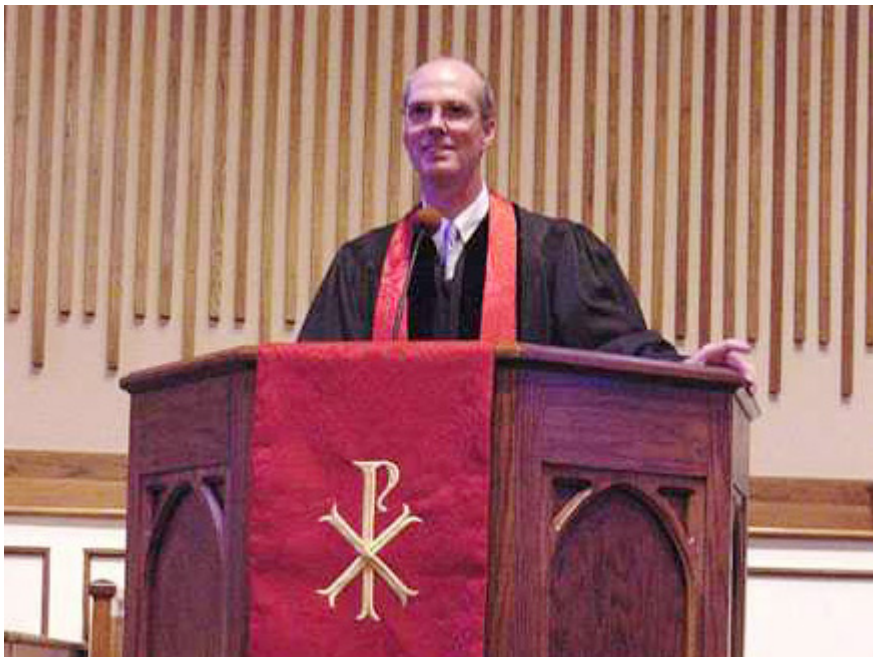


SBC ousts Alabama church over pastor's stand on homosexuality

June 17, 2015

COLUMBUS, Ohio (BNG)—For the second straight year, the [Southern Baptist Convention](#) Executive Committee has voted to oust a church over homosexuality.

The Executive Committee took action June 15 against [Weatherly Heights Baptist Church](#) in Huntsville, Ala., under a bylaw barring from membership churches “which act to affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior.”



Pastor David

Freeman of Weatherly Heights Baptist Church in Huntsville, Ala., says he bears no ill-will toward the Southern Baptist Convention, but “at the end of the day, I must be honest.” (Weatherly Heights Baptist Church Photo)The Executive Committee reportedly decided to act on behalf of the convention because there was no time allotted for discussing the matter on the schedule at the June 16-17 SBC annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio.

Last year, the Executive Committee voted on the convention's behalf to withdraw fellowship from New Heart Community Church, La Mirada, Calif., for not firing the pastor after he said from the pulpit he no longer believes that all same-sex relationships are sinful. The committee took similar action in 2009 against Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, after investigating an internal controversy over whether to include photos of same-sex couples in the church directory.

Same-sex-marriage ceremony

Weatherly Heights Baptist Church came to the attention of the Alabama Baptist State Convention after media reports about Ellin Jimmerson—an unpaid staff member who was ordained by the congregation—performing a same-sex marriage ceremony on Feb. 9, the first day gays could legally wed in the state.

Attention turned to Pastor David Freeman after local Baptist leaders found an old sermon on the church website where Freeman said he does not believe the Bible condemns “adult, loving, monogamous, same-sex relationships.”

Later, Freeman wrote in the church newsletter that he had been asked to conduct a same-sex marriage but had declined. He said he might be open to doing so in the future, however, and met with church leaders about a consensus that he would be free to do so as long as it was in the capacity of an individual minister and not representing Weatherly Heights Baptist Church.

Association withdrew fellowship

The executive board of Madison Baptist Association voted 74-5 to withdraw fellowship from the church in order to “remain true to the biblical definition of marriage in belief and practice.” The Alabama state convention has not yet acted on the congregation's affiliation, but the executive

director and president joined in a statement Feb. 11 declaring “any church that allows staff members to officiate at same-sex ceremonies is clearly outside biblical teachings about marriage and human sexuality, and they demonstrate that they are not in like-minded fellowship or friendly cooperation with Alabama Baptists and Southern Baptists.”

The SBC Executive Committee termed the action “clear evidence of the church’s affirmation and approval of homosexual behavior” and denied seating to messengers “until such time as the convention determines that the church has unambiguously demonstrated its friendly cooperation with the convention as defined in the convention’s constitution.”

In a letter to an SBC official May 6, Freeman said he bears “no ill will” toward the SBC.

“It has been an important home for me,” Freeman said. “However, I must follow the truth as I perceive it. At the end of the day, I must be honest.”