

Lawsuit advances against Conservative Baptist Network pastor

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—A Louisiana pastor with ties to the Conservative Baptist Network and to House Speaker Mike Johnson will be headed back to court in February.



Brad Jurkovich appears in a Conservative Baptist Network video. (Screen Capture Image)

Two years ago, a group of former members of First Baptist Church of Bossier, La., sued the church and its leaders, including pastor Brad Jurkovich. They claimed those leaders illegally changed the congregation's bylaws and articles of incorporation and misused mission money.

Jurkovich is perhaps best known as the spokesman for the Conservative Baptist Network, a group that claims the Southern Baptist Convention has become too liberal. The network has backed a series of SBC presidential bids aimed at moving the SBC further to the right.

Church members alleged money meant for missions was diverted to the

Conservative Baptist Network.

Jurkovich was also a longtime pastor of House Speaker Mike Johnson, although Johnson reportedly moved his membership from First Baptist in Bossier to another church.

The Daily Beast reported Jurkovich's tenure at the church has been filled with controversy.

Jurkovich and other church leaders have denied any wrongdoing. The pastor told RNS in 2022 the church had an open and transparent budget process.

"These lawsuits represent an attempt by former members of First Baptist Bossier to inappropriately litigate an internal church dispute," he said at the time.

A lower court ruled in 2022 the church had to allow the former members access to financial records. However, lower courts also dismissed part of the lawsuit over church bylaws, saying former church members had waited too long to sue, and the court had no authority over internal church disputes.

In January, the Louisiana Supreme Court denied the church members' appeal, dismissing their claims against the church. However, the claims against Jurkovich and other church leaders remain active. A lower court hearing is set for mid-February to decide the next steps for those claims.

In a concurring opinion, two justices said while the court had no jurisdiction over First Baptist Church, the claims against Jurkovich and other church leaders should still be adjudicated.

The former church members have argued Jurkovich and other leaders failed to give proper notice of the bylaw changes and did not hold a valid

church meeting to review those changes.

Justice Jefferson D. Hughes III said the alleged actions by leaders were not acts by the church itself.

“One may argue that the acts alleged, rather than the acts of the Church, were acts in furtherance of an unauthorized and perhaps fraudulent coup d’état,” he wrote in a concurring opinion, with which Justice Scott Crichton agreed.

Hughes was skeptical that an “impromptu voice vote at the conclusion of a service,” where no votes were counted, qualified as an official meeting. He also questioned a requirement in the new church government documents that leaders had to be “completely loyal” to the church and their pastor.

“One would hope that a Higher loyalty would come into play,” Hughes wrote.

Allison Jones, attorney for the former church members, said she hoped the concurring opinions would allow the lawsuit against Jurkovich to move forward. She said the next hearing in the lawsuit is set for mid-February.

Jurkovich did not immediately respond to a request for comment.