

Southern Baptist agency disallows private ‘prayer language’ Missionary qualifications amended: Missionary qualifications amended

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The Southern Baptists’ International Mission Board says it will no longer appoint missionaries who use a “private prayer language”—a controversial practice related to speaking in tongues and previously practiced by IMB president Jerry Rankin.

The agency already excludes people who speak in tongues—the utterances called glossolalia—in public worship from serving as missionaries. But IMB trustees voted November 15 to amend its list of missionary qualifications to exclude those who use a “prayer language” in private.

The restriction of “prayer language”—widely understood as a private version of the charismatic practice of tongues-speaking—was approved by a vote of 25-18, according to the IMB’s Web site. Some trustees did not vote on the issue during their meeting in Huntsville, Alabama, the agency reported.

The policy guideline, which applies only to new appointees, states: “In terms of general practice, the majority of Southern Baptists do not accept what is referred to as ‘private prayer language.’ Therefore, if ‘private prayer language’ is an ongoing part of his or her conviction and practice, the candidate has eliminated himself or herself from being a representative of the IMB of the SBC.”

The policy interprets New Testament passages as talking about a spiritual gift enabling the bearer to speak a language that “generally is considered to be a legitimate language of some people group,” and adds that a “prayer language as commonly expressed by those practitioners is not the same as the biblical use of glossolalia.”

It also notes that the apostle Paul's "clear teaching is that prayer should be made with understanding." -*Associated Baptist Press*