

SBC Executive Committee cuts ties with four churches

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NASHVILLE (RNS)—The Southern Baptist Convention Executive Board voted to cut ties with four churches on Feb. 20.

One hired a woman pastor. Two allegedly mismanaged sexual abuse. The other failed to give to SBC missions causes.

All four were designated as “being out of friendly cooperation” with the nation’s largest Protestant denomination after its credentials committee recommended they be removed.

Immanuel Baptist Church, in Paducah, Ky., was deemed “not in friendly cooperation” for having a woman who serves as senior minister.

The SBC statement of faith—the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message—says that the office of pastor, also known as an overseer or elder, is limited to men.

The SBC is considering a constitutional amendment that would bar churches that allow women to hold the title of pastor, no matter what their role at the church.

Last February, the Executive Committee expelled five churches, including Saddleback Church in Southern California, one of the nation’s largest churches, for giving a woman, the wife of its new senior pastor, the title of preaching pastor.

The Executive Committee determined Grove Road Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C., had shown “a lack of intent to cooperate in resolving a concern regarding the pastor’s mishandling of an allegation of sexual abuse.”

The committee also decided West Hendersonville Baptist Church, in Hendersonville, N.C., had broken denominational rules on dealing with abuse by retaining a pastor who was “biblically disqualified.”

Trustees also decided that the SBC’s relationship with New Hope Baptist Church, of Gastonia, N.C., had been “discontinued” because the church, according to the Executive Committee, had not given to SBC causes for five years.

A question about the faith and practice of New Hope had also been raised, and the church had a “lack of intent to cooperate” in resolving that question.

Southern Baptist churches are required to donate to the SBC’s Cooperative Program unified budget or to a denominational entity, such as a seminary or a mission board.

Historically, churches are rarely removed for not giving. After joining via a state convention or by filling out a simple online form and making an initial donation, a church will remain on the SBC rolls unless someone takes action to have it removed.

Donations are checked when a church registers messengers for the SBC annual meeting but are not monitored otherwise. Currently, fewer than 60 percent of churches give to the Cooperative Program, its joint missions fund, down from about 75 percent in the mid-1980s.

At their regularly scheduled meeting this week, Executive Committee members approved a budget for fiscal year 2023-2024, which will be presented at the SBC meeting in June.

They learned the Executive Committee’s assets declined by more than \$2 million last year, part of an ongoing fiscal crunch.

They also heard an update from the search committee looking for a new permanent Executive Committee leader. That committee hopes to name a candidate next month. The Executive Committee has been without a permanent president since 2022 and has had a pair of interim leaders.