

Pastors Value Current SBC Name, Split on New Descriptor

More than half of the pastors in the Southern Baptist Convention do not intend to use the name “Great Commission Baptists” in communication about their church, according to a recent survey by LifeWay Research.

The survey also reveals that more than 70 percent of pastors agree the name “Southern Baptist Convention” should continue to be used.

LifeWay Research conducted a random survey of more than 1,000 SBC pastors in April and May in light of the task force appointed by SBC President Bryant Wright to study a possible name change for the 167-year-old convention. The report of the task force, delivered February and approved by the SBC Executive Committee, recommended the convention maintain its legal name but adopt “Great Commission Baptists” as an informal, non-legal name for churches and entities that want to use it.

LifeWay Research asked the question: “Do you agree that the Southern Baptist Convention should continue to be the name for this convention?” and found 72 percent of pastors agree (strongly or somewhat) the name should continue to be used. Twenty-three percent disagree and 5 percent “don’t know.”

The percentage of pastors who agree with the statement increases with age and church size. Sixty-one percent of pastors under 45 years agree, while 82 percent of pastors over 65 years agree.

Pastors of smaller churches (under 50 in attendance) are most likely to “strongly agree” (64 percent) with the retention of the name Southern Baptist Convention.

And, pastors in the West (45 percent) are less likely to “strongly agree” than pastors in the South (57 percent).

“Southern Baptist pastors strongly affirm the current name for the Southern Baptist Convention,” said Scott McConnell, director of LifeWay Research. “While more than one in five pastors indicate they are ready for a change in the name of the convention, across all subgroups measured the majority of pastors agree the current name should continue to be used.”

When pastors were asked if they agree “that a non-legal name like ‘Great Commission Baptists’ would be acceptable for use by those who would find it beneficial?” an equal number of pastors agree and disagree (46 percent) with the statement.

Responses to this question also vary by church size and pastor age. Only 36 percent of pastors of churches with less than 50 in attendance agree the non-legal name would be acceptable compared to 61 percent of pastors of churches with attendance over 250.

There is also a split in responses between younger and older pastors about the new name. The majority of pastors age 18-44 agree (59 percent), while the majority of pastors age 65+ disagree (60 percent).

Pastors were also asked if their church intends to use the tagline “Great Commission Baptists” in some or all of their communication about the church.

More than half (54 percent) say they will not use the non-legal moniker although more than a third (35 percent) have not discussed it. Four percent responded they will use both Southern Baptist Convention and Great Commission Baptists in their descriptors, and two percent indicated they will use Great Commission Baptists exclusively in their church identification.

Pastors in the West are more likely than those in the South to

select “Yes, we will use it exclusively.” Eight percent of those in the West compared to 1 percent of those in the South gave this response.

“Of course, churches have complete control over the name of their own church, but messengers to the SBC annual meeting will decide whether to grant cooperating churches the latitude of using an alternative descriptor when they refer to the Convention itself,” said McConnell. “Pastors in this polling sample who have an opinion are much more comfortable with the current Southern Baptist Convention name than proposing a non-legal name for churches that would benefit from it.”