

EC continues abuse reforms, vows to 'enhance transparency' in entity reporting

By Baptist Press and Tony Martin

Increasing financial transparency, combatting sexual abuse and electing a new slate of officers were among highlights of the SBC Executive Committee's meeting June 10 at the Indianapolis Downtown Marriott.

The Executive Committee (EC) declined to act on a pair of messenger motions ^[2] from last year's SBC Annual Meeting that would have required SBC entities to publish the information required on IRS Form 990 ^[3], the IRS's primary tool for gathering information about tax-exempt organizations. But along with its decision to decline the motions, the EC urged Convention entities to uphold all current reporting standards and promised to study how financial reporting can be improved.

The EC, "in cooperation and collaboration with SBC entities, institutions, and commissions, commits to reviewing the [SBC] Business and Financial Plan, to determine ways to enhance transparency and clarity of reporting to the Convention, and will report its findings and recommendations to the messengers at the 2025 SBC Annual Meeting in Dallas," the recommendation said.

The financial transparency actions were taken without opposition or discussion – a contrast to the sometimes intense discussion of financial transparency among Southern Baptists over the past year. SBC entities already are required by the Business and Financial Plan ^[5] to publish, among other

information, financial statements, audit reports and a statement that “the expenses and perquisites of the president are not excessive and are in keeping with biblical stewardship.”

Adam Wyatt, Pastor, Bethel Church, Monticello, serves as chair of the Committee on Convention Finances and Stewardship Development.

“We have two roles,” Wyatt said. “One, we help oversee this Cooperative Program budget. Second, we have to make sure that we are over the EC’s budget. At the end of the year, we receive all the reports from the entities on their end of the year audits. We don’t have to technically approve, but we do have to receive those officially.

“We’re responsible for looking at the overall business and financial plan,” Wyatt continued. “That’s an agreed upon plan of all the entities. And so one of the recommendations that my committee made this year, should it pass this year or not be changed by the messengers, is we’re going to try our best over the next year to look at the business and financial plan and figure out how can we come up with ways to show more clearly the transparency that exists and to maybe help clarify some things and better equip people to understand.”

When asked about the work of the EC, Wyatt said, “I think we do a lot more than people think we do or know we do. Just right now we’re thinking about 10,000 messengers here, thinking about all the committees doing their work. Even things like the Mississippi fellowship that we have at the Convention, we help coordinate that. We work with all the committees throughout the year, making sure the president is able to have the resources he needs to help out all the committees, help the committee on nominations, getting all those folks on board. We help coordinate all that on top of helping those groups get the trustees together and all that. I mean, there’s a lot of those things that we help out with, and

I think it's very, very important. It's not just right now the legal side of things and ministry assignments and all that. I think all the entities are doing their job."

But some Southern Baptists have claimed more data should be disclosed. Information required on the 990 is itemized and more specific than information published in SBC reports, with 990 forms running 50-75 pages in some instances. The 990 requires, among other items, a listing of all key employees and their salaries; a listing of all other employees making more than \$100,000 annually; specific amounts spent on legal fees, fundraising and lobbying; and a listing of amounts spent on activities outside the U.S.

International Mission Board President Paul Chitwood told IMB trustees ^[6] last month that requiring publication of 990 information "could literally put the lives of our missionary families and their national partners at risk and would potentially compromise the confidentiality of church members and other donors who generously support the IMB's work."

The EC also took up two recommendations related to sexual abuse. First, it declined to act on a 2023 SBC messenger motion that would have amended the SBC Organizational Manual to task the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission with assisting churches on matters related to sexual abuse.

The EC declined to act on the motion not to avoid dealing with sexual abuse, but because dealing with the motion before the SBC Annual Meeting would have been the wrong timing, said Mollie Duddleston, chairman of the EC's Committee on Convention Missions and Ministry.

The SBC's Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force will recommend ^[8] to messengers June 11 that they assign the EC the task of creating a "permanent home for abuse prevention response." Some groundwork already has been laid, Duddleston said, to ensure the EC is ready for that assignment.

“In the next couple of days, we recognize that the messengers may give this task back to us, the Executive Committee as a body,” Duddleston said. “So at this time, we view this” proposed action as “out of sequence. There are a couple of things that need to happen before we could move forward with anything.”

The EC also voted to report to messengers that it “continues to work toward ending all formal relationships with Guidepost Solutions.”

Only two formal connections still exist between the EC and Guidepost. An SBC sexual abuse hotline is maintained by Guidepost, Duddleston said, and an indemnification clause in the EC’s contract with Guidepost requires the EC to cover Guidepost’s legal fees if it faces litigation for its work with the SBC. EC President Jeff Iorg said the legal bill so far has amounted to \$2 million, almost entirely due to the lawsuits filed by two former SBC leaders.

Officer elections

Among EC officers reelected were: chairman, Philip Robertson, pastor of Philadelphia Church in Pineville, La.; vice chairman, Tony Dockery, pastor of St. Stephen Church in La Puente, Calif.; chair of the Committee on Convention Missions and Ministries, Duddleston, director of ministry operations and women’s ministry at Cross Church in northwest Arkansas; chair of the Committee on Convention Events and Strategic Planning, Carolyn Fountain, a retired educator from Monroe, La.; and Wyatt.

The EC elected as secretary Nancy Spalding, a retired accountant from Roseville, Mich., and as chair of the Committee on Southern Baptist Relations Todd Stiles, pastor of First Family Church in Ankeny, Iowa.

All elections were by acclamation, with no contested elections.