where a team ministered among the Miskito Indians, Lewis said the Miskitos’ first language was original to its people, its second language was Spanish and its third language was hip hop.

“Here you have those people who don’t even speak English, rapping,” he laughed. “Globalization is already happening.”

Southern Baptist church plants in urban centers can become models of how churches can stay relevant as the cities evolve and adapt, Lewis said, noting, “People are craving human touch and human relationships. That is where the disconnect is and that’s where the church can make a difference.”

NAMB’s first gathering for and about the urban church — named “BLVD Conference — is scheduled for Oct. 23-25 in Atlanta. For more information visit <http://www.rebuildnetwork.org/blvd/>.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Truth is in crisis

The SBC struggles for integrity

#METOO

NEWS ANALYSIS: Was SBC #MeToo resolution on abuse a band aid for larger issues?



Date: June 26, 2018 **Author:** Joni Hannigan **8 Comments**

The Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Dallas may have had only one fifth of the messengers as the previously largest SBC convened in the Texas stronghold, but when messengers unanimously passed a resolution on abuse, they failed to note lack of a clear position on clergy-penitent privilege and counseling. The Resolutions Committee chairman offered a clarification and said there were no exceptions intended. Still, in a #MeToo social media moment, is the firing of an SBC leader

WM06302

over alleged bad advice and failed reporting of abuse – and a non-binding resolution – enough? Or should other leaders and entities explain their action or lack of action in regards to promoting those who are accused of abuse, covering abuse, asked to testify in abuse cases, or promoting or offering a system which provides controversial or questionable counseling for victims of abuse.

DALLAS (June 26, 2018) – For many at the Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas June’s meeting was a victory lap of sorts with one of the youngest presidents in the history of the SBC elected, younger leaders celebrated at the helm of its mission organizations and at least half its seminaries, and a well-branded, if somewhat tarnished, image.

For others, it was like watching taps at Arlington Cemetery, a noble and yet sad image of what once was great but is now lost – with former leaders firmly ousted – and state conventions, missionary agencies, and local associations all but dying on the vine along with Baptist state newspapers, accountable boards, and civility.

#METOO, THEOLOGY & MYSOLOGY

And in the midst of it all, #MeToo expressions like “misogynist,” “rapist,” “sexual assault,” “workplace harassment,” and “domestic abuse,” were thrown into a confusing mix of denominational politics which diluted meaningful discussion over the role of women in the denomination.

What might have at one time been a healthy discussion over women’s roles in church and in ministry positions turned into an ugly fight that threatens to label complementarians as “misogynists,” and egalitarians as liberals – while the world is expected to interpret ecclesiological and theological terms lest Southern Baptists be inaccurately defined.

Somewhere in the middle are hurting men, women and children who have seen the #MeToo movement hijacked by what amounts to a political movement rather than a social cause to help hurting people.

MORAL & PERSONAL FAILURES IN SBC LEADERSHIP

The Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas follows a year of disappointing losses in ministry leaders as a result of moral and personal failures – and other reasons not disclosed.

Those most recent high profile resignations include Frank Page, president of the SBC Executive Committee; Alvin Reid, senior professor of evangelism and student ministry at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.; Christian George, curator of Midwestern Seminary’s Spurgeon Library in Kansas City; and David Sills, professor of missions and cultural anthropology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

The termination of Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth and a key player in the Conservative Resurgence of the denomination, grabbed most of the headlines, however, and prompted a resolution at the SBC in Dallas condemning “all forms of abuse.”

#METOO PROVOKES ABUSE RESOLUTION

The statement on abuse renounced “all abusive behavior as unquestionably sinful” and called for decisive action to report abuse allegations to law enforcement authorities. It also offered compassion to abuse victims, “being careful to remind the abused that such injustice is undeserved and not a result of personal guilt or fault” (Baptist Press).

