

**Kevin Ezell, NAMB, and Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network Concerns**  
**Nov. 26, 2014**

From: Will McRaney  
Exec. Missional Strategist  
Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network  
To: Kevin Ezell  
President – North American Mission Board

Kevin,

I appreciate the unique trust that you carry as the leader of our national mission board. You and Jeff have been effective in ministry and are men who are of honorable reputation. You serve a sister SBC organization that has a significant place of leadership among our family of autonomous sister organizations. We all serve Christ and we also serve Southern Baptists in positions of great trust and responsibility around the stewardship of our mission. I appreciate NAMB's unique role in our overall mission.

As Jeff noted in an earlier conversation, it is very important for us to work in a healthy manner. I am seeking to exercise God-honoring leadership of our Network and partner with NAMB in kingdom advancing ways. We are seeking to do this together around challenges we did not create and facts which seems to be disconnected from perceptions. I believe we can get to some common truths, work together well and dismiss these attempts to confuse and distract us from our Kingdom work. I will seek in this document to provide clear disclosure in hopes that we will quickly let not misperceptions continue to waste precious energies.

I appreciate the opportunity to address concerns and present my understandings of some facets of our common work. Clarity of communicating on paper is a bit more challenging than in person. Hopefully the thoughts and spirit will come through as I seek to clarify and fill in essential components and summarize a few concerns I have already provided you in previous communications. I am hopeful this effort below will help us alleviate some of the concerns expressed and set us on a new healthy course in our partnership.

I would encourage us to take the long view of things as we move forward. Our Network and I are sure NAMB desires to give and receive respect as we each carry out our assigned roles and steward that which God has entrusted to us. Both organizations have been around a long time. In most areas, the associations were the first to get formed and then followed by the state conventions. The Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network has been faithfully carrying out its mission for about 175 years and we are aware SBC pioneer Annie Armstrong carried out her ministry in our region. The North American Mission Board has a long history as well.

I am not a contentious person and seek to live peaceably toward greater Kingdom advance, as I am sure you do as well. Should we have issues or concerns, I would value the opportunity to discuss them to keep from giving footholds to the enemy or wasting energies unnecessarily instead of working through mission impacting challenges as they are certain to arise. I did appreciate the time you invested in sharing the several concerns and give me the opportunity to address and clarify several points which we share completely different information or perspectives.

### **Issues We May Be Dealing With:**

- **Miscommunications**

Communications are hard at its best. Our Network assumes that like our Network, you desire to please Jesus and lead NAMB rightly before God. We are at different distances and layers from the communications we must both use to make decisions and lead our organizations. I believe many if not all of the three concerns you expressed would be significantly reduced with some additional and/or clarifying information. You have asked me to bring concerns to you and Jeff, which I have done and I appreciate seeing your concerns so that I can quickly and in an informed manner address those specific concerns directly.

I would like to propose that as we move forward, we work from conversations on procedural and staffing matters and then quickly to emails to highlight understandings and then verify and/or clarify on matters of decisions or directions or understandings. I would assume this primarily will occur in the exchanges that Jeff and I have about various details as they arise. These emails will assist with memory and help with clarity as well. Summary conclusions of conversations could be exchanged to help with communications.

- **Difference in Understanding of the Role of NAMB and the Network**

Our Network is an autonomous and wants to exercise intentional stewardship and mutual respect for our partners as we carry out evangelism, church planting and ministry. Both NAMB and MABN desire to work to advance the Kingdom of God.

In August 2012, NAMB and the BCMD entered a written Cooperative and Strategic Agreement that guides their relationship. We as the leadership of the BCMD are a people of integrity and will keep the stipulations of those agreements. At the same time, we are a sister Baptist organization that values mutual cooperation and respect. We look forward to a future of mutual cooperation and respect. We do not desire to be contentious or selfish, but as stewards of the Lord desire to be faithful to the mission field He has assigned and has given to us and do so in a way of loving mutual reciprocity or koinonia.

We understand and appreciate the role of NAMB in prosecuting its mission as it relates to MABN, to be that of advisor, helper, but not controller. We understand that as NAMB invests money in the mission of the MABN. NAMB is pursuing its mission to see church planting develop across the US and we should continue to operate with integrity of purpose as faithful stewards and be accountable for the use of those funds.

We also understand that it is reasonable for NAMB to expect MABN to use funds responsibly, and effectively. However, we the churches in the MABN, are the ones who will live with the wake behind the church planters. This would include their efforts, the results, their success or failures and their spirit of cooperation or distrust that they foster among the churches from their connection with our cooperative ministry. For this reason, we see the Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network as being accountable to the Lord to take intelligent, aggressive, and healthy actions in the selection, training, coaching, deployment, management, and servicing of church planting personnel. We see NAMB's role as providing support, insight and counsel and to the extent possible, funds to help the Network execute its stewardship responsibilities to the Lord Jesus.

