

Southern Baptists: Name change too costly

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [March 21, 2012](#) issue

When Southern Baptists gather for their annual meeting this June, they will not be asked to create a new official name. Top leaders decided that a change is not worth pursuing. Instead they will be asked to approve a recommendation that Baptists end the name change discussion but have the option of using the unofficial moniker "Great Commission Baptists."

The recommendation was adopted February 21 by the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee after a task force deemed a name change impractical. "I feel very thankful there was such a positive spirit in receiving this recommendation," said SBC president Bryant Wright in an interview after the committee's decision. "It's just another way that we can be more effective in carrying the good news of Jesus Christ to North America and the world."

Wright's task force determined that the legal costs and logistical wrangling that would be necessary to change signs and stationery and deal with trusts and wills made a change unworkable. Plus, Wright noted, the voluntary nature of Southern Baptists means that even if a name change had been approved, "they don't have to follow it."

The optional use of "Great Commission Baptists" provides an answer to those troubled by the *Southern* in the denomination's official name, as well as its link to the SBC's Civil War-era defense of slavery.

The unofficial title refers to Jesus' command that his followers spread his message worldwide. "It gives a freedom to a church planter in Boston," said Wright. "If he prefers to just go by 'Great Commission Baptist,' we

are giving him the freedom to do that."

Paige Patterson, the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary president, 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. —RNS