

To: *Dr. Kevin Ezell, President of the North American Mission Board and NAMB Trustees*
Dr. Ronnie Floyd, President of the SBC Executive Committee and SBC Executive Committee

This letter is being sent to the leadership of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention on behalf of the undersigned Baptist state convention leaders in response to the “Strategic Cooperation Agreements” sent by NAMB to non-South Baptist state conventions, dated June 26-30, 2020.

Our state conventions have appreciated our respective partnerships over the years with the North American Mission Board, especially in the areas of church planting and evangelism, and also in coordinated missions and mobilization efforts such as disaster relief. We believe we work most effectively when working in collaboration and harmony, especially in our non-South states where the local context and cultures of our mission fields can vary so significantly.

Over the past ten years, NAMB has grown increasingly centralized and unilaterally directive in its strategies, its personnel and funding processes, and its relationships with state conventions. While this has not been our desire, and we are convinced the results reveal diminished fruitfulness, we have respected NAMB’s autonomy. Our state conventions have made many adjustments to cooperate with NAMB’s evolving and frequently changing strategies and guidelines. Some state conventions believe NAMB hasn’t kept previous agreements. In spite of this, we have greatly reduced staff and state-directed ministry to provide Cooperative Program funds to the national SBC.

However, we find that the latest, revised “Strategic Cooperation Agreement” for October, 2020-September, 2023 abandons true collaborative partnership. For one thing, it leaves state conventions with little or no role in the assessment, supervision, or evaluation of church planters or statewide personnel. In addition, though NAMB notified state conventions on August 7 and conceded to fund evangelism for one more year in the same manner that was planned for 2020 (evangelism funding through state conventions has been frozen since mid-March), moving forward we have little confidence with which to plan for evangelism funding from NAMB in our annual operating budgets, and we have been told that undesignated “administrative funding” would be reduced by half in 2021 and then eliminated in the years following. This means that NAMB will provide no certain funding through non-south state conventions beginning in 2022. Tens of millions of dollars that were once part of funding church planting and evangelism through non-south state conventions is now part of NAMB’s budget, directed exclusively by NAMB, for work in our states.

An agreement that reflects little collaborative partnership and that promises much reduced investment in state strategies, offers little value to our state conventions. As a result of these and other concerns, many of us feel the proposed agreements are simply not in our best interest. Indeed, after years of attrition, many of us believe our longstanding partnerships with NAMB may finally be coming to an end in any meaningful sense.

As we have attempted to understand how we fit into the evolving NAMB paradigm and continue to support the work of the churches in our state conventions, many of us and our boards

have contemplated such responses as declining to enter into any agreements with NAMB, retaining a larger percentage of Cooperative Program funds for the work of the state conventions, designating giving only to specific SBC work, reducing promotion of the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and replacing it with a more robust state missions offering, or even creating unique state-facilitated partnerships. Some of us would like to go on an annual block-grant system like southern state conventions. They each receive \$300,000 annually from NAMB. No non-south convention will receive even close to this amount by October 2021. These options, as well as others that have been discussed, are not what we prefer, but NAMB’s reduction in funding through State Conventions totals over \$50 million annually, and we must be ready to do what is necessary to support the ongoing work of the churches in our home states who look to us for contextualized assistance in church planting, evangelism, and missions.

Please understand the issue prompting us to respond is partnership. Our concern is with the way NAMB dictates the terms of the relationship between various state conventions. This most current “cooperation agreement,” like others before it, included no discussion with the leadership of our respective conventions as to what would be most effective in our states. We were simply informed as to how it will be. God will provide the resources we need one way or another, but we would rather be in partnership with NAMB working together to reach the lost and make disciples than each going our own way. We remain committed to the shared goals of Southern Baptists that are so beautifully illustrated by the Cooperative Program. It is the desire of every state convention executive director signing this letter to be net contributors to missions through the Cooperative Program and our shared causes. In recent years non-south conventions have given about \$46 million annually through the national SBC when all giving channels are combined.

We are reaching out to you now to try to avoid any escalation that will become more and more public, with additional boards and leaders in our states getting involved. Dr. Leo Endel is serving as the president of our Baptist State Conventions Executive Director group for 2020-21 and Dr. Sonny Tucker is our president elect for 2021-22. For simplicity and clarity of communication, we propose that you direct any response to Dr. Endel for his coordination with the undersigned. Of course you may also feel free to respond directly to all of us simultaneously if you choose. We respectfully ask for a response prior to August 15. We are praying for you as you consider our concerns.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:
Randy Adams
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Signature

Randy Adams
Printed Name

Northwest Baptist Convention
State Convention

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