- Possible Unseen Agendas

It is always possible that organizations and or individuals have agendas that are not readily seen or apparent that impact their attitudes and decisions. In fact the Scripture would exhort us all to guard our hearts, because we all have the capacity to be double-minded and desire both the things of the Lord and selfish desires as well.

The NAMB has worked to get focused, clear and then public with its overall direction as a new direction was set several years ago. The Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network has recently invested significant time and energies in clarifying our mission, roles, objectives and strategies with the churches in our region. The Exec has been out publicly speaking in all parts of our region and then to the entire network of churches at our Annual Celebration earlier this month. Further, in this document I will seek to further clarify my understandings and directions so that all those seeking to interpret the intent of the Network and its leaders have a solid base of information from which to form informed opinions and make contributions.

### **My Understandings & Commitments:**

- Work Cooperatively, Not Contentiously, Not Argumentatively:

We as the Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network are an autonomous organization that plays a cooperative role in the life of our denomination. God established this Network of churches and gave them the responsibility and privilege to sharing the love of Jesus Christ to the peoples of our region and then to the peoples of the world.

Our desire is to work with other sister denominational organizations cooperatively for Kingdom advance, not contentiously or argumentatively. Within our autonomy, we desire to work responsibly and with intentional stewardship to the Lord of all resources, human, physical, and financial. As He establishes all things and brought the Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network into existence, we seek to steward it responsibly, intelligently, aggressively, and in love as we look to the interests of others as well as our own as Paul wrote in Phil. 2:3-4.

We do believe that God will hold us accountable for how we steward the mission He entrusted to us in taking the gospel to the lost in our realm through evangelism, church planting and ministry. One day we will give an account to the Lord Jesus for our efforts in these areas. As we pursue our responsibilities before the Lord as an autonomous organization accountable to Him, we want to be a cooperative member of the Southern Baptist Convention family of churches and organizations. Our understanding is that our

cooperation should enable other organizations to aggressively pursue their responsibilities before the Lord and should not distract from or undermine the assignment the Lord has assigned us in our region.

- Disposition of Missions Money:

We count it a significant portion of our stewardship to give a high degree of accountability and accuracy on all funds entrusted to our stewardship. NAMB and our Network operate on different budget years which leads to some differences, but it is my understanding that in 2013, the money sent out and the money received in dollars through the Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network were close in amounts. Churches of the Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network through their gifts to the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Offering invested approximately \$915K into national missions through NAMB. During the same year 2013, NAMB reinvested approximately \$915K in our region formally through our Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network. Neither of these figures represents the total picture, as our churches are investing significantly more through direct missions and sponsoring churches across North America, and NAMB is also directing additional financial resources and personnel in the region that is not reflected in the numbers shared.

We appreciate NAMB doing this and its generosity toward this mission efforts in this region. However, the money we send out and the money received are similar in amounts. The funds that return through the Network come with additional controls and stipulations that can serve to both enhance, but also restrict our stewardship toward our mission of multiplying the Kingdom advance and mission impact through existing and new churches.

- Stipulations of our Cooperative Agreements:

In August 2012, the North American Mission Board and the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware entered into a Strategic Partnership Agreement. While the stipulations of the Cooperative Agreement were made prior to the current Exec. Director coming into office, the Exec. Director of the BCMD is committed to honoring the terms stipulated by the agreement.

There are several points of the agreement which seem to be in question regarding violation. According to the agreement, the ratios and other terms of the agreement can be reviewed and adjusted annually. During 2015 budget consultations with Jeff Christopherson, Northeast Regional VP of NAMB, NAMB Mobilizer Kevin Marsico and BCMD SDOM David Jackson, I was first made aware of the joint ministry funding ratio of 1% per \$100,000 of Cooperative Program dollars that remained in the state convention. Being new to the office, I was not aware of the written cooperative agreement, so VP Christopherson sent a copy to me after our budget meeting in Columbia.

After reading the agreement and evaluating our 2013 financial statements, I inquired to the NAMB Regional VP regarding a possible ratio adjustment to reflect the actual 2013 financials, which would result in an adjustment from the BCMD providing 26% to 22% on all jointly funded expenditures. The NAMB VP verbally indicated an adjustment to the ratio could be made in October 2014 as NAMB begins its new budget year to reflect the agreed to 1% per \$100,000.

Within several days Christopherson returned with the news from the NAMB corporate office that the adjustment would not be made. I understood the reason to be that NAMB could not make the change but every five years due to financial budgeting and recordkeeping factors. The Exec. Director appreciated the prompt communication of the decision of NAMB corporate as we were seeking to put together the Network's 2015 budget. The Network's Exec. Director reread the agreement where it states the agreement can be reviewed and adjusted annually. The Exec. Director had the BCMD chief financial steward review the document as well for an additional perspective. The Exec. Dir. communicated with the NAMB Regional VP regarding the Cooperative Agreement and was told that the intent of the agreement was for the ratios not be adjusted until 5 years had elapsed. As the Agreement was created prior to the new BCMD Exec's arrival to the position, it was impossible to know the intent.

