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Cooper Suggests Areas for  
Study by Southern Baptists

NASHVILLE (BP)--Owen Cooper, drawing on his experiences as Southern Baptist Convention president and former SBC Executive Committee chairman, suggested here some areas Southern Baptists need to study and probe carefully during the next few years.

Addressing the Executive Committee during its three-day meeting here, the widely-traveled layman from Yazoo City, Miss., suggested that "the general philosophy of the Executive Committee should be made more positive."

Cooper also touched on the tongues movement, the name of the Southern Baptist Convention, greater involvement of state executive secretaries in SBC activities, the method of presenting resolutions to the SBC, clearer retirement policies by SBC agencies, wider representation on SBC bodies, better use of Southern Baptist volunteers, increased support for the SBC's unified Cooperative Program budget and the historic significance of the 1976 convention in Norfolk, Va.

"I say this in love," the SBC president emphasized, "but less time should be given (by the Executive Committee) toward finding 'reasons why things can't be done' and adjudicating differences between agencies, and more time should be given to finding 'how things can be done'...if necessary (by) reassigning programs among agencies.

"It is interesting to note that during the course of this meeting, considerable time was spent by the Executive Committee in listening to...the various agencies...outline the need for more funds.

"Ultimately, this hearing will result in the division of an inadequate amount of money among these requests and no agency will secure funds indicated as its current needs," Cooper said.

"It is also interesting to note," he continued, "that practically no time was spent by the Executive Committee in discussing ways and means to provide additional funds. It would appear to me that at least equal time should be given reports from agencies working to increase the amount of funds available for distribution.

"I recognize that this is not a specific assignment of the Executive Committee, but if the Executive Committee is to act 'for the convention ad interim' it should interest itself in all of the critical problems of the convention, and one is that of increasing available funds to agencies of the convention," he said.

"The problem we face as an Executive Committee is not the lack of ability to 'equitably distribute funds.' Our problem is that of a lack of funds 'to equitably distribute.'"

"The program of the convention must not become stagnant. It must be dynamic. It must show growth. There must be room for new ideas, for new concepts, for new programs," Cooper said.

"The innovator should not be frowned upon. He should not be thwarted. He should not be discouraged. He should be given freedom. The methodology of applying Christianity in the latter part of the 20th Century may change. Provision must be made for change," the retired chemical corporation executive said.

"This is not to suggest that we change the Biblical basis of our approach or turn one iota from being a Bible-based, Bible-believing, Bible-belonging mission body."

Cooper expressed concern over the "serious problems" the tongues movement has created in some Southern Baptist churches and suggested that the Executive Committee ask a committee to study the matter and draft "some ideas, suggestions or perhaps guidelines" to help pastors and laymen understand the situation and know how to cope with it.

"We should neither ignore this situation or get overly excited about it--but we should recognize and face it," Cooper said. "A lot of honest people need some help in this area."

Cooper said the name of the Southern Baptist Convention "should be under constant review and consideration.

"Our convention has work in each of the 50 states, two territories of the United States, in many outposts where we have citizens or military establishments," and "we have foreign mission work in 77 countries. Truly we are an international...organization.

"I am aware that we contend the name of 'Southern' reflects the 'theological position' rather than a 'territorial position,'" he said.

"This is exceedingly difficult for most non-'Southern Baptists' to understand. Actually the word 'Southern' denotes no more theological position than the word 'Calvin' denotes a geographical position."

Calling for greater involvement of youth and minority groups, Cooper said he recognized that the majority should not be circumvented "simply to recognize the minority, but I believe there are alternatives by which this can be accomplished and the matter should be studied."

On the question of more women representatives on SBC boards, commissions and committees Cooper said, "This has nothing to do with 'Women's Lib.' It's simply a matter of justice and has to do with recognizing the contribution that women make toward our work."

Cooper said executive secretaries of state conventions should be more involved in "the planning, the programming, the emphases and the projected activities of the Southern Baptist Convention."

He emphasized, "Through action of state conventions and the offices of state executives, decisions are made, not only affecting the financial support of the Southern Baptist Convention, but also the degree of enthusiasm with which cooperation is given, commitments are made and support is provided."

Cooper also called for study of retirement practices of SBC agencies, not to set an age for retirement but to improve how it is administered.

"What I am talking about is the general practice of extending on a year-to-year basis the tenure of service beyond age 65. It's not good administration to have a period of 'limbo' in the life of an agency. In the interest of employee morale and proper planning this should be studied."

He also called for review of "the entire matter of resolutions at the Southern Baptist Convention.

"If the resolutions of the convention are to be meaningful...demand the attention of those to whom they are addressed...attract the support of the great mass of Southern Baptists who never attend the convention, then... (they) should be properly introduced, carefully reviewed by the committee and seriously considered by the messengers--all in a well planned manner."

In closing Cooper suggested that the 1976 SBC meeting in Virginia offers Southern Baptists "a unique opportunity to...portray, on site, many challenging and historic events so meaningful in the development of our country...and denomination."