

# Ezell encourages 'leap forward' as NAMB trustees meet in Los Angeles

LONG BEACH, Calif. – Capping two days of meetings with the North American Mission Board's (NAMB) Board of Trustees, NAMB president Kevin Ezell expressed the urgent need to push forward with even greater strides and avoid settling for only incremental progress in taking the gospel to North America. The meetings took place Monday and Tuesday, February 3-4.

"Is it our goal, is it my goal to just be marginally better?" Ezell asked in his report to trustees Tuesday afternoon. "Someone once said, 'God is not a God of low risk, generic visions for the Church.'"

Citing the need for a "leap forward" in the advancement of NAMB's mission as it serves Southern Baptists, Ezell shared a quote from Annie Armstrong, who helped create the Woman's Missionary Union, served as its first corresponding secretary and tirelessly championed the cause of missions and missionaries.

"The future lies all before us," Armstrong said. "Shall it only be a slight advance upon what we usually do? Ought it not to be a bound, a leap forward, to altitudes of endeavor and success undreamed of before?"

"I'm thankful we are where we are," Ezell said. "But it's time to do more. We must do more."

Ezell then shared examples of what significant advancements would look like and the resources they would require:

- To add an additional 100 new church plants over the current annual average – \$10 million.

- To double the number of church plants from the current 700 to 1,400 over the next few years – \$70 million.
- To increase the current church plant loan portfolio by 70 loans – \$50 million. These loans allow church plants to have worship space and are provided by NAMB for plants that would not otherwise qualify for traditional loans.
- To add 50 more housing units for church planting missionary families – \$25 million. Planter families can live in these units for up to two years while planters complete a residency program and get established in their city of service.

“We have an incredible need,” Ezell said. “If this wave of opportunity passes us, and we don’t take advantage of it, I believe we are going to be held accountable.”

In other trustee business:

- Financial Services Committee chair Clark Reynolds, who serves as missions pastor for Houston’s First Baptist Church, reported that NAMB received an unqualified rating (the highest rating possible) in its annual audit. Members of the Financial Services Committee met with independent auditors from Batts, Morrison, Wales & Lee, PA, who conducted the audit.
- Trustees approved responses to seven different motions that were referred to NAMB from the June 2024 Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The responses will be forwarded to the SBC Executive Committee and published in the next *SBC Annual*.
- In his report to the Board, Carlos Ferrer, NAMB’s Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer, shared that revenue for the current fiscal year is running ahead of projections.

On Monday, February 3, trustees boarded buses and visited one of Send Relief's two Los Angeles-area ministry centers. Darryl Speers, director of the center, shared how Send Relief teams have met needs in the wake of the devastating fires that destroyed thousands of homes in the city.

The center, located in an area of Los Angeles known for a high amount of human trafficking involving children, partners with other local ministries to meet needs and share Christ with those caught up in prostitution and other trafficking activities.

Next, trustees visited Renovate Church, a church plant launched on Easter Sunday, 2020, by church planting missionary Chris Kirish. Despite more than a year of mandated lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic, Renovate persevered and today has three services and has helped launch another new church.

Later Monday evening at dinner, trustees celebrated California partnerships, welcoming Pete Ramirez, executive director of the California Southern Baptist Convention, Adam Groza, president of Gateway Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Kent Dacus, vice president of enrollment and student services at California Baptist University.

The dinner included a panel discussion led by Send Network president Vance Pitman about the important role sending churches play in church planting. Mark Lee, lead pastor of Vantage Point Church in Eastvale, Calif., and Jay Stovall, a church planting missionary who launched Portrait Church in 2023, participated in the panel.

Lee, who also serves as Send Network's west region director, sent Stovall out from his church to plant in the Inland Empire area of Los Angeles, which is one of the fastest-growing metro areas in the United States.

The dinner concluded with Ezell recognizing and thanking Bryant Wright, president of Send Relief, for his five years of

leadership at the compassion ministry. Wright announced the previous week that he would retire at the end of March. Trustees joined Ezell in giving Wright and his wife Anne, also present, a standing ovation.