The initial charge against Patterson was that he used an illustration in a conference years ago advising a woman to stay with her abusive husband. After that initial charge, which was assigned a #MeToo identity on Twitter, further accusations were lobbed at Patterson about how he dealt with an alleged rape at a seminary where he’d served as president. His lawyer, Shelby Sharpe released a statement about these charges.

NAMB PRESIDENT CLAIMED CLERGY-PENITENT PRIVILEGE IN 2004

The resolution that ultimately was passed unanimously by messengers in Dallas, ironically omits any reference to “clergy-penitent privilege” however, a claim used by Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board, in a court case reported in 2004 in Louisville’s Courier-Journal.

A Sunday School and choir volunteer who also worked at a school operated by Highview Baptist Church, where Ezell was then pastor, had been accused of sex crimes he later confessed.

News articles report that when Ezell was subpoenaed to testify before the grand jury, he invoked the clergy-penitent privilege. The former teacher later, after being charged with additional crimes, pled guilty to sexually abusing seven boys in the 1970s and early 1980s and is still listed in the Kentucky sex offender archive.

A subsequent blog noted that Ezell told the *Louisville Courier-Journal* the leaders of the congregation (one of the largest in the state) did not plan to tell members of the congregation about the predator’s arrest or conviction.

RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE CLARIFIES ‘NO EXCEPTION’ INTENDED

The chairman of the 2018 SBC resolutions committee, Jason Duesing of Missouri, in an interview June 13 said it was not the intention of the committee to provide exception clauses.

“If they’ve been asked to testify, they should testify,” Duesing said when asked generally about pastor/clergy exemption clauses, even in the course of Christian or church counseling. “It’s the spirit (of the resolution) that if somebody is aware of something they need to report it and take action on it.”



ERLC president Russell Moore (L) and SBC Resolutions Committee Chair Jason Duesing of Missouri at a press conference at the 2018 SBC annual meeting in Dallas.

SOVEREIGN GRACE MINISTRIES

Boz Tchividjian, founder and executive director of Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE), shared a similar opinion in 2013 after Sovereign Grace Ministries – embroiled in a civil lawsuit alleging it had covered up numerous cases of child sexual abuse over a several decades period – said it was practicing its First Amendment right to religious freedom.

SGM wrote in a 2012 statement it had the right to provide confidential pastoral counseling free from government infringement.

“SGM believes that allowing courts to second-guess pastoral guidance would represent a blow to the First Amendment that would hinder, not help, families seeking spiritual direction among other resources in dealing with the trauma related to any sin including child sexual abuse,” wrote Tommy Hill, SGM’s director of finance and administration, according to an article in Christianity Today. The referenced statement has since been removed from SGM’s website.

Tchividjian conceded he did not have all of the facts at the time, but, as the former prosecutor for child abuse cases in Florida, he said he was in disagreement with a view that clergy-penitent privilege should be invoked to avoid testimony.

“Quite frankly, any time an institution—a Christian institution—responds or defends its behavior as it relates to sexual abuse allegations with quoting laws and hiding behind constitutions, it causes me concern,” said Tchividjian, a law professor and the grandson of the late Billy Graham. The GRACE website notes with alarm the fact that SGM leaders kept members in the dark about the the wide-spread sexual abuse of children, calling it “staggering.”

Too often, those within the Church have been uninformed about the complexities of child abuse,” the website reads. “This has compounded its damaging effects on individuals, families, and faith communities with inappropriate and even negligent responses to signs and disclosures of abuse. Our collective failure as Christians to properly care for the most innocent and vulnerable among us has often been staggering.

SOUTHERN SEMINARY AND SOVEREIGN GRACE MINISTRIES

In 2014 Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville cut ties with the pastors college of Sovereign Grace Ministries, ending a two-year relationship between the two organizations. Two months previously, popular author Joshua Harris resigned from The Gospel Coalition after testifying in court about the role of the leadership of the SGM flagship church – Covenant Life – in suspected covering up of crimes. He served as pastor of Covenant Life from 2004 until 2015, when he left to attend college. Harris had followed C.J. Mahaney at Covenant Life.

