

SBC approves amendment limiting pastorate to men

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The day after messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting affirmed the expulsion of two churches because they have female pastors, messengers also initially approved a constitutional amendment to limit the office of pastor to men.



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SBC messengers voted to approve a change to Article 3, Paragraph 1 of the SBC Constitution. The amended item stipulates a cooperating SBC church “affirms, appoints, or employs only men as any kind of pastor or elder as qualified by Scripture.”

Constitutional amendments require two-thirds approval at two consecutive annual meetings. So, it will face a second vote at the 2024 SBC annual meeting.

Originally, Michael Law, senior pastor of Arlington Baptist Church in Arlington, Va., submitted a proposed amendment saying a cooperating Southern Baptist church “Does not affirm, appoint, or employ a woman as a pastor of any kind.”

Juan Sanchez, senior pastor of High Pointe Baptist Church in Austin, proposed the alternative language, restating the definition in terms of what a church does rather than what it does not do.

The SBC affirmed a decision of its Executive Committee to consider Saddleback Church in Southern California and Fern Creek Baptist Church in Kentucky outside the bounds of “friendly cooperation” with the convention on the basis of the SBC confessional statement, the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message.

The Baptist Faith and Message says, “While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.”

Rather than leave the matter up to the SBC Credentials Committee and SBC Executive Committee, Law said he felt it would bring “clarity” to include a statement about a male-only pastorate in the SBC governing document.

‘Slow on the take ... quick on the draw’

The same morning SBC messengers voted to approve the limiting language in their constitution, they also approved a motion to grant a one-year extension to its abuse reform implementation task force.

The task force asked for more time to complete their work, including development of an online database to track known sexual abusers.

During debate on the constitutional amendment, Bob Bender, pastor of First Baptist Church Black Forest in Colorado Springs, Colo, asked, “What does it say when we are slow on the take on sexual abuse of women but quick on the draw to disqualify them from non-lead pastor roles?”



Meredith Stone

Meredith Stone, executive director of Baptist Women in Ministry, said Southern Baptists' votes to expel two churches with female pastors and to approve the constitutional amendment "devalue the worth and the callings of women to participate in God's work through the local church."

The SBC already made its position on women serving as pastors clear when it approved the revised Baptist Faith & Message in 2000, Stone said.

"However, this amendment further denigrates women," she said. "It creates division, draws lines and communicates that the bodies, lives, leadership and ministry of women are a battleground to determine who is 'in' and who is 'out.'"

"The emotional, spiritual and physical safety of women is further threatened when they are not only devalued, but used in a political denominational battle."