

Generational change evident at SBC annual meeting

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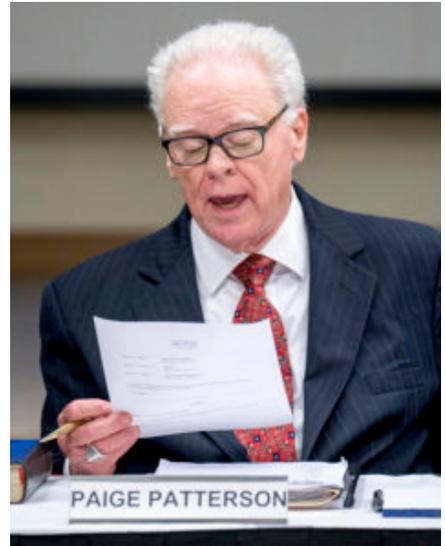
DALLAS—A key architect of the self-identified “conservative resurgence” in the Southern Baptist Convention withdrew from a scheduled opportunity to address the SBC after being fired from his seminary post, and messengers to the annual meeting elected the youngest SBC president in nearly 40 years.

Paige Patterson, until recently president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, notified the incumbent SBC president four days before the SBC annual meeting in Dallas he [would not preach](#) the convention sermon.

Then by a more than two-to-one margin, SBC messengers chose 45-year-old J.D. Greear, pastor of The Summit Church in Durham, N.C., as the convention’s president over 70-year-old Ken Hemphill, a former seminary president and denominational executive.

Many observers saw the two events, among other signs, as evidence of a generational shift within the nation’s largest Protestant denominational organization.

Patterson backs out



Former Southwestern Seminary President Paige Patterson, pictured here at a May 22 trustee meeting, was terminated by the seminary May 30. His attorney has issued a statement defending Patterson against alleged “misinformation.”

(Photo by Adam Covington/
SWBTS via BP)

Patterson had been at the center of a firestorm first triggered by his comments about spousal abuse and a woman’s appearance and later by allegations he mishandled rape claims by students at schools he led. He sent an email June 8 to Steve Gaines, incumbent SBC president, withdrawing as the scheduled convention preacher. He also resigned as chair of an evangelism task force to which Gaines had appointed him a year ago.

In a 13-hour closed-door meeting that began May 22 and stretched into the predawn hours of May 23, the Southwestern Seminary board of trustees [removed Patterson](#) as the seminary's president but named him "president emeritus."

One week later, the board's executive committee cut its ties to Patterson, [stripping him of titles and benefits](#) the board had granted, citing "new information" about how Patterson had inappropriately handled claims of sexual abuse both at the Fort Worth campus and at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he served previously.

The committee also rescinded the board's invitation for Patterson and his wife, Dorothy, to continue to live on campus as "theologians-in-residence" at the Baptist Heritage Center.

In his June 8 email, Patterson identified his withdrawal as convention speaker and resignation as task force chair as "an effort to do what I can to contribute to harmony within the Southern Baptist Convention and to respond to the request that has come especially from Gaines and other Southern Baptist leadership."

Soon after he sent the email to Gaines, Patterson also released an open letter to the "Southern Baptist family" in which he expressed regret for "a poor choice of words" on some occasions but defiantly defended himself against serious wrongdoing.

"Recently, I have been accused, publicly and privately, of a number of things—none of which I acknowledge as having done in the way portrayed, and others that I am confident I absolutely did not do," he wrote.

Patterson specifically denied he "ever knowingly ignored or failed to follow appropriate protocols in cases of reported abuse of women, students or staff at any institution where I have served."

In his open letter, Patterson noted the 2018 gathering would be the first SBC annual meeting he failed to attend in 66 years.

It also was the first for a significant number of messengers, based on those who stand to identify themselves as such during the annual meeting's opening session.

Gen X pastor elected president

Their impact was evident in the election of the SBC president, when Greear received 5,410 votes (68.6 percent) compared to Hemphill's 2,459 (31.2 percent).

Other officers are A.B. Vines, pastor of New Seasons Church in San Diego, first vice president; Felix Cabrera, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Central in Oklahoma City, second vice president; John Yeats, executive director of the Missouri Baptist Convention, recording secretary; and Don Currence, minister of children and administration at First Baptist Church in Ozark, Mo., registration secretary.



J.D. Greear, pastor of The Summit Church in North Carolina, spoke at a pre-Southern Baptist Convention conference in Flower Mound. (Photo / Amber Dion)

At a pre-SBC [conference in Flower Mound](#) geared primarily toward a group often identified as “young, restless and Reformed,” several speakers alluded to the need for a new generation to assume leadership in the convention.

During a panel discussion on the future of the SBC at that event, Greear spoke of the need to view recent events in Southern Baptist life “from a posture of humility and repentance.”

When asked at a news conference following the presidential vote if he perceived his election as marking a generational shift in the SBC, he acknowledged, “We’re definitely seeing something.”

However, he rejected any suggestion it signaled a repudiation of the past or a “passing of the torch” that meant the the older generation would “fade into the sunset.”

“We need to walk forward together,” he said.

No place for politics



The praise band from The Village Church in Flower Mound led in worship during a conference prior to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting. Observers noted

the beginning of a shift at the SBC, with a younger and more ethnically diverse group taking leadership. (Photo / Amber Dion)

Messengers faced their first challenge in walking together in the first hour of the annual meeting's opening business session, when some messengers challenged a last-minute addition to the order of business—a Wednesday morning address by Vice President Mike Pence.



Garrett Kell, a messenger from Alexandria, Va., makes a motion to disinvite Vice President Mike Pence during the opening session June 12 of the two-day Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting at the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center in Dallas. Messengers defeated the motion to amend the agenda to replace Pence's address with a time of prayer. (Photo / Matt Miller / SBC Newsroom)

While a motion by Garrett Kell from Alexandria, Va., to replace Pence's speech with a time of prayer was defeated, it sparked spirited debate about the propriety of an elected official addressing the convention's annual meeting.

After the initial motion failed, several messengers introduced a variety of related motions, seeking to restrict future annual meetings from inviting any elected officials other than the mayor of a host city to offer greetings.

Messengers soundly defeated a proposed amendment to defund the SBC Ethic & Religious Liberty from the Cooperative Program unified budget and redirect the funds to the International Mission Board.

Nathan Rager from The Peoples Church in Clearwater, Fla., presented the amendment, focusing primarily on ERLC President Russell Moore, for his outspoken criticism of Donald Trump during the last presidential election before SBC President Steve Gaines admonished him “not to disparage” anyone.

Vance Pitman, pastor of a multi-ethnic church in Las Vegas, spoke against the amendment and in Moore’s defense, saying, “The ERLC under Russell Moore’s leadership has done more to bring healing to damaged relationships with people of color, minorities and a younger generation of SBC pastors than all of our resolutions combined.”