Mahaney, the founder of SGM, also stepped down from The Gospel Coalition in 2014, after being named in a 2012 class action lawsuit on allegations of a conspiracy to cover up sexual abuse. That year he stepped away from the T4G (Together for the Gospel) conference he co-founded in 2006 with fellow evangelical Christian leaders Mark Dever, R. Albert Mohler Jr. and Ligon Duncan.

This year, Mahaney, pastor of the SBC-affiliated Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville, which he founded in 2013, again stepped away from the T4G conference following new exposure related to the SGM controversy. Rachael Denhollander, the former Olympic gymnast whose testimony against Larry Nassar went viral, addressed the allegations of abuse at Covenant Life Church in interviews and on Facebook.

In late January Denhollander said the SGM situation is “one of the worst, if not the worst, instances of evangelical cover-up of sexual abuse” and “one of the most well-documented cases of institutional cover-up I have ever seen.”

Sovereign Grace Churches (formerly SBM) issued a statement in February calling Denhollander “mistaken in her accusations” against the church and Mahaney.

In a March 1 Facebook post, “Response to Sovereign Grace Churches,” Denhollander defended herself by more fully outlining the SGM situation and providing a provocative look at methods, evidence, court limitations, and rationale.

That same month, Hershael York, newly promoted dean of the School of Theology at Southern Seminary and a professor of Christian preaching there since 1997, commented on Denhollander's post:

I am in awe of your graciousness, your relentless pursuit of truth, your commitment to the Gospel, and your willingness to do the uncomfortable thing. Only the grace of Christ could account for your balance. You have helped me think more clearly on this issue and I am grateful. Count on my continued prayers and support as you call Christian leaders (among whom I count myself) to face and embrace the truth wherever it leads us. As followers of the One who is Truth, how can we do any less?

In an exchange which followed, Dennis Hulick, whose Facebook profile says he lives in Raleigh, N.C., asked York if he "might work toward ending Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville's involvement and affiliation with the SBC and SBTS.

"I hope that you might encourage and expect that the President of the SBTS would end his public involvement with CJ Mahaney as that would speak volumes to those that were abused and then unprotected by a number of leaders within the SG church association," he wrote.

York's response was short: "You need to share your opinions with the people and entities that you have mentioned. My feelings are already public and I have no more influence with anyone than my candor and honesty, which I have already given."

A few weeks after Denhollander's comments, Christianity Today's editor in chief Mark Galli wrote an insightful review and timeline of the SGM "scandal" calling for an independent investigation:

We call for a fresh and thorough independent investigation not because we believe those accused are guilty of every one of its critics' charges. We are as bewildered as anyone and simply don't have enough information to make a confident judgment on the matter. We see, however, that SGC, churches current and former—and pastor C. J. Mahaney (founder and former president) in particular—are under a cloud of suspicion.

In May, Immanuel Baptist Church in Louisville published a Facebook note: "We were Rachael's Church." In it the church confessed to being "sinfully unloving," and pledged to "discontinue inviting (SGM) leaders to minister to our church."

MOHLER'S WRATH OF GOD FALLS SHORT

More than two months following Mahaney's departure from T4G and on the day Patterson's resignation was announced, Mohler abruptly released a declaration: "The Wrath of God Poured Out – The Humiliation of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Like *Christianity Today's* Galli, Mohler calls for an independent investigation for churches, denominations or Christian ministries engaged in a pattern of mishandling charges of abuse – but unlike Galli, does not target a specific ministry in his actionable comments, and qualifies his statement by saying a “public accusation” requires such an investigation.

Also like SGC in a response to Denhollander’s accusations Feb. 13 called irresponsible the “horrific” comparisons made between its churches and widespread abuse, Mohler said “The SBC is in the midst of its own horrifying #MeToo moment.”

In a sweeping statement focused on “public humiliation” and concern for “our public credibility,” Mohler delivered a treatise granting credibility to break-away moderates’ criticisms about the SBC’s Conservative Resurgence, of which Mohler was a part, saying their “prophecies had some merit after all” without admitting his culpability in the failures. He wrote:

The liberals who left have kept marching to the Left, in theology and moral teaching. The SBC, solidly conservative theologically, has been revealed to be morally compromised.

