

Beaumont church ejected from SBTC for allowing gay-friendly ministry to use building

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By Greg Warner

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BAYTOWN (ABP)—A conservative church in Baytown has been kicked out of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention because it lets a ministry to homosexuals use church meeting space. Although the Eklektos ministry affirms homosexuality, the sponsoring church does not, its pastor says.

Faith Harbour, a 4-year-old emergent church in the Houston area, was voted out of the breakaway convention by the group's executive committee, which said the church violated the convention's policy against actions that "affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior."

Eklektos, established late last year, meets in a storefront leased by Faith Harbour and has a link on Faith Harbour's blog. But Randy Haney, Faith Harbour's pastor, said those actions do not constitute an affirmation of

homosexuality.

“Number one, I do not affirm the homosexual lifestyle,” Haney told the convention’s newspaper. “Homosexuality is part of the sinful nature. It is listed, as are many other sins that are acts of the sinful nature. However, I do not hate people who are in that lifestyle. I have friends who are in that lifestyle and they know my stance.”

Haney met with SBTC officials—whom he said were convinced Faith Harbour “was starting a gay church and setting up a woman as pastor”—but was unable to change their minds.

“The sticking point was that he was allowing a homosexual-affirming fellowship to meet in his building,” said Rix Tillman, a Southern Baptists of Texas leader.

Wendy Bailey, an ordained Presbyterian minister and leader of Eklektos, told the Baytown Sun Eklektos does not try to resolve the “tension” over the morality of homosexuality. “Our perspective is we want to create a place where people can come to Scripture and can discover truth for themselves without any prejudged sense of what that is,” she said.

Haney said he and Bailey “differ on that.”

Both Bailey and Haney insist Eklektos, which meets weekly in small groups, is not a church.

According to the group’s website: “Eklektos is a community of Christians who are primarily concerned with helping all people grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ. This community of Christians is especially called to welcome and affirm people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered. We are a diverse group of disciples—diverse in age, race, gender, ideology and sexual orientation. We are united in Christ and in the affirmation that all people are loved and called by Christ to be his disciples

and to be a part of his healing/reconciling work in the world.”

Joe Stewart, chairman of the SBTC board, defended the expulsion.

“One cannot be presenting the life-changing gospel to homosexuals and at the same time affirm the lifestyle,” he said. “When we sign an agreement to be a part of the SBTC, we have those theological parameters that we live and abide through, and that is part of what makes us unique and distinct.”

The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, which broke away from the Baptist General Convention of Texas in 1998, is unique among Southern Baptist Convention-affiliated conventions. Churches are required to affirm a doctrinal statement as a condition of membership, whereas other conventions base membership primarily on financial support.

Baker Road Baptist Church in Baytown, the sponsoring congregation of Faith Harbour, also voted Jan. 8 to cut ties with the congregation. Two Baptist associations are following suit.

South Texas Baptist Association already has disaffiliated the church. San Jacinto Baptist Association, which included Faith Harbour because of its relationship with member Baker Road Baptist, was scheduled to take similar action Jan. 23.