

Kentucky Baptists cut ties with church with female pastor

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SOMERSET, Ky. (BP)—Messengers representing more than 2,300 churches affiliated with the Kentucky Baptist Convention affirmed a recommendation of the convention’s Committee on Credentials to disaffiliate Fern Creek Baptist Church in Louisville.

Fern Creek Baptist was deemed to be not in “friendly cooperation” with the convention in accordance with Article VI of its constitution and bylaws. The vote to disaffiliate was approved by a show of ballots by a large margin.

The vote by the messengers was that Fern Creek Baptist Church is not in agreement with the scriptural mandate for the office of pastor as articulated in the Baptist Faith and Message, as revised in 2000 and updated in 2023. The revised Baptist Faith and Message limits the office of pastor to men.

Nick Stamps, chairman of the Credentials Committee, noted the motion was made because “it is our assigned responsibility.”

“Our task is to make a recommendation the task of the messengers is to make a decision to approve or reject the recommendation,” Stamps said. “This has not been an easy task, but there has been an overwhelming spirit of love and grace in each meeting. I encourage each of us to have that same spirit. May we continue to endeavor to partner with the gospel.”



Linda Popham has been pastor of Fern Creek Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., more than 30 years. (BP Photo by Sonya Singh)

Nick Sandefur, senior pastor of Porter Memorial Baptist Church in Lexington, Ky., spoke against the motion to disaffiliate. He noted that the pastor, Linda Popham, has served there for 33 years and the church has “not broken any KBC rules or strayed from our bylaws.”

He added he thinks the process is unhealthy.

“The flaws are that it doesn’t define what friendly cooperation is, and this ambiguous process could cause future division in our convention. What will be the next issue—open communion or a Saturday night only service? I also see it as infringement on local church autonomy.”

Following the brief debate, the messengers voted to affirm the committee’s recommendation.

“Kentucky Baptists care about process and they care about fairness when it comes to making important decisions about affiliated churches,” said Todd Gray, KBC executive director.

“The KBC Committee on Credentials is not an activist committee, but it does respond to requests for inquiry from Kentucky Baptist church members. That was the case with Fern Creek Baptist Church.

“An inquiry was requested, and the committee did its work with fairness throughout the process. It sought to honor sister Linda Popham and the good folks at Fern Creek Baptist Church, while at the same time holding to the position it thought to be biblical and, therefore, in the best interests of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

“The committee recommended disaffiliation to the messengers of the 186th annual meeting, invited the messengers to vote on that recommendation and the messengers affirmed it.”

KBC President James Carroll said: “Ending a ministry partnership is lamentable, even when it is prudent. I take no joy in the messengers’ action to disaffiliate Fern Creek Baptist Church, but I support it. Kentucky Baptist churches unite, as we have for 185 years, around a specific set of doctrinal beliefs. While we recognize and joyfully affirm many churches outside our convention, we operate in special partnership with one another.

“To this end, our Credentials Committee has an obligation to help protect our boundaries of cooperation by investigating reported instances of misalignment within our convention. Based on their determinations concerning a church’s alignment with our statement of faith on primary and stated secondary matters, they can make appropriate recommendations to the full body of messengers. This year’s committee invited the leadership from Fern Creek into this process and welcomed their participation, but ultimately, the committee recommended—and the messengers affirmed—disaffiliation.

“To be clear, we made no statement about the legitimacy of their church—only that their faith and practice do not align with our convention

of churches. I am praying for God's best for them."