Shifting from Southern Baptists in the last few paragraphs of his lengthy essay, Mohler asserts, “The MeToo moment has come to American evangelicals,” before ending with the rhetorical, “The Southern Baptist Convention is on trial and our public credibility is at stake. May God have mercy on us all.”

Mohler, however, failed to mention SGM or Mahaney in his commentary.

SBTS COUNSELING CHANGES

A few days after Mohler’s commentary, Heath Lambert, a faculty member at Southern Seminary since 2006, the Executive Director at the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, and the new pastor of First Baptist Church in Jacksonville, released a statement, “A Time for Choosing.”

In his own declaration of alleged abuse at the hand of his parent, Lambert opined about Patterson’s re-telling of a story about a woman’s abuse years ago, and spoke of “standing with God himself” against the “victimization of the weak.”

It’s “a clear time to choose,” he wrote. “[T]he world is watching.” Lambert announced ACBC would not be holding its 2018 meeting at the campus of Southwestern Seminary. Interestingly, commenters on a blog “Cry For Justice,” opining about a 2017 talk he hosted on involving controversy over counseling and domestic abuse, said ACBC has only recently begun to speak about domestic abuse.

Lambert, in “95 Theses For An Authentically Christian Commitment to Counseling,” presents the current practice in biblical (neuthetic) counseling at ACBC and SBTS.

SBTS moved from “pastoral counseling,” including teaching by the former professor of Christian psychology Eric Johnson, to what Russell Moore, president of the SBC’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission refers to as “biblical counseling.”

In a series of affirmations and denials, Moore in 2010 when he was serving as provost and dean of SBTS, wrote a comprehensive defense of the seminary’s new direction in his, *Counseling & the Authority of Christ: A New Vision for Biblical Counseling at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*.

Moore wrote that the changes came about after Mohler was elected as president during the “Conservative Reformation” and the curriculum was found lacking:

The CPE/pastoral care model of the Southern Seminary tradition was indeed founded on a theological worldview and on a ministry paradigm inconsistent with the theological worldview and conversionist outlook of the new era.

In his 16-page e-book, Moore wrote that psychotherapies should not be seen as medical practice.

We deny that psychological research, personality theories, and psychotherapies should be viewed as “objective science,” as that term is usually understood. Neither should they be seen as extensions of medicine and medical practice.

Lambert earned his undergraduate degree in biblical studies and political science, and his graduate and post-graduate degrees in Christian ministry and biblical counseling. Moore earned his undergraduate degree in political science and history, and his graduate and post-graduate degrees in biblical studies and systematic theology.

Rickard Marks, now a former pastor of family ministries at First Baptist Church in Jacksonville, where Lambert now serves, and vice president of Jacksonville based Live the Life Ministries, this month made a comment on social media about biblical counselors.

In a June 15 Tweet, Marks wrote:

Neuthetic counselors should be held liable for negligent counsel just like their professional counterparts. Your lack of training in areas of abuse, eating disorders, clinical depression, etc, will harm others. Know your limitations.

Marks holds graduate and post-graduate degrees in Marriage and Family Therapy, and psychology and counseling, in addition to a graduate degree from Southwestern Seminary in Religious Education. He is a licensed professional counselor and an ordained minister.

SBC RESOLUTION ON ABUSE CAUSES REACTIONS

In addition to the SBC resolution on abuse, other declarations by SBC leaders and groups followed in the wake of the SBC annual meeting in Dallas.

— The International Mission Board of trustee president Rick Dunbar said about a new policy on abuse released during its meeting June 10-11, “If anyone ‘sees or suspects something, they need to say something.’” He said of the IMB it is its policy to investigate all cases (of abuse) regardless of when they occurred.

