

# Proposal from the Missional Partnerships Task Force

## Background and Overview

Earle Street Baptist Church has a rich history of generous giving and participation in missions in our community and around the world. One of Earle Street's greatest strengths is the commitment she has made to share the Good News of the Gospel with all people. This is captured in "The Greater Way" statement the church adopted a few years ago as a unifying focus for the people at Earle Street. The Greater Way is a life modeled after Jesus and his embrace of the "Great Commandments" and the "Great Commission" *to love God, to love our neighbor, and to make disciples.*

Last fall, we hosted two denominational informational meetings with representatives from the Southern Baptist Convention and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Following those meetings, we held three "congregational conversations" led by George Bullard where we explored our denominational identity and our missions partnerships. We were introduced to the concept of bounded, fuzzy, and centered-set denominations and churches. At the second congregational conversation, held on October 29, the people in attendance overwhelmingly indicated in their written response sheets they wanted Earle Street to be a "centered" congregation by a margin of 97%.

In the third session, held on November 12, those in attendance were asked to choose from several different scenarios that addressed denominational support. The results were:

- Scenario One – SBC Church with CBF relationships 22%
- Scenario Two – Dually aligned with SBC and CBF 19%
- Scenario Three – \*Missional Partnerships Baptist Church 53%
- SBC Only 4%
- CBF Only 2%

*\* A Missional Partnerships Baptist Church was defined in the meeting as follows: "To become a missional Baptist church (meaning without a formal affiliation) which embraces numerous missional partnerships including some which are SBC, CBF, Baptist World Alliance (BWA), Greenville Baptist Association, and various local and global ministries that help fulfill God's empowering vision for our church. Our foundational statements mentioned above would act as the centering or core understandings of who we are as Earle Street Baptist Church. Development of a clear vision would be essential to define the uniqueness and autonomy of ESBC."*

Following the three congregational conversations, a task force was formed to study our missional partnerships and denominational commitments and then bring back a recommendation to the church for its consideration. The task force was made up of two members each from the Pastor Search Committee, the Strategic Planning Committee, and the Deacons. The task force held its first meeting on January 16, 2024, and spent the first few sessions analyzing the results from the congregational meetings and studying the book *Centered-Set Church* by Mark Baker. In time, we asked some of the members of the Missions Cluster to join the discussion before drafting the proposal we are now presenting.

The task force has worked diligently to embrace the direction the congregation indicated it wanted to go last fall in the three congregational conversations as a “centered-set church.” As a centered-set church, we will focus on making Jesus and his mission the center of everything we do and not be bound by denominational labels or programs. We would continue to support our traditional global missions partners such as the Southern Baptist Convention and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, as well as add some new mission partnerships that would extend our missions work even further. Another task the group worked to accomplish was to help the Pastor Search Committee have more clarity when communicating with senior pastor candidates the priorities of the church and the missional commitments of Earle Street.

After the congregational dialogue on May 5, the task force will finalize a recommendation that will be presented to the congregation at the church conference on May 15 for approval.

The members of the Missional Partnerships Task Force are:

David Clyborne – *Pastor Search Committee*  
Rebecca Register – *Pastor Search Committee*  
Glenn Arrowood – *Deacons*  
Joyce McCarroll – *Deacons*  
Keith Merck – *Strategic Planning Committee*  
Amy Moore – *Strategic Planning Committee*

*Missions Cluster Representatives*

Anna Kay Lord  
John Love  
Monte McKinney  
David Newton  
Martha Newton  
Libby Young  
Mary Beth Young

# Missional Partnership Task Force Proposal

May 5, 2024

- 1) The Task Force recommends that we continue to support mission endeavors at the level of 10% of regular budget offerings.
  - a) Anyone giving to ESBC can choose to designate their budget mission offerings to one of the following Global Missions Partners (in alphabetical order)
    - i) The Baptist World Alliance
    - ii) The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
    - iii) The Southern Baptist Convention
    - iv) Gifts divided equally among BWA, CBF, and SBC.
  - b) If a person does not designate their mission offering, the default (undesigned) giving option would be a new fund called “The Greater Way Partnership Fund.”
  
- 2) The “Greater Way Partnership Fund” will be used for additional funding for current mission partners, mission emergencies, spontaneous mission needs that arise, or new missions opportunities.
  