Part of the NAMB budget proposal to the BCMD, was to increase the overall church planting budget for planters \$150,000; about \$39,000 being BCMD's portion under agreement and \$111K NAMB's portion. The Network appreciated the offer for the additional \$111k by NAMB, but could not accept the additional funds at that time. If NAMB had chosen to reduce the matching percentage 4% in keeping with 2013 BCMD financial realities and the Cooperative Agreement, about \$36k/yr. would have been available to match the additional money NAMB was offering to invest in church planters in our region.

Between the original 2012 agreement and current realities, the BCMD was operating on approximately \$400,000 less in CP staying in the state from the time of the original agreement two years earlier. At the direction of the new BCMD Exec, Tom Stolle, Chief Financial Steward, completed an extensive internal operations audit and invested significant time in reworking operations to save \$105,000 annually to help keep evangelism, church planting and ministry funds at their previous levels. The remaining smaller state staff also took a 1% reduction in retirement contributions to personally invest in our mission as an organization. Internally the BCMD was making all types of adjustments and reductions both in personnel, retirement and operational costs, all of which also impact church planters, in order to keep church planting and other ministry budgets the same in the midst of sending a higher percentage to SBC national than prior to Great Commission Resurgence. This was done in the midst of having some \$400,000 less in Cooperative Program staying in the region than was calculated for setting funding ratios for the 2012 NAMB/BCMD agreement.

The BCMD will strive to keep the stipulated agreement and where we know, the spirit of the agreement as well. However, it is more challenging for all involved to keep clarity around non-written agreements and intent. We keep our word, but we live in an age of legal agreements and we will keep our terms, not out of spirit of contention or being uncooperative, but out of a spirit of integrity and responsibility for our stewardship. We have no desire to be a contentious, legally spirited type of organization, but we cannot assume responsibilities that we have not formally committed to and we ask the same of our partners.

A concern has been expressed regarding hiring practices. Additional information and conversations should help us come to a much better understanding on what actually took place on these matters. These can be addressed more completely at a later point in this

document, but the Cooperative Agreement also speaks to these matters in terms of initiating the search, final approval, and our carrying out of our assigned responsibilities by our individual organizations.

- Frontlines of Mission Field

In keeping with our understanding of the New Testament, and historical Baptist traditions and ways of life, we believe that awareness of what needs to be done lies closer to the frontlines. Those nearer to the frontlines should be engaged and involved in creating and executing strategy. Baptist Associations have down through our history represented the interest of the people in the field. State Conventions have historically been autonomous self-governing organizations that are to represent the interests and insights of the people on the field. Our larger SBC is also an autonomous organization that should be inclined to represent well and fairly the interest of the churches. Our denominational boards have been charged with responsibilities to help with this overall process in the historic SBC structure and in a similar fashion to the New Testament church.

We have not had an Episcopalian type structure with an elite that dictates everything. We have needed aggressive leaders to lead into the future, but leaders in touch and sensitive to the needs of the constituents. It has been a part of the genius of the Baptist expansion along with having leaders who have an aggressive spirit of cooperation. In the Network, we see ourselves as an organization made up of duly elective representatives and a staff that courageously pursues the responsibilities of the Lord in a spirit of cooperation with the welfare of the churches in the field foremost in our minds.

It is vital the Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network be integrally engaged with the enlisting, equipping, encouraging, supporting and deploying of planters in starting churches in our region of responsibility. We have to live with the planters, the results, how they deal with people, other churches and the various facets of our denominational life. We are actually much closer to their mission field. We are in a better position to see what is happening on the field and what is not, therefore it is our best interest of our stewardship of responsibility and mission to be the organization on point in assisting those newly planted churches so that we can assist and redirect them as they experience challenges. It is the other local pastors around them and the Network staff that will be there to assist them with understanding the mission field, care for them and their families, celebrate victories and cry with them over personal and ministry hurts, help them with church and many other types of connections necessary for effective ministry, and provide assistance as they grow and develop disciples and as church for decades to come.

Having a strong regional base of support for the planters is vitally important not only for the individual plant, but also to maintain and enhance the several SBC distinctives, including essentials of SBC doctrine and a cooperative form of missions out of gratitude for others who paved the way. We really do believe we can do more faster and better together.

- Self-supporting to help others

In some areas of our denomination, the local work is extremely weak and almost entirely dependent upon the work of NAMB. And in those situations a higher degree of NAMB input and control is justified to make the work of the Great Commission progress. In our own region the Baptist work of the past has resulted in 550 churches and resulted in a fair amount of strength for effective ministry and the financial resources to carry on their own load.