— The North American Mission Board of trustees meeting in Dallas June 11 made revisions to its Employee Guidelines and Operating Procedures. A spokesperson for NAMB has not yet released a review of those changes to this writer, however.

— Newly elected NAMB trustee Willy Rice, in a blog May 31, wrote about a family experience which happened 25 years ago in which the IMB and a local Baptist association “stonewalled” them after their two daughters had been sexually assaulted by the Director of Missions in that association.

Rice, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Clearwater, Fla., and a former president of the Florida Baptist State Convention, concludes his painful story with these words:

Finally this question, is a man truly a shepherd when he allows the wolves to devour the lambs because he is afraid of the consequences of confrontation? Isn't it the very definition of a shepherd that he stops the wolves, that he protects the sheep, and that he guards the flock? When we fail to protect the innocent because we are more interested in protecting the reputation of institutions we serve, we not only fail those very institutions, we fail the sheep and fail the Chief Shepherd.

We have failed too often. There are too many stories like this one and too many scars that have never been able to heal. Let them be told. Let us repent. Let us learn to be shepherds again. God help us.

Sponsored Content

TE2208 - Arctic Frost / 20 Sydney's Closet US | Sponsored

Netflix Cancels Another Rounds Of Great Shows Bon Voyaged | Sponsored

[Pics] How The Ideal Female Body Has Changed Throughout The Past Century Ocean Draw | Sponsored

35+ Spot On Parenting Comics That Show You're Not Alone <https://www.parenthood.com> | Sponsored

Doctor Says Slimming Down After 60 Comes Down To This getfittoday.online | Sponsored

Washington: These Unsold Volvos Now Almost Being Given Away (See Deals) [Volo Deals](#) | [Search Ads](#) | Sponsored

Urologist: Plenty of Men With An Enlarged Prostate Do Not Know About This Simple Solution medicalhelp.me | Sponsored

This Vegetable Will Kill Your Belly And Arm Fat Overnight! [Get Health Insider](#) | Sponsored

[Pics] 23 Bizarre Facts About Redheads That Are Actually True [Ocean Draw](#) | Sponsored

◀ #METOO ◀ BIBLICAL COUNSELING ◀ CHRISTIAN COUNSELING ◀ CHRISTIAN TRANSPARENCY ◀ CLERGY PRIVILEGE ◀ CONSERVATIVE RESURGENCE ◀ CONTROVERSY ◀ GCR ◀ MYSOGYNY ◀ SBC ◀ SBC TRUTH IN CRISIS ◀ SEXUAL ASSAULT ◀ SEXUAL MOLESTATION ◀ SOUTHERN BAPTIST ◀ TRANSPARENCY ◀ TRANSPARENCY IN THE CHURCH ◀ TRANSPARENCY IN THE SBC

The Truth is in crisis

The SBC struggles for integrity

SBC NAMB

'Kevin' Ezell's warning threatening to sue me
for libel after my SBC story

Today 8:38 PM

Joni—I think you have put yourself into a potentially libelous situation. I am asking you and encouraging you in the strongest way possible to remove what you have posted about Kevin. I wish you had called to discuss this with me ahead of time



iMessage



Date: February 3, 2019 Author: Joni Hannigan 6 Comments

Today 8:38 PM

Joni—I think you have put yourself into a potentially libelous situation. I am asking you and encouraging you in the strongest way possible to remove what you have posted about Kevin. I wish you had called to discuss this with me ahead of time



iMessage



Months ago I received an unsolicited and very unexpected text message.

Its warning was clear and yet I had done nothing to draw the attention of a colleague late on a Thursday night, clearly after hours, and when I was enjoying a meal with my family.

My transgression, it appeared, was to write a rather lengthy and rambling analysis about events that had taken place weeks before at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Dallas, and finally put them into a historic and current context. A sort of “state of the denomination,” if you will, released on my newly published website.

“The Truth IS in Crisis” was meant to cause people to ask questions about the Southern Baptist Convention and its leaders. As a reporter and editor for more than two decades, I had finally felt compelled to write on subjects of which I have particular insight and information.

