



2017 Ministry Inquiries

Cooperative Program

1. With an understanding that SBC entities which receive Cooperative Program funding share an equal responsibility to advance and grow the Cooperative Program, please give a description of the ERLC's efforts to promote the Cooperative Program and the expected outcome of these efforts that would be suitable for use in a Baptist Press or SBC LIFE article about the value the Cooperative Program brings to the ERLC.

In all our organizational outlets, the ERLC promotes the tremendous Great Commission impact that gifts to the Cooperative Program make possible, particularly in the work of the ERLC. As the entity that is the most dependent on Cooperative Program funds, we are as an organization critically aware of the importance of the Cooperative Program. The ERLC takes every opportunity to promote the Cooperative Program and give thanks for the sacrificial giving and prayerful support of Southern Baptists. As one example, one of the very purposes of our Leadership Network is to promote broader participation in SBC life, most notably through giving to the Cooperative Program. Here, we highlight the work the ERLC and other entities are doing and strive to be an ambassador for our denomination, highlighting how much Kingdom good we as Southern Baptists can do when we partner together. Beyond this, at every ERLC conference we hold private gatherings of key leaders and next generation pastors with the express purpose of promoting the Cooperative Program, both encouraging SBC churches to expand giving and seeking to identify and encourage like-minded non-SBC churches to become SBC churches and participate in Cooperative Program giving. Additionally, being the organization that helps drive the Global Hunger Relief initiative, we are uniquely suited to show how our cooperative partnership with IMB, NAMB, the Executive Committee, LifeWay, Baptist Global Response, and the WMU, partner together to feed hungry people around the world and carrying the gospel with it.

Ethnic Participation

2. Please give a descriptive report of participation of ethnic churches and church leaders in the life and ministry of your entity.

The ERLC has As the SBC entity specifically assigned with the responsibility of making Southern



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Baptists and others aware of the Bible's positions on racial reconciliation, among other issues, the ERLC has made this issue a focal point among the items we consistently address. Over the last five years, the ERLC has hosted a national conference on racial reconciliation (which was attended or viewed by thousands of people in person and online and attracted national media attention), consistently published materials on the biblical mandate for racial reconciliation and commentaries on flashpoints in society where we can bring a uniquely Christian and Baptist perspective to an item in the news concerning racial issues. Beyond that, the ERLC has included racial reconciliation in several of its hallmark resources designed to equip churches—video and printed church curriculum, the *Gospel for Life* book series, Sunday emphasis bulletin inserts, and several other areas. In terms of external groups, the ERLC has continued to welcome new leaders into the ERLC Leadership Council, a small network of leaders, pastors, and influencers within the denomination that ERLC leadership regularly meet with. Within this Council, over the last year the ERLC has added two African-American pastors, two Hispanic pastors, one Korean pastor, and one Iranian pastor. When it comes to personnel, we have filled two director-level positions within the ERLC over the last three years, with Trillia Newbell serving as Director of Community Outreach, and Steven Harris serving as Director of Advocacy (making him the first African-American representing Southern Baptists in our Washington office in Commission history). Our board presently has two African-American and one Asian-American serving as trustees. In terms of emphasis, Dr. Moore regularly addresses the issue of racial reconciliation in television, radio, and print interviews, and writes on the topic frequently.

Mental Health Resource

3. In response to a Ronnie Floyd motion, June 2013, Houston, TX, requesting the Executive Committee and SBC Entities to assist churches with mental health ministries, the Executive Committee appointed an advisory group, Fall 2013, to determine ways in which Southern Baptist entities and SBC churches can best help those who are in need of mental health assistance. The final report of this advisory group was presented to Dr. Frank S. Page, Fall 2014.

In the 2015 & 2016 Ministry Report(s) the following question was asked of each SBC entity:

Please give a progress report on what the ERLC has implemented to assist SBC churches with training and equipping people with mental health challenges and how will the ERLC



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continue to seek ways to work in cooperation with SBC entities and others to address the severe challenges imposed by mental illness?

For the 2017 Ministry Report please provide the following:

If the ERLC feels that reporting on this subject is within its purview, or falls within the scope of its ministry assignment(s), or has made any progress in the area of assisting churches with training and equipping people with mental health challenges, or has developed or identified resources to assist SBC churches in the area of mental health ministry, please provide a detailed progress report.

