



## **Georgia Baptist Mission Board Statement on Open Letter to Pastors – “Georgia Religious Freedom Being ‘Held in The Balance’”**

On March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016, a letter was published online in [The Christian Index](#) titled, [Georgia Religious Freedom Being ‘Held in The Balance’](#). In this article, the author Mike Griffin, referenced events in German history that were taken out of context. The section of the letter being referenced states: *“But the church, as a whole, is too quiet on these matters. We are simply allowing opportunities to get away from us. This is why I am asking for your help! We must not let the government do to us what Hitler did to the pastors and churches of his day. He got them to accept his protection from government action if they would agree to stay out of government. He basically said, you take care of the church and leave government to me. Pastors, this is happening before our eyes today!”*

This is in direct reference to Martin Niemöller’s, popular poem written in 1946, “First they came...” and his description of what occurred in Germany leading up to World War II. Pastors and the church did not stand up to the government to combat the rising discrimination against Christians, Jews and other groups. In Niemöller’s example, the church did not stand up for its faith and speak up for members and the public. It is interesting to note that Niemöller was accused of “abusing the pulpit”, crimes against the State, ordered to pay a fine and imprisoned for speaking out. In 2006, Rev. Mark Creech wrote the article [“Who Shall Care for the Nation’s Soul?”](#) in the Christian Post, using similar reference to Niemöller’s story.

On Thursday morning March 10<sup>th</sup>, nearly a week after posting, Mike Griffin was criticized from the Well of the House regarding his letter to Pastors. The inference of those remarks made by representatives was that Mike Griffin was speaking to, or about the representatives themselves. In context, Mike’s audience was Georgia Baptist Pastors and leaders, in order to challenge the church not to be silent about spiritual convictions, and to speak out in order to avoid the repeating of history. It is impossible to understand the content of the article, unless one understands that it was not directed at the general assembly, but a call to action for Pastors based on church history.

We sincerely regret any misunderstanding of the intent of this article or its historical context. We should all rightly be held accountable for what we say, but not for what we do not say.