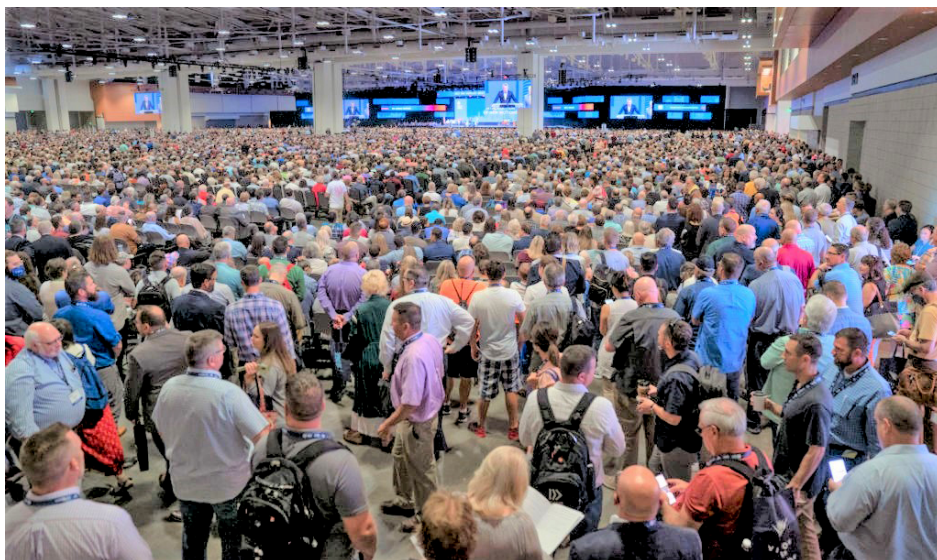


Messengers in mood for change at largest SBC annual meeting in 26 years

NASHVILLE (BP and local reports) – Messengers from local churches to the 2021 Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) June 15-16 at the Music City Center in Nashville were ready to make changes and challenge traditions in the name of advancing the Gospel.

The convention's 15,726 messengers – the most since 1995's annual meeting in Atlanta hosted nearly 20,000 messengers – took action to protect victims and hold leaders accountable even when it meant overturning decisions of convention entities, especially the SBC Executive Committee headquartered in Nashville.



FULL HOUSE – The 2021 Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention saw 15,726 messengers registered – the most since 1995's annual meeting in Atlanta hosted nearly 20,000 messengers.

Messengers called for creation of a task force to be appointed by new SBC president Ed Litton, senior pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Ala., to oversee an independent review of

the Executive Committee regarding allegations of mishandling reports of sexual abuse.

Grant Gaines, senior pastor of Belle Aire Church, Murfreesboro, Tenn., moved that the new SBC president appoint the task force to oversee a previously-announced investigation of Executive Committee mishandling of sexual abuse claims.

Initially, the motion was referred to the Executive Committee by the Committee on Order of Business, but messengers overturned the ruling by a two-thirds vote and overwhelmingly adopted the motion.

The Executive Committee also encountered an overwhelming defeat in a proposed revision to the SBC's Business and Financial Plan. Robyn Hari, a financial advisor from Brentwood, Tenn., and chair of the Executive Committee's Committee on Convention Finances and Stewardship Development, told messengers the proposal sought to strike a balance between accountability and autonomy of the SBC entities.

However, messenger Vance Pitman, senior *pastor* of Hope Church, Las Vegas, Nev., took to the convention floor microphone to describe the proposal as "an unprecedented expansion of the Executive Committee powers." The recommendation failed on a raised-hand vote.

Another Executive Committee recommendation rejected by messengers was a proposed revision to the Lifeway Christian Resources Mission and Ministry Statement. The proposal, initiated at the request of Lifeway trustees, was defeated on a ballot vote after messenger Michael Schultz, pastor of Antioch Church, Lewisburg, Ky., spoke against adoption due to a proposed deletion of Lifeway's responsibility to assist churches with home school ministries.

