

Ed Litton, known for racial reconciliation, elected SBC president

June 15, 2021

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (RNS)—Ed Litton, senior pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Ala., was elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention during the SBC annual meeting June 15.

Litton has made racial reconciliation a hallmark of his work since at least the 2014 riots after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. His election is considered a defeat for hard right conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention's recent battles over race, sexual abuse and gender roles.

Litton won in the second round of voting Tuesday, defeating Georgia pastor Mike Stone, a former SBC Executive Committee chair and favorite of the Conservative Baptist Network, which has been critical of SBC leadership, saying it has become captive to liberal ideas.

In the first round, Stone and Litton each received about a third of the 14,300 votes cast, with Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Al Mohler drawing about a quarter of the vote. Randy Adams, executive director of the Northwest Baptist Convention, was a distant fourth.

Litton, who served as the SBC's first vice president in 2001, becomes the 63rd president of the SBC and will take over from J.D. Greear, pastor of The Summit Church in Durham, N.C., who served an extra year term due to the cancellation of the 2020 annual meeting amid the coronavirus pandemic.



Fred Luter

Fred Luter, the only Black pastor to serve as president of the SBC, from 2012 to 2014, announced in January he would nominate Litton on Tuesday. The two have been friends for more than 20 years and met when they swapped pulpits for a “Racial Reconciliation Sunday” event.

“From there, our relationship developed to more than just colleagues to bring races together,” Luter told Baptist Press, the SBC’s official news organization.

Luter and Litton were among the signers of “Justice, Repentance and the SBC,” a December 2020 statement published after heads of six Southern Baptist seminaries issued a statement rejecting critical race theory.

Ahead of the election on Tuesday, Luter, pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, called Litton someone who could unite Southern Baptists and get them focused on evangelism, not fighting among themselves.

“Take it from Fred, vote for Ed,” Luter told the crowd of more than 15,000 messengers.

The 2021 SBC presidential election comes at a time of tension for the nation’s largest Protestant denomination. The denomination has declined by close to 2 million members since 2006 and its rate of

baptisms has been stagnant for years.

Southern Baptists also have been divided over issues of race and immigration, support for former President Donald Trump, gender roles and allegations of mishandling sexual abuse cases.

Dwight McKissic, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington, recently told the *New Yorker* magazine he would leave the denomination if Stone or Mohler won, and other African American pastors had voiced similar sentiments.

After graduating Grand Canyon University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Litton served in church and state convention posts in Texas and Arizona before helping to found Mountain View Baptist Church in Tucson. He became pastor at Redemption—then known as First Baptist North Mobile—in 1994. In 2007, his first wife and mother of their two children, Tammy was killed in a car accident. In 2009 he married Kathy Ferguson, who had lost her husband, also a pastor, in an auto accident seven years earlier.