The text followed a series of messages from earlier in June when an employee of the North American Mission Board was directing me to the correct hotel location of the NAMB full board meeting hours after I had been given a runaround about the location – following a terse email.

It’s frankly disappointing to think any trustees duly elected and entrusted with an SBC entity (or its employees) would operate with anything less than full transparency.

Perhaps more on that later.

WM06313

But, for now, the message:

“Joni – I think you have put yourself into a potentially libelous situation. I am asking you and encouraging you in the strongest way possible to remove what you have posted about Kevin. I wish you had called to discuss this with me ahead of time.”

For starters, the timing of the TEXT MESSAGE, not email. I rarely correspond by text with this person, or any person, and in fact, have only in case of urgency – like trying to discover the location for a meeting that should have been well-established, but somehow escaped publication and was not available in the SBC newsroom.

The offending text is marked 8:38 p.m. (EST), June 26, 2018. This was just hours after I published my news analysis, “Was SBC #metoo resolution on abuse a band aid for larger issues?”

To “ask” or “encourage” me “in the strongest way possible” to remove a story about “Kevin,” is somewhat confusing. I would never presume to refer to Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board, as “Kevin,” but instead, most know I reference people by their titles or by “Bro.”

This only leads me to believe the person was on very familiar terms with “Kevin” himself. To begin the message by telling me I might have put myself into a “potentially libelous situation,” actually made me laugh. Sort of. The sinister sounding legalese would be more humorous if I hadn’t already endured threats and intimidation by my own board at the now defunct Florida Baptist Witness, Inc. (newspaper) just a few years ago after voluntarily resigning.

Finally, there was the bit about calling someone to discuss information that has been published and online for more than a decade. None of the information that I used about Kevin Ezell is new. What was new was my informed analysis, the climate, and the remark concerning the resolution on abuse by the chairman of the resolutions committee.

It is time for Southern Baptists to be aware good people are being threatened. Intimidation is cloaked by honey-tongued individuals who warn people to “pray” and not “gossip” so the Kingdom is not hurt.

People are banished from social media accounts of highly compensated SBC leaders and pastors and those with influence use a newfound love of public relations to bandage over a once blessed missions powerhouse which is hemorrhaging and ill.

Like an ousted pastor once told me (that interview never saw the light of day); people who don’t know God will think more positively about honest people who point out the sin in their own midst than people who act as if they are perfect.

Stop with the slick, shiny, crunchy granola façade before it’s too late. Stop with the platitudes and the half-baked apologies and knocking knees.

Our children and our grandchildren deserve better. We deserve better.

The Truth is in crisis

The SBC struggles for integrity

OPINION

OPINION: My own '#MeToo' story; how Southern Baptists should do more



Date: June 10, 2018 Author: Joni Hannigan 5 Comments

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (June 9, 2018) — I should have said something.

Tears flowed freely a few years ago when I sat at a table surrounded by women my age attending an event for veterans learning to engage in small business.

We were surrounded by dozens of younger women, many of whom were taking a stand against military sexual assault. After listening to the first female Secretary of the Air Force, they were discussing chain of command and who is overall responsible for providing a safe place for people to serve.

That day I was clobbered with intrusive thoughts that would not stop. I could feel the anguish of the young women – my own desperate heartbeat – shame and fear all wrapped in one.



WM06316

If I had just told my story earlier and made someone pay. Made the man who assaulted me pay. The thoughts came as freely as the tears I tried to hide behind a large napkin.

Running to the elevator, I mostly bee-hived the remainder of the conference, trying to avoid crowds and loud people.

It's as if every man who had ever wronged me had become "him" – the man who was my supervisor in the Navy and a deacon in the local Baptist church. He was the man whose children I babysat, the man whose wife I chatted with at baseball games on base.

I realized he was the reason I panicked months earlier every time my new boss insisted on sitting close to me at my desk or trustees reached out to touch or pat me condescendingly after they let me know they didn't professionally respect me.