The assistance of NAMB has been and is helpful and much appreciated as the churches in the Network seek to bear the vast majority of their own financial responsibility and also share with others across the globe. In this situation, cooperation with NAMB is helpful and accountability for spending NAMB funds well is reasonable. However, we understand we should be at a point in the life of our organization to control our destiny and set direction, and supervise our staff as is referenced in the Cooperative Agreement. With this understanding, we are grateful for our cooperative relationship with NAMB and the various ways it has and is contributing to our work.

Over the years the NAMB/HMB, expressed a desire to help the northeast and other parts of the country to grow stronger so that they can deploy money into more needy areas. The Baptists in this region have not only spawned other SBC work throughout the Northeast region, it has grown so that they can fund a major part of its operations and mission effort. No ministry organization, including the BCMD, has all the funds it would like to carry out its mission. However, while we greatly appreciate cooperative funds, we are seeking to take more responsibilities for the ministry that takes place in our assigned part of North America and through its strength, other parts of the globe. Historically, the SBC has rejoiced over this effort of becoming self-supporting for great Kingdom impact and sharing into more needy regions.

### **My Concerns:**

There are some concerns that have been raised that we are trying to pay attention to as a Network who has mutual work and interests in our region.

- Funding for Starting and Strengthen Network Churches

Our denominational leadership has been aware of the downward trend in Cooperative Program from an average of 10.7% per church in the mid-1980s to 5.61% in 2012 and 2013, with all projections of that continuing and possibly in fact accelerating based on certain factors. Part of the decline prompted me to do an aggressive and intelligent study of factors toward the drivers back in 2012 prior to accepting the responsibilities to serve as the BCMD Executive Director. From my study and analysis, I did a formal summary of 13 factors impacting the Cooperative Program and presented it to various SBC leaders, including all the state executive directors and then to the executive leadership of the SBC Executive Committee. While not comprehensive or solution oriented, I sought to identify and communicate what I believe are the major factors impacting our Cooperative Program and capacities to carry out our collective mission. I would have every belief that all of the other SBC boards and agencies have done similar studies and made adjustments in strategies accordingly.

In assessing what the SBC boards, state conventions, and associations need do in the realm of church planting and evangelism as we work to multiplying the mission impact of churches, we realize that all of these cost money. The 2015 budget of the Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network has 70% of its budget coming from the Cooperative Program and another 16% from the NAMB. We purchased two Cooperative Program videos to use and share with churches and help facilitate the Annie Armstrong and Lottie Moon Offering through or in conjunction with our state offices. Both the IMB and the NAMB are dependent on the Coop. Program as well. If the figures I located are accurate, about 36% of the IMB's budget comes from the Cooperative Program and 36-38% of NAMB budget revenues comes from the Cooperative Program.

We are grateful that both the IMB and NAMB have highly recognizable designated offerings with special seasons of emphasis. State Conventions have had various levels of limited recognition and success in their state missions offerings. In recent history, the BCMD has collected around 3% of its budget from its state mission offering.

The good news is there are significantly more plants taking place across our region. This obviously has put stress in most every facet and system involved in planting from processing, assessing, training, coaching, counseling, encouraging and funding. A related concern, which is actually a good, but a difficult challenge to have, is that most all the 2015 budgeted money to assist planters has either been committed to plants that have started in the last three years or are planned to be started in 2015.

People in our region desperately need Jesus. God has continued to open the floodgates of the world by sending the peoples of the world to our neighborhoods. Healthy mission engaged churches serve as the foundation, funding and future for all missions efforts and in fact, all church ministry as well. We feel quite responsible to the Lord for making evangelism, church starting and ministry happen in our region of responsibility as a matter of stewarding the mission engagement in our area and through them to the world.

With the projections for continued further declines in the Cooperative Program over the next several years and a recent decline of over 20% in the BCMD state mission offering, I sought to steward my fiduciary responsibilities. One of those ways was to enhance the promotion and opportunity to invest in Kingdom mission advancement in our region through the historic state mission offering, now known as GoFwd Mid-Atlantic in keeping with Annie's admonition to aggressively leap forward into future mission impact.

This emphasis of an established and historic Baptist offering is not out of a spirit of contention or non-cooperation but simply it is our desire to please the Lord by aggressively pursuing our stewardship and responsibility to both carry more of our load and share resources with others. Like the two SBC Board's designated offerings, making this state missions vehicle recognizable and available year round may provide us additional resources to fund the work of the Network in evangelism, church planting and ministry. There is no desire to detract from the work of the SBC or its mission boards as we share common objectives from different roles. There is a desire however to be realistic for providing the necessary financial resources to fulfill our stewardship.

- Behaviors on some Personnel on Field



Behavior of some personnel on the field are generating reactions from people in our Network that is hindering our ability to communicate clearly on the field and with our partners and advance our strategic cooperative and unique mission objectives assigned to us as autonomous sister SBC organizations. I first experienced those concerns from the BCMD family before I actually officially began my position. Then several months later we had the difficulties of the Send City Coordinator representing and speaking on behalf of our entire organization without my approval. Over the last several months as additional concerns were expressed to me by leaders in our Network, I communicated those to NAMB national leaders in phone conversations and written communications. On October 16, 2014 I shared a summary of those personnel concerns in a letter to you. These personnel concerns are matters brought to my attention to explore, not ones the Exec created or sought out.

