

Ezell: NAMB-state partnerships remain strong

by Kevin Ezell, posted Friday, November 13, 2015 (one month ago)

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Kevin Ezell is president of the North American Mission Board.

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP) -- This is the time of year in our Southern Baptist family when our state Baptist convention partners gather for their annual meetings. I have enjoyed being a part of several of these events this year, which always provide a chance to hear about how God is working through our churches and partnerships in North America.



It is also a great time to express my gratitude for the partnership we have with our conventions and to remind Southern Baptists that much of the North American Mission Board's ministry work flows through, and in cooperation with, these partners.

Here are some highlights of how these partnerships take place:

-- NAMB has strategic cooperation agreements and cooperative budgets with our state convention partners. These are clearer, more concise and more effective than ever before, and our funding is more strategic.

-- About \$38 million of NAMB's 2014-2015 budget was directed to state conventions with the majority of that going to non-South states. Our strategic cooperation agreements require that the majority of this funding is to be spent on church plants, evangelism or church revitalization. We still also help provide certain convention staff positions and church planting catalysts.

-- The leaders of state Baptist conventions in the South have played a vital role in helping us shift more of NAMB's funding to non-South areas. NAMB had been spending more than \$10 million annually in South states where the overwhelming amount of Southern Baptist Convention resources already exist. Now, South leaders have allowed us to move to an annual grant of \$300,000 for each of their states. Again, these funds are to be used on church planting, evangelism and church revitalization. This is allowing us to put an additional \$6 million annually in non-South areas to increase the church planting capacity.

-- We now have a 100 percent funding plan model for non-South state convention partners. In the past, NAMB has required these conventions to match a portion of the funds we sent, even if we provided 85, 90 or even 95 percent of their funding. But often, state partners could not provide their portion. This left money on the table year after year. Southern Baptists don't give sacrificially so that we can leave money unspent. Two years ago we began offering non-South state convention partners a 100 percent plan which limits spending on infrastructure and it places a maximum amount of funding on the field for church planting and evangelism. All but one of our non-South state partners are on board or are in the process of adopting this plan. By the way, the 100 percent plan would not have been possible without the sacrifices made by the leaders of our South convention states.

-- More NAMB funding is going to church planting than ever before and this helps state conventions. In 2011, NAMB spent 18.1 percent of its budget on church planting. Today it is 53.92 percent. Of course the top priority for these new churches is reaching people for Christ. But as these church plants grow and strengthen they contribute more through the Cooperative Program and in other ways, benefiting the state Baptist convention where they are located and the SBC family at large.