

Southern Baptists to stick (mostly) with same name

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(RNS) A task force is recommending that the Southern Baptist Convention maintain its official name but give members of the nation's largest Protestant denomination the option of calling themselves "Great Commission Baptists."

The recommendation on Monday (Feb. 20) determined that changing the Southern Baptist Convention name was fraught with legal and logistical problems.

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary President Paige Patterson, a traditionalist and a member of the task force, had long favored a name change but said it is likely too difficult to pull off.

Patterson, a former SBC president, cited the "enormous legal fees" involved in changing congregational and state convention names as well as trusts and other documents. He hopes the compromise will satisfy those who wanted a name change.

"I think that, if anything, it's a case of our having our cake and getting to eat it, too," he said.

Pastor Micah Fries of St. Joseph, Mo., another member of the task force, agreed that the unanimous recommendation was the best option, despite a desire by many to move away from a name that has its origins in a Civil War-era defense of slavery.

"From a legal perspective, an actual name change was probably an impossibility," Fries said. "This is probably the best-case scenario." The term "Great Commission" comes from Jesus' call for his followers to spread his message worldwide, a hallmark of Southern Baptist identity.

If the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee accepts the recommendation, the proposal could come to a vote at the SBC's annual meeting in June in New Orleans.