Much of the noise we are both hearing and having to invest time revolves around these personnel concerns. One of my hopes and prayers is that should Michael Crawford receive BCMD and NAMB formal approval, he will use his unique ministry and relationships to soon assist us with frontline troops and help put us on a new trajectory and path forward. Neither of us have excess time or energy to use in an ongoing fashion to continually address these distractions from our mission.

Perceived misinformation being spread that is undermining our ability to cooperate. The Exec is aware that it is impacting us locally and assume it has caused unwanted challenges to the President and Regional VP of NAMB as well. We are also hindered in this matter because the damaged lines of communication.

Misinformation and confusion is also undermining our work in the region. There seems to be confusion as to the roles of our Network and NAMB. There seems to be confusion as to who the planters go to for what parts of the planting process in light of NAMB's several year emphasis, newer structures, staff, and funding resources. Historically, the role of the associations, the state and our national mission board seemed to be more clear.

Our Network desires to steward our responsibilities and roles well. In many ways we are seeking to do this in an ever changing ministry context and appropriately deal with the challenges as they arise.

- Unique Roles of Sister Organizations

We are also damaged by the confusion in the field over the various roles of two separate organizations, as was recently noted as a factor by the pulling out of a Sending Baltimore lead partner and a BCMD very engaged pastor and planting advocate saying, "The SBC is broken" as I have written to you. In past years, it is the Exec's understanding this confusion did not exist, as the various partners, associations, state, and NAMB, each had definable roles and the churches and leaders we served knew exactly where to go for all denominational things church planting, evangelism, and disciple making. All things church planting eventually ended up on the desk of the SDOM and there was less confusion and the opportunity for clear communication and direction.

**Concerns Expressed:**

Concerns – you have expressed to me

By email dated Nov. 20, 2014 from the President of NAMB to the Exec. Director of Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network three primary concerns were expressed.

- Local Disconnect with NAMB staff & Returning phone calls:

Any claim that I am openly speaking against both NAMB leaders who reside in our region is simply false and at best several people removed from the supposed remarks. Additionally, the Exec does not recall any conversation with the NAMB Regional VP in regards to any claim that the Exec has openly spoke against the two NAMB employees from Maryland. The Exec does recall parts of one conversation with Christopherson back in the summer in which he expressed he had received a call from a former planter who expressed a concern from an associational meeting he had attended. The Exec communicated to the NAMB VP that there were about 12 people in the room and the unspecified concern could be checked with others. The Exec does not recall receiving or being told any specifics in terms of what I was reported to have said or when or where. I would welcome to the opportunity to deal with any specific claim of statements I supposedly made or make. All leaders understand that general statements of concern or complaints are ones that cannot be readily addressed and misunderstandings regarding intent and/or meaning are a natural part of communications as each one speaks and hears from their own perspectives.

As it would be expected of all leaders in similar positions, the Network Exec has exercised discipline in open communications in light on concerns expressed to him from various pastors and leaders in the region in order to please Jesus and protect the good efforts of both the BCMD and NAMB. In fact, since receiving more concerns, the Exec has intentionally eliminated most all references by name or position to these NAMB staff in order to drastically reduce the potential for misunderstanding or misrepresentation of comments, unless a direct question is asked. The Exec is focused on aggressively and respectfully advancing the mission of the Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network, which is the topic of many corporate gatherings.

Misunderstandings occur all the time in communications, particularly as the conversation is removed from the source, removed in time, and the people listen seek to interpret, conjecture, or misapply information based on their expectations and own life experiences. Knowing my own heart, most things I am saying and knowing that I will give an account for every thought and word before the Lord, the Exec has and will continue to work to keep a guard on my thoughts, attitudes and certainly words in spite of some gossip and ramblings that are swirling about various related topics.

Concern was express that the BCMD Exec was not returning calls from local NAMB personnel. It has been the intent and practice of the Exec and his staff to be responsive to the needs or requests of various sister SBC organizations and partners. While the SDOM was the primary person of contact with our Network with the NAMB Mobilizer and the Send Baltimore Coordinator, the Exec has been in several meetings with one or both personnel. The Exec has no memory that at any point had a call and/or email with a request had been received from the Mobilizer, and consequently not one that had not been returned.

After an extensive search of phone logs and email communications by the executive office staff, not one message was found asking for a return contact was received. Only one phone or email message was found originating from the NAMB Mobilizer, Kevin Marsico through my assistant and none directly to the Exec. The communication was on Oct. 16, 2013, two weeks into my taking the position. The note to the Exec from the assistant indicated that Marsico was praying for me and wanted to know how he can serve you.