And when the presidential election forced me to read story after story of sexual harassment and women's issues I became more deeply entrenched in wanting revenge – especially when I learned that military sexual trauma continues to be a huge disgrace in our fallen world.

And then came a more intimate knowledge of domestic violence after a close relative divorced her husband and began the fight of her life to get fair time with her two-year-old twins.

I learned more than I wanted to know about the church and its failure to hold women up. I learned there is still so much judgment for victims, so much asked of the same women who some say are the "weaker vessel" and who must be "protected." I learned there is a valuable lesson in listening and remembering what people say versus what they do.

Thirty some years ago the military was not a culture where I could report my assault, as an 18-year-old, and feel that I would be taken seriously. My fear that my superior would minimize his attack or even punish me for it was also overshadowed by my suspicion that his assault was part of a test for my security clearance and I needed to keep quiet in order to prove my understanding of a "loose lips sinks ships" climate.

I realize now that my fear, although real at the time, was just that, fear. Honestly, that fear also was driven by the fact that I was ashamed of having been called in to speak with my superior about being out too late the night before. I was embarrassed. So he used his power to keep me quiet after he overpowered me.

That is what the #MeToo movement is all about.

Sure, there are times I would like to put a "face" on someone and "name," in order to call attention to the issue and to also help others who might have been attacked or are in danger. But unlike Megan Lively in the Southeastern Seminary situation, who told the *Biblical Recorder* recently that she "honestly felt like if people could put ... a face and a name with a story, it made it real," I would like to put the name and face with the person who attacked me. And I would if I could.

Who will I hold accountable otherwise?

Will it be the Officer In Charge (OIC) in charge of Corry Naval Air Station? Or perhaps the Secretary of the Navy? Maybe the Joint Chiefs of Staff or the President himself?

WM06317

Maybe I should hold accountable the citizens of the United States of America who have allowed an atmosphere for this type of crime to be perpetuated on its women (and men) for far too long with little repercussion? Indeed, that would be about changing a culture, something I would hope that every one of us as believers are about.

The fact that the chief who attacked me was a deacon in the church is perhaps the toughest part sometimes to deal with. That sense of betrayal was the strongest, but for some reason I never thought to hold anyone in the local church accountable — but put the blame squarely on the two people who were in that room.

I am still learning how to forgive myself for having ever landed in his office, and him for his awful misdeeds.

Hold your children tight. Hold each other tight. Cherish and value each other and love and behave in the nature of Christ. Speak with kindness and grace. Hold each one accountable where we fail. But stop short of spewing hypocritical words about protecting women and children while leaders, ministers, teachers, wives, and families are torn apart by denominational politics.

The #MeToo movement deserves more than the SBC.

Remember protection (in addition to reporting criminal activity to local law enforcement) can mean counseling, therapy, and a means to overcome the ravages of assault as well.

Stop preaching that “church discipline” and prayer is the only recourse for those involved while we don’t hesitate to use worldly business practices for separation agreements with “non-disclosure” statements, employment contracts, and to file non-profit tax status for our churches.

Stop preaching that “church discipline” and prayer is the only recourse for those involved while we seek out dentists, doctors and florists for our health and professional needs.

Those who won’t testify, won’t stand up against, and won’t defend those who need defense, and those who are the perpetrators — are the ones who should be held liable.

Grace.

Sponsored Content

The Best Walking Shoes for Men to Wear All Day Long Without Getting Tired LENS IEH | Sponsored

What Are ODTE Trades? Lott oX | Sponsored

Brain Surgeon - Do This to Relieve Tinnitus and Hearing Loss (Try Tonight)! journalofmedicalnews.com | Sponsored

Urologist: Plenty of Men With An Enlarged Prostate Do Not Know About This Simple Solution medicalhelp.me | Sponsored

BMW Offers Major Incentives For Leftover 2022 Inventory BMW Deals | Search Ads | Sponsored

Where Can I Get 5% Interest on My Savings? LowInterest | Sponsored