



## 2016 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 its printed and electronic materials, as well as its broadcast venues, the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission acknowledges the tremendous Kingdom impact that gifts to the Cooperative Program have, particularly in the work of the ERLC. As the SBC entity that is numerically most dependent on Cooperative Program funds, ERLC staff are well aware of the importance of the Cooperative Program. At every juncture and stop, the Commission is faithful to promote the Cooperative Program and express thanks for the sacrificial giving and prayerful support of Southern Baptists. In the last year that has included a number of strategic meetings the ERLC has led with next-generation pastors and leaders in which we—along with a number of other SBC entity leaders—meet for the express purpose of promoting the Cooperative Program.

### Ethnic Participation

2. **Given this context, please give a robust descriptive report of ethnic participation, including active involvement of ethnic churches and church leaders, across all levels and aspects of ERLC ministry—such things as board of trustees composition, senior administrative staff, other professional staff, support staff, consultants, contributors to public policy and religious liberty postings and discussions, and ethnic church and church leader composition of any external advisory groups—demonstrating progress, if any, in ethnic participation over the past two decades (1995-2015), giving special attention to progress over the past five years (2010-2015).**

As the SBC entity assigned the responsibility of making Southern Baptists and others aware of the Bible's position on racial reconciliation, among other moral issues, the ERLC is consistently out front calling Southern Baptists and their churches to be mindful of this issue. The ERLC focuses on the human rights and immigration issues, where racial and ethnic peoples are most often at the center of the debate. In the last year, we have hosted a national leadership summit on the issue of racial reconciliation, which was attended or viewed by thousands of people in person and online and

given national media coverage. Additionally, building upon last year's efforts, 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 the ERLC regularly meets with, adding four African-American leaders and one Hispanic leader. We have also filled a strategic post in our Washington office we had been attempting to fill for over a year with Steven Harris, an African-American leader that is serving our organization as Director of Advocacy in Washington. As such, he is the first African-American representing Southern Baptists in our Washington office on Capitol Hill. Beyond these areas, Dr. Moore frequently addresses the issue of racial reconciliation in television, radio, and print interviews, and writes on it frequently himself, including in both his latest book released this year and one that is forthcoming in the year ahead.

### **Mental Health Resource**

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

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission recognizes the importance of ministry to those who suffer with mental health challenges and commends those churches currently engaged in these ministries. The ERLC provides educational materials on its website to help individuals understand certain mental health challenges. We have created an issues awareness section specifically devoted to helping individuals and churches understand mental health challenges, and add resources to this section throughout the year to help churches think through this issue and serve men and women in their congregations in a gospel-focused manner.

### **ERLC Specific Questions**

- 4. In your opinion, what is the most reliable metric indicating future accomplishments of or challenges to ERLC, and why is that metric the one you think is most important to watch? How does the ERLC measure its effectiveness in accomplishing its ministry assignments?**

The most reliable metric is to discern 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 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 on moral and ethical issues? Please give examples.**

See following pages.

- 6. How is the ERLC being a voice TO Southern Baptists, positioning them for cultural preparedness and in some cases, social action? Please give examples.**

The organization speaks *to* Southern Baptist churches in a variety of ways. One major way that bears mentioning is the way in which the ERLC strives to be active in the life of local congregations—sending members of our ERLC leadership to preach and teach in local congregations, and also partnering with churches throughout the denomination to establish Church Equip weekend events where the ERLC trains churches on topics of their choosing. Another major way the ERLC strives to speak to Southern Baptists is by disseminating a wide array of content designed to help appeal to, educate, and train Southern Baptists for preparedness in thinking through key ethical and moral issues and in engaging the culture with the gospel.

- 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 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. Whether advocating in court or with national media for a Christian sexual ethic when it comes to the definition of marriage or the rights of employers or individual Christians to live according to the dictates of their consciences; to providing videos, resources, articles, books, bulletin inserts, and explainers on everything from Supreme Court

rulings to religious liberty incursions and pro-life causes; to establishing major conferences on marriage, and a first-ever pro-life event explicitly for evangelicals, designed to mobilize evangelical Christians around the country to stand for life in our nation's capital, 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 resolutions, recommendations or other avenues of convention protocol, how has the ERLC been a public voice in the public square?**

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 practices.

**9. Given its ministry assignment(s), has the ERLC undertaken to effectively identify the moral, ethical and religious liberty issues of our time, as well as present biblical teachings and interpretation for these issues as well? Please give examples.**

The need for identifying the key moral, ethical, and religious liberty issues of our time, provoking conversations, and equipping Southern Baptist churches to think through them from a gospel-focused perspective is foundational at the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. Every article, blog, event, interview, and meeting is designed with service to Southern Baptists and Southern Baptist churches in mind. Examples include the array of resources we have produced in response to the Supreme Court decision on marriage in June; events we have held equipping churches to stand for marriage and the gospel, to promote racial reconciliation in their churches, and to engage the culture and the public square with the gospel effectively and winsomely; bulletin inserts, articles, and other resources on each of our Southern Baptist emphasis Sundays; and the steady stream of articles, interviews, publications, videos, and other resources that the ERLC regularly provides on both timeless issues and urgent contemporary events of concern to Southern Baptists.

**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 alarm to churches when there are genuine threats to should call 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 centered on social issues, 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 on behalf of 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. In the upcoming year, the 2016 presidential election will pose unique challenges to the country as religious liberty has never been more imperiled in the last century. As a Commission, much of our efforts will be advocating for religious liberty at a time in which it is being maligned, distorted, and increasingly used as a partisan wedge issue.

**13. What has been 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 ERLC 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.