



The Executive Committee
of the Southern Baptist Convention
901 Commerce Street
Suite 600
Nashville, TN 37203

January 15, 2021

Dear Member of the Executive Committee:

As is always the case, I am privileged to submit a report to you from your Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission about the work of our ministry over the last year.

It is clear that these are strange and tumultuous times. A time of revelation, in the truest sense of the word, about our culture and our churches. The events of 2020 have shown us much about this moment that we inhabit: a lack of trust in institutions throughout the public square; a divided and polarized political landscape, with hostility more common than seeking the common good; and the very real frailty of our lives in the midst of a pandemic that has taken the lives of thousands of Americans. If anything has been revealed to those watching, and has been reaffirmed for the church, it is just how desperately the gospel is needed for a world in chaos and groaning for redemption. In the midst of this challenge, the ERLC has sought to provide a consistent voice applying the moral demands of the gospel to the issues confronting the church.

The pandemic, predicted by no one when we were planning for the upcoming year, has brought forth a number of difficult challenges. From a death toll that continues to rise to the economic instability caused by the loss of jobs, people have understandably lost a sense of security and safety. Even the measures meant to safeguard the most vulnerable—social distancing, shutdowns, cancellation of weddings and funerals—have caused their own forms of sadness, frustration, and isolation.

However, even in these trying times, there are moments of grace. Churches and Christians have adapted to this moment and done the seemingly impossible. Thousands, almost overnight, transitioned to digital platforms and asked “How can we serve our neighbors in this moment?” Your ERLC has sought to equip the church by creating a platform on our website that hosts Covid-19 resources and articles. It features videos from pastors and ministry leaders across the country discussing how they have led their congregations in innovative and inspiring ways.

As vaccines to end this terrible plague have been developed, your ERLC hosted Dr. Francis Collins, the head of the National Institutes of Health and a faithful Christian, to discuss the truth about vaccines and equip pastors with the information they need for their congregations.

We have spent the past year working with Congress to protect the eligibility of local churches to secure loans through the CARES Act and the SBA Paycheck Protection Program, all while ensuring proper

protections for religious freedom were put in place. Further, we have worked with governors, Members of Congress, and local leaders to ensure that religious liberty is protected alongside public health.

Our work in other realms has not ended, even as it has taken on new forms in the midst of the pandemic. We have continued the work to advance religious freedom in a number of avenues, most notably an amicus brief cited in the Supreme Court majority opinion ruling that churches have the right to hire staff consistent with their convictions. Further, we have joined in cases against an abortion industry that has attempted to use the pandemic as a pretext for their horrific agenda. Moreover, to advance the cause of life, this past fall we were able to announce an incredible victory for our Psalm 139 Project through a generous donation that allows us to place 10 ultrasound machines in pregnancy resource centers across the country—a record for our initiative.

Our advocacy for religious liberty extended to the international front as we advocated on behalf of persecuted Christians and Muslim Uyghurs in China, a minority religious group oppressed by the Chinese government for their beliefs.

Finally, a fractured public square confronted us at the conclusion of 2020, something no one can dispute. Our team, in an effort to resource pastors and local churches, created the Church and Civility Church Toolkit to provide sermon outlines and guided discussions centered on the topics causing division in churches and around the dinner table. However, while we believe this resource was useful, more must be done. As part of that, our team continued our work speaking in churches on these issues as the year came to a close, and we will continue in the days ahead to advocate for convictional kindness to be displayed in the public square.

The past year has been a year of chaos and a year of revelation. The ERLC has endeavored to represent Southern Baptists in the public square with the truth of the gospel courageously, and the kindness that is our weapon of war against the forces of hatred and division. But this year also served as a reminder of God's abundant kindness and the great work that churches are doing daily. As we look to the next year, I am encouraged to be joining with thousands of Southern Baptist congregations to carry the message of the gospel to a world sorely in need of its hope, its stability, and its grace.

Onward,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell Moore". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Russell Moore