At a couple of points, email communication was received as a copy on something to our SDOM and on a couple of occasions, an invitation was received. The Exec has responded to each known invitation for him specifically and on a few occasions, the SDOM said he replied and or attended something for us.

If there were believed to be additional efforts to contact me, it could have been a mechanical malfunction or a faulty memory. I regret the belief that such outreaches were ignored and would be glad to exchange communications if such calls were to take place in the future.

- Selection of Personnel -- Hiring Protocol:

Concern has been expressed about the Network's hiring process. We certainly seek to hire new staff for our given mission aggressively with good stewardship and accountability for helping churches evangelize, disciple, and start new churches in our region. We are seeking staff with high character, high servant's spirit, and highly skilled people who seek to serve others. Based on the Cooperative Agreement, the policies of the BCMD, and a more complete look at related facts and factors, the hiring seems to be in good order given the totality of the situations. However, there could be unwritten expectations and there are missing conversations and information that would have provided greater clarity and agreement on the hiring process if known by both NAMB and BCMD leaders.

While we desire to be aggressive in our efforts to seek the Lord and highly qualified staff as a matter of responsible stewardship of the mission entrusted to us, we have no desire to be contentious or consumed by self-interest. However, we need to deploy personnel who will deploy and manage personnel in the field and to assist church leaders to be successful on the field.

Concerns were expressed about both the SDOE and the SDOM hiring processes and tied together to imply there is a pattern that is procedurally outside of the stipulated Cooperative Agreement dated August, 2012 between NAMB and the BCMD and/or uncooperative in nature. The facts of both situations when understood should demonstrate that the BCMD Exec has acted in keeping with the Cooperative Agreement. Conversations with NAMB took place in good timing on each situation. The Network Exec. fulfilled his job responsibility to secure staff as outlined by and in keeping with the Network's policies and allowed NAMB like opportunity for approval as well.

Regarding the hiring of our current SDOE, there is one or more conversations between the Network Exec and the NAMB Regional VP that apparently are missing in the accounts communicated by the NAMB President. In the later part of 2013 or possibly first part of 2014, the Network Exec made an inquiry by phone call(s) to the NAMB Regional VP regarding forthcoming changes in the evangelism positions. The Regional NAMB VP communicated his affirmation of my moving forward with whoever I deemed best and to

just let him know. Christopherson communicated at least two reasons to support this position to me. First, the Regional VP trusted the BCMD Execs wide expertise and experience in this area, and second, his belief that whatever we did would be an improvement in our overall evangelism team. He also indicated a lesser hiring concern for NAMB over the hiring of evangelism personnel than church planting personnel.

The BCMD Exec. communicated to him that internal changes were being made as our then current Love Loud Missionary was leaving our staff. I communicated our desire to move our former SDOE back into her sweet spot of ministry in the coming vacancy as Love Loud Missionary and then begin a search for a SDOE. The Network Exec moved over the next several months to internally consider several people who might fit the need without initiating conversations with any candidate, then received two unsolicited resumes to consider, and then began a conversation with Dr. Joel Rainey for the position over multiple weeks in a slow and deliberate process.

Dr. Rainey was already an approved Church Planting Catalyst and highly qualified in evangelism and missions. At some point the Exec. presented his name to the Regional VP of NAMB with excitement, in keeping with what was understood from prior conversation(s) and written in the Cooperative Agreement. The full expectation was that Dr. Rainey would be received and approved by NAMB with great excitement, as we were adding a SDOE (Evangelism) with church planting success from the field and the denominational level as a DOM and as a CPC for the BCMD and NAMB.

Dr. Rainey had already been approved by NAMB to serve as a CPC, so the Exec was not aware if NAMB had additional approval processes or if this was just a matter of changing his position in their records. According to the Cooperative Agreement, NAMB does give the final approval to all candidates that are jointly funded. To the best of my recollection, the NAMB Regional VP communicated to me that he would have conversations with some (one) of the evangelism leadership at NAMB. The Exec does not remember any conversation indicating a disapproval of the hiring process or the person for the SDOE, Dr. Joel Rainey.

As per my email communication to the NAMB President on Nov. 15, 2014, the BCMD Exec is recommending to both the NAMB VP and the Administrative Committee of the Network that we hire Michael Crawford, a faithful and successful African American church planter to serve as the next State Director of Missions, a jointly funded position. The Cooperative Agreement stipulates the parameters and procedures regarding Personnel. One statement reads "Jointly funded missionaries must go through the approval process of both the convention and the NAMB. Search for jointly funded missionaries shall be initiated by the convention in consultation with NAMB. Final approval of the candidate will be from NAMB."