- 3) The Task Force recommends that we create a “Missions Vision Team” within the Missions Cluster that will:
  - Develop a strategy for missional partnerships
  - Evaluate opportunities presented by mission partners to use “The Greater Way Partnership Fund”
  - Recommend to the missions cluster/ deacons/ congregation spending and participation in missional partnerships.
  - Coordinate the work of the missions teams in the missions cluster.
  - Become a learning group for expanding our participation in Kingdom causes.
  - Communicate current missions projects and potential new missions opportunities with the church.
  - Facilitate missions education for the congregation.

The composition of the “Mission Vision Team” still needs to be confirmed but will most likely consist of members of the Missions Cluster as well as some at-large members. We anticipate there will be staggered membership for team members, with each member serving a 2-year term.
  
- 4) The Task Force recommends continuing to support the Greenville Baptist Association but reduce the level of support to \$1500 annually for project support. We would redistribute the balance of the funds budgeted for the Greenville Baptist Association to other mission partners such as, Ecuador and Thailand which currently receive no financial support from Earle Street even though we have been assisting these ministries with the work of missions teams for several years.

- 5) The Task Force recommends continuing our Global Missions Celebration (held in February) giving people the opportunity to make good faith pledges for missions over and above their budget offering designations.
- 6) The Task Force proposes to continue to affirm the *Baptist Faith and Message* as adopted in 1963 as our statement of faith.

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## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What does it mean to be centered-set/ Jesus-centered?**

“Rather than drawing a line to identify people based on their common characteristics, a centered set uses a directional and relational basis of evaluation. The group is created by defining a center and observing people’s relationship with the center.” “In a centered church, God is the center focus.” We want ESBC to be defined by Christ, not an outside organization or denominational structure. One writer defined being ‘centrist’ as a “space deep and rich with conviction. It is a position that is biblically based, Christ-centered, missionally focused, relationally healthy and historically orthodox.” A centered-set congregation will engage relationally across a spectrum of missional partners and cooperate in mission with like-minded brothers and sisters.

### **What is the difference between missions and missional?**

The mission of Earle Street Baptist Church is to: worship God (worship), to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed (missions), to be a home to all who would enter (fellowship), to minister to the needs of one another (ministry), and to assist in spiritual growth (spiritual growth). Missions is one piece of it, but **missional** focuses on the statement as a whole. This means that in the future we may support missional partners that are not involved in the work of missions, but some other piece of our mission statement.

For example, we may support the Voices of Appalachia because of their connection to worship. The Bible Project is a nonprofit, crowdfunded organization that makes free resources like videos, podcasts, articles, and classes to help people experience the Bible in a way that is approachable and transformative. We might support them because of the connection to spiritual growth.

### **Am I able to still give money to the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program?**

Yes. Everyone is able to choose a Global Partner to give 10% of their budget offering. As well as designating one’s mission offering to the Southern Baptist Convention, others can designate to The Baptist World Alliance, The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, or gifts equally divided among the three.

### **What is the Baptist World Alliance?**

“The Baptist World Alliance is a global movement of Baptists sharing a common confession of faith in Jesus Christ bonded together by God’s love to support, encourage

and strengthen one another while proclaiming and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit before a lost and hurting world.”

It is a global network of 51 million Baptists in 130 countries and territories unified by a mission to impact the world for Christ. As a “Global Impact Church,” a congregation connects with other Baptist churches and conventions in five key ministry areas:

- Strengthening worship, fellowship, and unity
- Leading in mission and evangelism
- Responding to human need through aid, relief, and community development
- Defending religious freedom and human rights and justice
- Advancing theological reflection and transformational leadership

**Can we add missional partners in the future?**

Yes, the Missions Vision Team can evaluate adding any additional missions partners.

**How will the congregation have continued input in our missions strategy?**

Every year, the Mission Vision Team will make recommendations on budget allocations for partners. The congregation will have a chance to ask questions about these allocations and also to vote on the budget.

**How do I update my designation to Global Partners?**

Similar to our Global Missions Offering, a card will be provided to make your preferences known or it can be done on the church’s website or Realm.

**If someone doesn’t designate a Global Partner, where will their money go?**

If someone doesn’t designate a Global Partner, then 10% of their budget offerings will go into “The Greater Way Partnership Fund.”

**When will these changes take effect?**

July 1, 2024, pending congregational approval.