

# Saddleback appeals SBC ouster over woman pastor

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Saddleback Church, the California megachurch long known for its former pastor, bestselling author Rick Warren, has appealed the decision by the Southern Baptist Convention to oust it for naming a woman to its pastoral team.



Rick Warren (second from left) with (left to right) Stacie Wood, Andy Wood and Kay Warren. (Photo courtesy of A. Larry Ross)

Stacie Wood, wife of Andy Wood, who replaced Warren as lead pastor last summer, has the title of “teaching pastor.”

Of the eight congregations removed from official affiliation by the denomination’s Executive Committee since last year’s annual meeting, three are appealing the decision.

Another church, Fern Creek Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., was also among the five churches ousted for having women in pastoral roles, a stance that is against SBC teaching.

The third church making an appeal is Freedom Church in Vero Beach, Fla., which was ousted “based on a lack of intent to cooperate in resolving concerns regarding a sexual abuse allegation,” the committee stated in February.

On May 16, the SBC credentials committee issued a statement saying the three churches had appealed, following a process that requires a submission in writing at least 30 days before the SBC annual meeting. That gathering is scheduled for June 13-14 in New Orleans.

## **Pivotal vote in New Orleans**

During the annual meeting, the credentials committee said, a representative of each of the three churches will be allotted a time to speak, as well as a representative of either of the two committees. Messengers to the meeting will determine if their decisions will be upheld.

“A ‘yes’ vote will affirm the decision of the Executive Committee and credentials committee,” the statement reads. “A ‘no’ vote will overturn the decision of the committees and allow the church to immediately be registered and to seat messengers in accordance with convention rules.”

Executive Committee Chairman David Sons noted in a separate statement this is a historic juncture for the convention.

“Since this is the first time in SBC history for this particular item of business to come before the convention, it’s important for everyone coming to New Orleans to be prepared and informed about the process,” he said.



“As Western culture grows more dark, more evil and more secular, we have to decide are we going to treat each other as allies or adversaries?” Pastor Rick Warren asked messengers to the 2022 SBC annual meeting in Anaheim, Calif. “Are we going to keep bickering over secondary issues or are we going to keep the main thing the main thing?” (BP Photo by Adam Covington)

During the last annual meeting, Warren, who founded Saddleback in 1980 after graduating from Southwestern Baptist Theological seminary, took a surprise turn at a microphone and encouraged Southern Baptists to focus on cooperation rather than differences.

“I love Southern Baptists,” the author of *The Purpose Driven Life* said. “As Western culture becomes more dark, more evil, more secular, we have to decide: Are we going to treat each other as allies or not?”

Saddleback’s elders issued a statement in February reiterating that theme, but also noted a possible future response.

“We love and have always valued our relationship with the SBC and its

faithful churches,” they said. “We will engage and respond through the proper channels at the appropriate time in hopes to serve other like-minded Bible believing SBC churches.”

Prior to the Woods’ arrival and since, the megachurch has shown its support for women in ministry.

On Mother’s Day weekend in 2021, it ordained three women who were longtime staffers. The weekend before Mother’s Day this year, Katie Edwards was announced as the new campus pastor of the church’s Lake Forest, Calif., location.