

Southern Baptist leader suggests name change

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [October 18, 2011](#) issue

Does the Southern Baptist Convention need a new name? The president of the nation's largest Protestant denomination, Bryant Wright, who is also a pastor in Marietta, Georgia, says the idea should be explored again for the sake of evangelistic success alone.

"The name

'Southern' really no longer reflects who we are as a convention in reaching all of North America," Wright said in a video posted on the Pray4SBC.com website. He added that the word doesn't play well in places like Boston, New York, Idaho, Wyoming and Michigan. "With 'Southern' in the name, it's really a barrier in seeking to do ministry in areas like that," he said.

Wright's plans, announced at a SBC Executive Committee meeting September 19, sparked debate, according to Baptist Press, the denomination's news outlet. Some committee members said the plan should be reviewed by lawyers or voted on first by Baptists at their annual meeting next June, but both recommendations were voted down.

Wright said any recommended name change would need to be approved at two consecutive annual meetings of the denomination, which has been grappling with stagnant baptism rates and declining membership.

Southern

Baptists have debated a possible name change numerous times before. At their 2004 annual meeting, 55 percent of voters defeated a measure that would have set up a committee to study the matter.

In a 2008 poll by SBC-affiliated LifeWay Research, 27 percent of Southern Baptist pastors agreed that the name "Southern" is a "hindrance" while 68 percent disagreed.

Wright appointed Jimmy Draper, who led the SBC Sunday School Board in 1998 when it became LifeWay Christian Resources, to lead the study committee. —RNS