



The Executive Committee
of the Southern Baptist Convention
901 Commerce Street
Suite 600
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

Dear Member of the Executive Committee:

It's an honor to present a word of report to you from your Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. Each of you, as members of the Executive Committee, are stewards of our denomination's commitment to the truthfulness of Scripture and the priority of the gospel, and I am grateful for your service to our Southern Baptist churches.

As I think about the work of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission over the last year, I'm reminded of an anniversary that made headlines. Earlier this year, many news organizations marked the thirtieth anniversary of a pro-democracy protest in Beijing that culminated in the famous image of a young, unknown Chinese man standing—alone—against a row of tanks in Tiananmen Square.

What is most striking about this image is that he was not—in that moment—part of a mob or a riot or an army. It was just him: unarmed and unaccompanied. And yet, ironically enough, that's where the power was. The loneliness is what gives the image its force. And part of the reason the world paid such attention is because this action didn't seem to make sense. It looks so strange to see a person risk his life and his place in society without the means to fight back. And yet, courage, biblically defined, includes both of these elements—a redefinition of power and a reshaping of community. As this milestone passes us, those of us who belong to Christ should pause to reflect on how the courage that comes from the Spirit of God ought to prompt all of us to, when necessary, stand alone against the crowd.

That's one of the things that we as Christians have to be willing to do, and it's one of the things that your Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission strives to do each day. Be willing to speak the truth as we see the Bible telling it.

One of the ways we have sought to do that is with a relentless focus on the issue which, for many around the world, defines the Southern Baptist Convention at this moment: church sex abuse. Over the last year, your Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission has devoted itself wholeheartedly to this issue in service to Southern Baptist churches around the country who want to do everything in their power to combat this wickedness in unity together, on behalf of the vulnerable, and for the sake of the gospel.

Over the last year, it has been a privilege to partner with our SBC President J. D. Greear, and with the President's Sexual Abuse Advisory Group. This work was made possible in part by the generosity of the Executive Committee, giving sacrificially in order to help fund research and resources that would equip our churches. Already hundreds of churches and thousands of Southern Baptists have taken the Caring Well Challenge or utilized resources connected to this issue of combatting church sex abuse. The ERLC devoted its national conference to this issue over the last year and welcomed the largest crowd in the event's history. In Texas, we worked to see legislation passed that would protect churches from civil liability if they informed another congregation of a

potential staff member about whom there may be questions or allegations on this matter. Much has been done, and yet much more work remains to do. And those of us at the ERLC are both grateful to serve our churches, and determined to do so with unflinching commitment to Scripture and our Lord.

Over the last year, there have been a number of areas where we have focused efforts beyond the issue of abuse. At the forefront, though, is the issue of life and human dignity. We live in a society in which our federal government—to this very day—subsidizes the work of Planned Parenthood, an organization that preys upon women and profits on the backs of slaughtered children. We live in a society where multi-million dollar companies threaten state legislatures who would dare enact common-sense laws designed to protect women and children. We live in a world that thinks and speaks of unborn children made in the image of our God as problems to be solved.

But at the ERLC, we wake up every morning and we imagine what a post-Roe world would look like. We imagine that, and we work toward that future. In some cases, that takes the form of conferences and events. In other cases, it looks like advocacy for legislation. In yet other cases, it takes the form of our Psalm 139 Project, with which we provide ultrasound technology to centers around the country. In every case, though, this work means standing athwart a watching world that sees our care for the vulnerable as backwards. But the way of the cross is one that cares for the vulnerable. The way of the cross says that Jesus loves the little children—all the children of the world.

You see, the vulnerable matter to Jesus, and so matter to your ERLC. Sometimes this entails working across the country in state legislatures to help enact pro-life legislation. In other situations, it looks like working with the White House to ensure adoption agencies are not forced to choose whether they will violate their consciences or abandon needy children. And in other cases it's declaring—in a world that uses migrants, including children, as political punching bags—that the church of Jesus Christ must take our cues not from talking heads on television but from living words in Scripture. That's also why your Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission will not back down one inch when it comes to standing for racial unity. We're proud to be partnering with LifeWay to produce curriculum for our churches on how we should apply the gospel to the issue of race. And we'll continue to provide resources that counter lies from many corners.

Beyond this issue, however, we also face assaults on religious liberty that would have seemed unthinkable just a matter of years ago. Over the last year, we've worked with the White House and Congress to prevent Bibles from getting caught up in trade disputes, and to keep government from taxing church parking lots. We've combatted well-intentioned legislation that would sacrifice religious liberty. And we've combatted egregious legislation that would threaten adoption agencies and healthcare providers from carrying out their callings to serve. We must be stewards of the inheritance of our Baptist forebears, and every day, that's exactly what your ERLC strives to be.

At the same time, one of the jobs of the to be the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission is to be a Paul Revere of sorts for our churches—running out ahead and alerting our churches of dangers that are coming and questions that need to be considered. Here, one area where we've spent a great deal of energy is on the issue of artificial intelligence and social media. We've put together resources, events, and content that examine questions that the families of tomorrow will face that seem nearly possible to imagine today. In a world in which social media has been characterized by falsehoods,

toxicity, and cruelty, the ERLC has tried to highlight larger problems of a society increasingly isolated and rootless—and provide resources and solutions can help churches see the way forward. After all, biblical courage often means being willing to stand alone, against a crowd. But biblical unity means those who are in Christ should never be forced to stand alone, or against, those who bear the name of Christ.

Returning to Tiananmen Square, though, it's worth pointing out that this "tank man" was bravely alone, but, in his loneliness, he inspired people all over the world to stand for freedom over tyranny. As we remember him, let's remember how much more so we as Christians are called to stand—sometimes in community and sometimes in solitude—for the truth that is dependent on the cross, not dependent on the crowd. That's what your ERLC is here to do, and to equip our churches to do as well. We're grateful for the opportunity to do so by the sacrificial, cooperative giving of our churches for the sake of the Great Commission and the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the Gospel,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell Moore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent flourish at the end.

Russell Moore, President