The Executive Committee also lost an officer when vice chairman Tom Tucker, a vocational evangelist from Rock Hill,

S.C., was not awarded a second term by the Committee on Nominations. Messengers turned away an attempt to overturn the Tucker decision by the Committee on Nominations.

Messengers did accept Executive Committee proposals granting the second of two required approvals to an SBC Constitution amendment listing racism and mishandling sex abuse as grounds for disfellowshipping a church.

The Executive Committee was not the only committee to have a recommendation overturned by messengers. The Resolutions Committee declined to bring to the floor a resolution submitted by messenger Bill Ascol, senior pastor of Bethel Church, Owasso, Okla., that called for abolishing abortion, but messengers voted by a two-thirds majority to consider it and then adopted the resolution after a one-word amendment to soften the resolution's initial rejection of any "incremental approach to ending abortion."

Messengers approved Vision 2025, a five-year plan setting a series of goals for Great Commission advancement (Matt. 28:18-20), and added to the five proposed Vision 2025 goals a sixth goal stating the convention's intent to eliminate all incidents of racism and sexual abuse. They also amended a goal placing emphasis on reaching teenagers to those under age 18.

Juan Sanchez, pastor of High Pointe Church, Austin, Texas, became the first Hispanic to be elected convention preacher. He will deliver the convention sermon next year in Anaheim, Calif.



NEW SBC OFFICERS – Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) officers elected by messengers to the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting are ((from left) First Vice President Lee Brand Jr.; Recording Secretary John Yeats; President Ed Litton; and Registration Secretary Don Currence. Not pictured is second vice president Ramon Medina. (BP photo)

Messengers elected Lee Brand Jr., an administrator at Mid-America Seminary in Memphis, Tenn., as first vice president. Ramón Medina, lead pastor of the Spanish ministry at Champion Forest Church, Houston, Texas, was tapped as second vice-president in a race that included Dusty Durbin, pastor of Big Level Church, Wiggins.

Don Currence, administrative pastor at First Church, Ozark, Mo., was reelected registration secretary by acclamation.

Critical race theory (CRT), the subject of a 2019 SBC resolution that sparked controversy, drew several mentions during the convention including messenger motions and resolution submissions calling for its denunciation as well as questions to SBC presidents during their reports.

No official convention action addressed CRT by name. Instead, messengers adopted a broad resolution repudiating “any theory or worldview that denies that racism, oppression, or discrimination is rooted, ultimately, in anything other than sin.”

The resolution also reaffirmed a 1995 resolution in which

messengers apologized to African Americans for “condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism.”

Among other resolutions adopted by messengers were those addressing:

- The Equality Act currently before the U.S. Congress, which would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Questioning) as a protected class.
- Defense of the Hyde Amendment prohibiting federal taxpayer funding of abortions, which is currently under attack in the U.S. Congress.
- Permanent disqualification from the pastorate of those who have committed sexual abuse.

Sixty-four new International Mission Board (IMB) missionaries were appointed June 14 in a Sending Celebration. They will join 3,631 IMB missionaries already on the field around the world. The vast majority of the new missionaries stood behind a screen during the service, as they could not be identified due to security concerns in their locations of service.

The North American Mission Board reported that Southern Baptists have planted more than 8,200 churches in the past decade. They comprise nearly 17% of all Southern Baptist churches and represent nearly 19% of all baptisms reported in the SBC.

SBC President J.D. Greear, senior pastor of multi-campus The Summit Church in the Raleigh-Durham, N.C., area, during his time in office had previously retired the Broadus Gavel, which was named for slave owner John Broadus, the second president of Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and had been used continuously at annual meetings since 1872.

He gaveled the 2021 Annual Meeting to order with the Judson

Gavel, named for Adoniram Judson Jr., who served as a missionary to Burma for 40 years.

The 2022 SBC Annual Meeting is slated for June 14-15 in Anaheim, Calif.