Part of the Cooperative Agreement indicates both NAMB and Convention leaders need to operate within their respective boards and policies and procedures. Recognizing the stipulated procedures in the process and duties assigned to Exec of the BCMD, we are moving aggressively in this matter and as it moves forward we will follow our responsibilities and agreements on these matters. I have communicated to Pastor Crawford that his hiring is contingent upon the approval of both the BCMD Administrative

Committee and NAMB. He is also aware that there will be communications with Christopherson as the Regional VP and possible questionnaires and/or tests.

As I noted in my email to you dated Nov. 15, 2014, I had been in current conversations with Crawford for a few weeks regarding other contract/part-time roles that would multiply his opportunities for mission and ministry within our Network and in various ways assist planters and pastors. We had been exploring various options and had been exploring possibilities with internal dialogues with select staff and Network leaders.

Crawford is a man of deep character with successful planting experience in urban Baltimore. He has great credibility with planters, strong relations with NAMB staff in the region, and high credibility with our African American leaders. With the short notice of David's departure and confusion because of misinformation among some planters as to the direction and future of church planting in our Network, it quickly became apparent that I should transition the conversations with Crawford to include the option of seeking approval for him to join our staff as our next SDOM.

This Mid-Atlantic Region has desperately needed a quality African American leader on so many fronts as we minister among, DC, Baltimore, and South Philadelphia, and also among the wealthiest and poorest of African Americans in the nation. The BCMD Exec has an extensive background in church planting as a planter, professor, researcher, assessor, coach, and training and support system designer and writer. The Exec has some understanding of the lay of the land in our region, and experience with Michael in various ministry and personal settings. The Exec came to believe that Michael Crawford would be a great fit to serve as SDOM and it is fully expected that after a review by NAMB personnel and our Administrative Committee, he would receive enthusiastic support and formal approval.

The timeline of events is as follows...

- Oct. 31, 2014 – SDOM resigns
- Oct. 31 – Nov. 5 – Exec. out of state including speaking at Renovate
- Nov. 6-8 final preparations for Annual Celebration
- Nov. 7 – initial conversation with Crawford about the opening, the job and his possible interest as he had communicated a 'no' to another possible church planting full-time role, other ongoing conversations about possible other roles prior to SDOM opening
- Nov. 9-11 – Annual Celebration of the Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network
- Nov. 13 – second meeting with Crawford in which he indicated his interest after his prayer and deliberations and more discussions about the job
- Nov. 14 – I exchanged communications with Jeff Christopherson and then the NAMB President regarding Crawford, with him indicating a desire to have input into possible candidates and my communicating that I had previously communicated with Crawford that he was my choice, pending the approval of the Admin. Committee and NAMB
- Nov. 12-14 – David Jackson, SDOM, last three days in the office before his two week vacation and Nov. 30 final day

- Nov. 12 & 14 – meetings with Jackson to download the many and complex dynamics of our church planting systems and people so that we could be better prepared to serve planters well for both the Network and NAMB as he was off and then after his final day on our staff (Nov. 30).

I believed that I was operating within the Cooperative Agreement, in an aggressive, intelligent and God-directed manner for the best interest of our Network with a highly qualified and needed leader in this role. Based on Christopherson’s written statement that NAMB was most interested in having a “high capacity and proven church planting leader in this post”, I communicated with Christopherson and Ezell that I believe that Crawford was both of these and brought many other qualities that would serve the Network, NAMB, and the leaders in our region exceptionally well.

In absence of previous ongoing discussions with Crawford, more time would have been given to take in additional qualified candidates from NAMB’s broad ministry view and others as well. This may well have eliminated some of the current concerns. While the CPC positions are very tightly connected to church planting, the SDOM role includes church planting as a major component and has some oversight responsibilities. The SDOM has wider touch points with the Network’s overall mission partners and churches, including our Associational Directors of Missions. As such, we believe Michael Crawford is uniquely wired to serve and lead well in the necessary roles and capacities.

We have desired to serve the Lord, our planters, missionaries and other leaders well. We provide for them high quality staff, men of strong character, servant’s hearts, and experience, possessing expertise helpful to the overall mission of the BCMD and local churches. We have sought to do so not only in following the Cooperative Agreement around minimal stipulations, but looking to the interest of our collective strategic mission to advance the Kingdom of Christ in our region and through it to other parts and people of the world. We have sought to be open in our dialogues and cooperative in spirit and believe Michael Crawford will serve all involved well should he be approved.

- Church Planters Giving Requirement:

Each individual state convention has their own requirements regarding how much of the local offerings are to be reinvested in cooperative SBC mission efforts. Part of the objective of this practice is to teach the new church to think beyond themselves and to provide opportunity for the plant to reinvest in those who have invested freely in the many systems, resources, and people who have invested in them.

In Florida, the long established requirement for new plants receiving funds was to reinvest 8% into the Coop. Program and 2% to their local association. In the BCMD, the 10% required breakdown had been 6% to the Coop. Program, 3% to their local association, and 1% to some other SBC mission agency in the prior years. State conventions have differing requirements related to other mission offerings.

