

# **Southern Baptist leaders stand by Moore after his apologies**

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (RNS)—Russell Moore can keep his job. But only after he apologized for criticizing Southern Baptists who supported Donald Trump for president.

The beleaguered head of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission was told by his agency's executive committee it stands by him, according to a statement released March 20.

## **Southern Baptists divided on Moore**

The decision followed a saga of several months over Moore's fate that split the denomination between his supporters, who tended to include younger Southern Baptists and minorities, and members of an older generation who often are more interested in ties with the Republican Party.

"For us not to stand in affirmation of the principles that Dr. Moore has espoused would be unfaithful to the mission entrusted to us by the convention," the statement said.

A few days earlier, Moore and SBC leader Frank Page issued a shorter joint statement about how they "fully support one another" after the two held a two-hour meeting.

The board of trustees for the Southern Baptist public policy and moral concerns agency, including its executive committee, oversees Moore.

## **Critiques drew strong responses**

During the election season, Moore wrote, spoke and tweeted critiques of

then-GOP candidate Trump and questioned the motives of Christian leaders who supported him.

Several Southern Baptists, including Pastor Robert Jeffress of First Baptist Church in Dallas and former SBC President Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, served on Trump's evangelical advisory board.

In May, Moore told CBS' "Face the Nation" Trump represented "an embrace of the very kind of moral and cultural decadence that conservatives have been saying for a long time is the problem."

Trump himself waded into the debate by tweeting: "Russell Moore is truly a terrible representative of Evangelicals and all of the good they stand for. A nasty guy with no heart!"

In response to Moore's actions, some Southern Baptist leaders threatened to halt funding his agency or the whole denomination.

Jeffress told *The Wall Street Journal* members of his church didn't believe the ERLC "represents our church's beliefs."

Prestonwood decided to hold back \$1 million in funds for the denomination.

### **ERLC committee affirms Moore's leadership**

But after apologies from Moore and his "numerous private conversations with many of those who had criticisms of him," the ERLC committee decided to support Moore.

"We realize that divisions do not heal overnight," the committee said. "But in terms of leadership and support, Dr. Moore is the man to whom it has been entrusted to lead this entity—speaking prophetically both to our culture and to our convention. He will continue doing so with the confidence of our support."

In his latest statement, Moore said he had not meant to “suggest it was sinful for Southern Baptists or others to advise candidates or to serve on advisory boards in order to bear some influence there.”

“What I was attempting to talk about were those—most often prosperity gospel teachers—who were willing to define the gospel in ways that I believe untrue to the plan of salvation, or to dismiss the moral concerns other Christians had,” Moore said.

Moore added he stands by his convictions to address “what the gospel is and is not, what sexual morality and sexual assault are and are not, and the crucial need for white Christians to listen to the concerns of our black and brown brothers and sisters in Christ.”

Moore said he regretted his social media postings that “were at times overly broad or unnecessarily harsh. That is a failure on my part.”

Jack Graham welcomed Moore’s apology, tweeting, “This is a gracious and unifying statement from @drmoore.”