

# **North Carolina pastor Clint Pressley elected SBC president**

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INDIANAPOLIS (RNS)—Clint Pressley, a North Carolina megachurch pastor known for a conservative but even-keel approach to leadership and who does not wear jeans in the pulpit, was elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

After a pair of runoff elections, Pressley received 56 percent of the 7,562 votes cast during a June 12 session of the SBC annual meeting at the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis. Tennessee pastor Dan Spencer, who had qualified for the final runoff with Pressley, received 43.7 percent of the votes.

Brad Graves, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Ada, Okla., was elected first vice president, and Eddie Lopez, pastor of First Baptist Church en Español of Forney, was elected second vice president.

Nathan Finn, executive director of the Institute for Transformational Leadership, was reelected as recording secretary, and Don Currence, administrative pastor of First Baptist Church in Ozark, Mo., was reelected as registration secretary.

## **Dial back the heated rhetoric**

Pressley, who has led Hickory Grove Baptist Church in Charlotte the past 14 years, prefers a suit and tie and a more traditional approach in worship, and he has indicated that his more formal style will translate into his leadership.

“It seems like the kind of rhetoric and the temperature is really high, and I’d like to see it come down a good bit,” Pressley told Religion News Service earlier this year.

He repeated that message at a forum hosted by the National African American Fellowship of the SBC earlier this week, saying he hoped Southern Baptists, known for evangelism and missions, would “get our attention focused back on what we do.”

“We got to quit arguing and start going back to work,” he said.

Pressley was one of six candidates seeking the SBC presidency, an influential volunteer role in the nation’s largest Protestant denomination. Three of the candidates—North Carolina pastor Bruce Frank, Oklahoma pastor Mike Keahbone and Tennessee pastor Jared Moore—were eliminated after the first round of votes. David Allen, a longtime seminary professor, missed the cutoff during a first runoff.

The field of six candidates was the largest since 2008. This year’s race was the first to be undecided after one runoff since 2016. That year, a runoff between North Carolina megachurch pastor J.D. Greear and Tennessee megachurch pastor Steve Gaines ended in a tie. Greear dropped out of the race but was elected president two years later.

Pressley supported the so-called Law Amendment, a measure that would have barred churches with women pastors. He also has been generally supportive of abuse reforms but did have questions about a proposed database of abusers, which was approved for the third year in a row by messengers.

## **Supports training to deal with abuse**

He supports more training and awareness for churches in dealing with

abuse. At an SBC presidential forum, Pressley said that in the past, his church would not have been prepared to deal with abuse. But the recent reforms, he said, caused his church to take the issue seriously and enact policies and training to deal with abuse.

That training meant the Hickory Grove leaders knew what to do when a church volunteer recently was accused of abusing a family member. Had the SBC not started dealing with abuse in recent years, he said, “We would not have known what to do.”

In his first news conference, Pressley told of growing up in a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and then how his life changed when his family began attending a Southern Baptist church.

“Never heard anything like that,” Pressley said. His family soon joined Hickory Grove, the congregation he now leads.

Pressley said he is glad to serve Southern Baptists but is aware of the limits of the president’s role, which is a volunteer role.

“As the Southern Baptist Convention president,” he said. “It sounds like you have a whole lot of power, but you don’t.”

Pressley said he is confident long-promised abuse reforms will move forward.

He also said that despite the failure to pass the Law Amendment, which would have added a constitutional ban on churches with female pastors of any kind, the SBC remains committed to complementarianism—the belief that men and women have separate roles in the family and in the church.

When asked about a newly passed resolution warning about the ethics of in-vitro fertilization, the North Carolina pastor volunteered that he and his wife had dealt with infertility, and IVF had been one of the treatment

options they thought about. He said pastors should use the resolution to help Southern Baptists think through the issue.

“We have just not thought about it very much,” Pressley said.

Pressley detailed some of his career as a pastor, saying he’d served small rural churches and older churches before coming back to lead Hickory Grove. He said Southern Baptists should be known for their joy—something he said Southern Baptists have a duty to show.

In a moment of self-deprecation, Pressley also admitted he’ll need help in overseeing the denomination’s annual meeting. His predecessor, Texas pastor Bart Barber, is known for his expertise in parliamentary procedures and Baptist polity.

That’s not Pressley’s strong point, he admitted.

“I shudder to think of how poorly I will compare to Bart Barber.”

*Adelle M. Banks contributed to this report.*