Exec’s memory of the matters surrounding this concern are as follows.

- VP Christopherson communicated with the SDOM and then later the Exec. that NAMB wanted to remove all of the 3% associational requirement from

church plants to be reinvested into the ministry of their local association. This was discussed by phone and then later to a group of NE Execs and the SDOM in New York.

- Christopherson instructed (maybe requested, not really sure) the BCMD to remove the 3% required gifts to the Associations from the church planter's covenant. It is my understanding NAMB made this change because some associations were not investing financially in the plants and some planters were complaining about it. In our New York meeting with NE leaders, the BCMD SDOM, David Jackson, expressed the possible concerns and negative impact for our associational partners.
- The BCMD SDOM and the exec made the adjustment in the covenant to remove the 3% to associations as a part of the requirement, recognizing that associations are not under the direction of our Network. In addition to the Network providing direct support to the planters, we desire to be assistance to the planters and those local associations and churches that are supporting them in various ways.
- Recognizing the increasing demands for resources to assist the almost double number of planters and plants from the previous year, we made the decision to require 6% to Cooperative Program and 2% to the state mission offering designated for church planting. The 2% in direct support from the planters receiving funds, would assist with the need to continue to support current planters, match (ratio) increasing planting funds through NAMB, and also provide mission money to fund future human and financial resources for new planters in the Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network. This type of request is not usual or unBaptist, but in keeping with our cooperative form of missions. By specifying only 8%, the planters have 2 additional percentage of the 10% requirement to invest in other SBC mission efforts of at their discretion.
- Since we are funding them, assessing, training, coaching, supporting, and counseling them and their families, we felt it quite appropriate to require funds to reinvest in themselves and future planters. To our thinking it would be a healthy thing for them to help fund an organization supporting them in the manner of the Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network.

We did require 2% of funds to the Network as an expression of their spirit of cooperation. We are asking them to cooperate with the Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network that is not only funding their plant directly, but providing Network staff expertise and funding for their planting processing, assessing, training, coaching, financial accounting, 3 counseling-coaching check-ups per year, and a variety of other things to assist them in their frontline mission work.

This requirement was not done out of defeat or malice or to be contentious or to undermine in any way the other parts of the SBC family of boards and organizations. To us, it seems to be intelligent and a help to establishing a sense of reciprocity, (koinonia) as in New Testament church life and has been a part of the Baptist spirit down through the years.

Again, in this matter we were not attempting to be contrary or devious, but simply to establish an intelligent policy of reciprocity.

- Others Unnamed

It was mentioned other concerns that were of lesser nature. Again, I am not aware of specifics, but please understand that we really desire to cooperate with the SBC intelligently and in a spirit of love and mutual respect for sister organizations. On specific matters, the MABN Exec. would be pleased to talk about specifics in order to gain clarification and if or where fault is found, to apologize and seek reconciliation. However, if fault or accusations are not accurate, both leaders of NAMB and BCMD can move forward in communicating truth in the midst of other lesser forms of communication.

We understand we are autonomous with a stewardship to fulfill our part of our collective ministry to push back darkness and we take that very seriously and desire to have it respected by our Baptist partners. We desire to move forward in a spirit of cooperation among autonomous organizations. We do not desire to create unnecessary problems or misunderstandings. However, we anticipate that same spirit and integrity from our Baptist partners.

**Future Communications:**

- Email Understandings and confirm in writing

It is apparent that there are significant misunderstandings and miscommunications that have led to the three noted concerns by the NAMB President and from the perspective of the Network as well. We are in different roles, are in different parts of the country, have our own unique perspectives, expectations, and values, and are trying to communicate with people whom we do not have long histories with at this point. I believe we would have been better served with writing down and sending by email our understandings from conversations soon after we complete them so that we have greater clarity and less room for misunderstanding on salient matters. I do not believe there has been malintent regarding conversations and how those are relayed to others or remembered or not remembered, but I believe we can do better in communications as we both seek to manage and lead in the midst of changing times, ministry contexts and mission factors. We can fairly easily email and then confirm on major points of discussion to enhance clarity and eliminate confusion and extra work.

**Closing:**

As the designated Executive leader of the Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network, I want to express my deep desire to intelligently and aggressively pursue God's calling on this SBC organization to assist churches in evangelism, church planting and ministry and do it in love, thinking of the interests of others and with a spirit of cooperation in the midst of our autonomy among sister SBC boards and agencies.

The Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network desires to steward our assigned responsibility before the Lord by courageously pursuing our mission in keeping with our historic roots and high calling, all in ways that please Jesus through a spirit of love and cooperation inside of our unique roles and autonomy as a part of the SBC family of boards and organizations.



May God grant us the wisdom and the grace to carry out our respective duties only in ways that please Jesus who we serve and will give an unfiltered account.

May God bless you personally and use NAMB fruitfully to serve His Kingdom and Southern Baptists in its mission.

Blessings to you and your team!

Will McRaney