

Church in anti-Muslim controversy leaves SBC_61305

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FOREST CITY, N.C. (ABP)—The church that received national media attention in late May for a sign that said the Muslim holy book should be put in a toilet has withdrawn from the Southern Baptist Convention.

Danieltown Baptist Church in Forest City, N.C., also voted to leave the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina and the Sandy Run Baptist Association, a local affiliation of churches.

Creighton Lovelace, the church's pastor, said the June 5 vote to become an independent Baptist church was unanimous. About 22 people—a typical number for the church—attended the regular monthly business meeting in which the vote took place, he said.

Lovelace's sign had read, "The Koran needs to be flushed!"

It was an apparent reference to a now-retracted Newsweek article saying American military officials had mistreated the Quran in handling war prisoners and suspected terrorists incarcerated at the Guantanamo Bay detention center in Cuba. The article quoted an unnamed official as saying

an internal government report had confirmed one inmate's accusation that a guard at the prison had flushed pages of the Islamic scriptures down a commode.

Reports about the accusation reportedly inflamed an anti-American mob in Afghanistan, which erupted into a riot that resulted in 16 deaths. Although Newsweek retracted the story when its source backed away from the claim, Pentagon officials admitted May 26 that an investigation had uncovered other intentional mistreatment of the Quran at the hands of American personnel.

As for Lovelace's sign, an American Muslim civil-rights group first brought it to national attention. Soon, other civic and religious leaders were criticizing it, including a critique from the head of the SBC Executive Committee.

"Now I realize how offensive this is to them, and after praying about it, I have chosen to remove the sign," Lovelace said in a written statement. "I apologize for posting that message and deeply regret that it has offended so many in the Muslim community."

Lovelace said the church pulled out of the organizations for several reasons. Some church members indicated a desire that the church become independent before the sign controversy, he said. Meanwhile, according to Lovelace, some raised concerns that the sign issue could endanger Southern Baptist missionaries serving in majority-Muslim countries.

Church members had also read what Lovelace called "editorials" by Tony Cartledge, editor of North Carolina Baptists' Biblical Recorder newspaper. Lovelace said the articles were "scathing" in their opposition to the church and to him.

The "editorials" Lovelace referred to did not appear in print but rather were entries in an interactive weblog on the paper's site called "Editor's

Journal." Weblogs, rapidly growing in popularity, are online communities in which a "blogger" provides background information not ordinarily found in news stories, or expresses brief opinions about various topics. Registered users are then invited to respond with further information or their own opinions.

Lovelace said he had also read an article called "Why I am not Southern Baptist," distributed by the Fundamental Baptist Information Service. In the article, the author, David Cloud, lists 13 reasons, including his belief that the SBC is ecumenical, that SBC churches are not governed scripturally because their deacons have too much authority, and that worldliness is rampant in SBC churches and schools.

With additional reporting by Robert Marus

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