Over the last year, the ERLC expanded its efforts to cover America's mental health crisis and equip churches to serve their own congregations in this area particularly in commissioning and cultivating content on a range of mental health issues facing the church. We featured articles that call the church to minister, love, and address mental health. We invited experienced pastors to share with readers how to talk about mental health in their preaching, counseling, and small group life. We asked experts to weigh in on biblical and compassionate responses to anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. We explored new areas of concern, particularly the rising epidemic of child suicide and the way the digital revolution has left teens connected and yet alone. Additionally, we featured content by medical and mental health professionals on diseases like Alzheimer's and other mental health issues that plague the elderly. For a sampling of recent articles in this area:

- [Silent No Longer: Mental Health and the Church](#) (Daryl Crouch)
- [5 Facts About Child Suicide in America](#) (Joe Carter)
- [What Science Really Has to Say about Sexuality and Gender](#) (Joe Carter)
- [Making the Church a Safer Place for Mental Illness](#) (Stephen Altrogge)
- [A Space for Struggle, An Answer of Hope](#) (Alan Noble)
- [Alzheimer's Disease and the SBC's Resolve](#) (Benjamin Mast)
- [Virtually Connected, Physically Alone](#) (Christina Fox)
- [The Kids Are Not All Right: Helping Teenagers Who Are Anxious and Depressed](#) (Jared Kennedy)

ERLC Specific Questions

4. In your opinion, what is the most reliable metric indicating future accomplishments of or challenges to each of the ERLC's ministry assignments? Why is that metric the one you think is most important



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to watch, relative to each ministry assignment? How does the ERLC measure its effectiveness, and what does the ERLC look for in determining its accomplishments across all of its ministry assignments?

From year to year, the most reliable metric we have found is in discerning the impact of future accomplishments or challenges on SBC churches. When the ERLC evaluates initiatives, goals, responses, or strategy of any kind, our priority is to focus on how they will affect actual congregations including the pastors, leaders, and lay people in them. As an organization, we want to shape the culture and influence the public square, but all of this happens with a primary commitment to the local church. To measure this metric, we evaluate quantitative indicators that reveal the level of church impact of a potential initiative or challenge. Some of these quantitative indicators include web traffic, resource downloads, conference attendance, social media reach, and churches served. While any of these indicators cannot give a clear picture of our impact individually, they can provide a window into our effectiveness when looked at collectively.

5. Please give a report for the past calendar year on how the ERLC has assisted churches with moral and ethical issues in the public arena? How does the ERLC come alongside and support SBC pastors and church leaders in finding their position, as well as having a voice, on moral and ethical issues? Please give examples.

See following pages.

6. What resources does the ERLC provide to Southern Baptists, to help position them for cultural preparedness and in some cases, social action? Please give examples.

Nearly everything the ERLC does as an organization could be mentioned in answer to this question, as our aim in all we publish, produce, and plan is to serve churches along precisely these lines. That being said, there are a number of key organizational resources, particularly over the last year that bear mentioning. To begin, there is daily content produced by the ERLC published across our digital channels, website, and social media. This is content that is often custom-tailored to events in the news at that moment, including explainers, calls-to-action, analysis, and commentary for pastors and Christians. Beyond the digital, the ERLC also regularly produces magazines and books to help serve Southern Baptists. As one example, Light Magazine has been relaunched over the last two



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years, featuring cutting-edge design, and leading contributors and content on issues in the news that Southern Baptists care about. An additional example includes the *Gospel for Life* book series we are publishing in partnership with B&H; these books are short treatments featuring leading thinkers on difficult issues in the culture. They were designed to be resources pastors could use, for example, to familiarize themselves quickly with an issue or to hand out as a resource to someone in his congregation that had questions about it. Beyond these, the ERLC is well underway to completing two video curriculum training resources for churches, one on religious liberty and another on family and parenting. Both of these are designed with Sunday School and small group classes in mind, are made up of some of the leading pastors, authors, and authorities on these issues, and are developed to help equip men and women think through these important issues. Additionally, through our regular events, both in Nashville and in Washington, we host Southern Baptists from around the country and equip them both for cultural preparedness and social action, while at the same time making the content available at no cost after the event to all Southern Baptists to extend that benefit as broadly as possible.

7. In matters where the SBC HAS spoken to current moral and social issues through its resolution(s), recommendations, or other avenues of convention protocol, how has the ERLC been a public voice in the public square? Please give recent examples.

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission exists first and foremost to serve the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention. When the organization speaks, it does so in two ways: first, by speaking to Southern Baptist churches, helping to train Southern Baptists and Southern Baptist congregations within the areas of their specific ministry assignment and to think through those issues from a gospel-focused perspective; second, by speaking from Southern Baptist churches, helping to act as a spokesman on behalf of biblical ethics and religious liberty and also by advancing the agenda of our cooperative consensus as articulated, for example, in our confessional statements and resolutions. To name just a few examples, we have been particularly vocal on the issues of family stability, religious liberty, and human dignity, all of which the SBC has spoken to consistently and strongly for decades. Over the last year, we have continued to stand with Guidestone and Baptist colleges contesting the Obamacare contraceptive mandate. We have dissented from the audacious overreach of the federal government dictating unthinkable policies regarding bathrooms that puts vulnerable children at risk. When important religious freedom legislation was imperilled, we made it clear where Southern Baptists stood, and what they expect



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of their lawmakers, leading to the passage of the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act in 2016. We have been advocates in courts and in the public square on issues ranging from defending the biblical definition of marriage, to the tyranny of abortion and our demand for the defunding of Planned Parenthood, to the rights of employers or individual Christians to live according to the dictates of their consciences, and many others. Additionally, in providing videos, resources, articles, books, bulletin inserts, and explainers on everything from Supreme Court rulings to religious liberty incursions and pro-life causes, in establishing major conferences on marriage and sexuality, cultural engagement, on the need to mobilize for protection of the unborn, and in many other ways, the ERLC has been tireless in their advocacy on behalf of Southern Baptists over the last year.

8. In matters where the SBC has NOT spoken to current moral and social issues through its resolutions, recommendations, or other avenues of convention protocol, how has the ERLC been a public voice in the public square? Please give recent examples.

One of the ways the ERLC serves the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention is being a first responder of sorts, equipping Christians and churches to think through the issues from a gospel-focused perspective. We exist to advance the agenda of our cooperative consensus, and part of that entails signaling in advance the sorts of cultural and social and political factors that can, without our noticing it, conform us to the pattern of this age (Rom. 12:2). Thus, part of the work of the ERLC is to show Southern Baptist Christians and churches the kinds of things they should be concerned about which they may not even be aware of, calling our churches to address these new issues from the prism of what we already believe and our denomination—through its cooperative consensus—has already expressed. Examples of this might include ways the ERLC is speaking out against rapidly advancing biomedical technologies, pharmaceutical abortifacients, or predatory online and social media schemes. Additionally, over the last year, the ERLC has given specific attention to mental health issues. The issue of mental health plagues so many of our churches, and yet too few resources exist to help equip Christians and churches on these issues, and as such this is one among many areas where we have attempted to show leadership in order to serve our churches.

9. Of all the moral, ethical and cultural issues which are confronting SBC pastors and churches, which of these does the ERLC deem to be of highest importance, or represent the highest leverage issues



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for our churches. How is the ERLC presenting biblical teachings and interpretation for these issues? Please give examples.

As long as there have been Baptists, conviction regarding the issue of religious liberty has long been a hallmark of our theological consensus, and contending for this religious liberty has quite often been one of the most pressing needs for which we must advocate in order to ensure the free spread of the gospel. As we head into an increasingly secular society, one in which religious liberty has too often been recast either as a partisan wedge issue or more perilously stigmatized as bigotry, Southern Baptists must redouble their efforts to show why our “First Freedom” is of critical importance for all Americans, particularly as the debate itself touches on so many areas of life—from the freedom of churches to carry out their mission faithfully, to the rights of individuals to live out their lives consistent with their faith, to the protection of vulnerable children and unborn children, and many other places in between. One of the main ways the ERLC has served Southern Baptist churches in this area is at the level of education and explication. To the former, for years Americans had the luxury of not having religious liberty questioned; that day no longer exists, so we must remind both the world and ourselves of its importance. To the latter, the fight for religious liberty exists on many fronts, so we must be able to present and to persuade others on the issue in a myriad of contexts and situations. Over the last year, the ERLC has developed both books and video curriculum (hence designed to equip at both the individual and church-wide level) designed to address religious liberty specifically, both its biblical warrant, common misunderstandings of it, and its relevancy for all Christians and churches. Religious liberty is too important for the freedom of our churches and the free spread of the gospel, and the ERLC will remain diligent to assist Southern Baptists in promoting religious liberty.

10. How does the ERLC assist churches and other Southern Baptist entities by promoting religious liberty? Please explain.

The ERLC assists churches by advocating on their behalf for the religious liberties which all Southern Baptist churches enjoy. We believe that religious freedom is not a gift bestowed on us by the government but rather a gift given to us by God which is inalienable. As such, and especially as there are mounting threats to religious liberty, the ERLC serves Southern Baptist churches by acting as guardians on their behalf—ever surveying the legislative and cultural landscape, sounding alarms



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to churches when there are genuine threats that should move them to action, and acting on their behalf advocating for the freedom of conscience for all people.

11. How is the ERLC's approach to public engagement distinctive from other Christian organizations that have similar assignments?

The ERLC approach to public engagement is distinctive in a number of respects. First, the ERLC is distinctive in that it is designed to inject a specifically Baptist voice to the public square. Since the time of the founding of our country, Baptists have been at the forefront of those petitioning for religious freedom, calling for a free church in a free state, and they provide a unique contribution to the cause of religious freedom. Second, as opposed to parachurch organizations or political action committees, the ERLC engages the public from a distinctly ecclesial perspective. We belong to the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention; as such, we think through issues from a distinctly church-focused grid, for the purpose of preparing Southern Baptists around the country to think through important issues, live out well the Christian life, and to speak from Southern Baptists in the public square—for the good of local congregations, the ensuring of religious freedom, the advance of the gospel, and the glory of God.

12. What unique challenges does the ERLC face, in the near future, representing Southern Baptists in the public square, and offering guidelines to Southern Baptists re: moral advocacy, public awareness, social action and religious liberties?

Perhaps the largest challenge the ERLC faces in the near future is dealing with the increasingly secular public square. Specific examples are seen in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services contraceptive mandate which effectively paves over the consciences of a great number of Christian hospitals, universities, and organizations. With this particular encroachment on religious liberty and others like it, the ERLC must be all the more strategic and vigilant in seeking to persuade those in the public square on the public good of religious liberty and a free marketplace of ideas. More broadly, one challenge exists on the issue of religious liberty even as a social good. As society continues to secularize, on both the left and the right, too often religious liberty has been recast as just another battlefield for partisan warfare. As it does, the ERLC must be vigilant in reminding our elected officials of why Baptists fought so hard for religious liberty in the United States in the first



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place and what we expect of them in terms of defending our First Freedom in law. Religious liberty is too important to allow it to be maligned or distorted so the ERLC will remain diligent.

13. Please give an update on the impact of the ERLC Leadership Network strategy across the SBC, and what is next for this initiative?

The ERLC Leadership Network has catalyzed pastors and churches around the country to think deeply about the ways the gospel informs the Christian life. The Network itself is open to anyone who would like to be involved with the work of the ERLC, and provides them with access to helpful resources, priority access to events, and exclusive content. It has allowed us to connect closely with thousands of Southern Baptists around the country—hearing from them, helping equip them, and being able to encourage them to action when it is necessary for elected officials to hear from their constituents en masse on issues important to Southern Baptists. As we continue to grow this network, the opportunities only increase in each of those areas and others still. At the foundation of this Network is a Leadership Council, which serves as an advisory council for the Network and receives intentional investment from the ERLC team. During their annual term, members of the Leadership Council enjoy equipping on key issues relevant to their lives and ministries through conference calls and events. With a new group of pastors serving in this role each year, it provides the ERLC a unique opportunity to invest in church pastors in a significant and concentrated way.