

Virginia church declared out of bounds by SBC

June 11, 2024

Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting overwhelmingly voted to declare a Virginia church that supports women in pastoral roles as out of “friendly cooperation” with the SBC.

At the annual meeting in Indianapolis, messengers voted 6,759 to 563—91.78 percent to 7.65 percent—to affirm a recommendation from the SBC Credentials Committee to consider First Baptist Church of Alexandria, Va., outside the bounds of friendly cooperation with the SBC.

The convention acted regarding the Virginia congregation one day before it was scheduled to consider final passage of a constitutional amendment that would bar churches with female pastors from affiliation with the SBC.

Prior to the annual meeting, First Baptist Church of Alexandria revealed it [received an inquiry](#) from the SBC Credentials Committee regarding its employment of a female pastor on staff. Kim Eskridge has served the church as pastor for children and women nearly 20 years.

At the SBC annual meeting, Senior Pastor Robert Stephens noted First Baptist Church of Alexandria has affirmed women in ministry for more than 44 years.

For decades, the church has “maintained a faithful partnership with churches” that hold a different understanding about whether the Bible limits the office of pastor/elder/overseer exclusively to men, Stephens said.

First Baptist Church of Alexandria and the Southern Baptist Convention have a “shared commitment to the gospel” and its declaration, he said.

“Let’s keep working together,” he urged.

Jonathan Sams, chair of the SBC Credentials Committee, noted Article 3 of the SBC Constitution states: “The Convention will only deem a church to be in friendly cooperation with the Convention” when it “has a faith and practice which closely identifies with the Convention’s adopted statement of faith.”

Article VI of the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message states in part, “While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor/elder/overseer is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.”

The Credentials Committee recommended the SBC “discontinue its cooperative relationship with First Baptist Church of Alexandria, Va., on the basis that the church has a stated faith”—egalitarianism—“which does not closely identify with the convention’s adopted statement of faith as currently required by Article III of the constitution.”

According to the church’s response to the SBC Credentials Committee, Pastor Mike Law of Arlington Baptist Church in Arlington, Va., notified the congregation’s then-interim pastor by email on May 24, 2022, of his intent to report the church to the SBC Credentials Committee.

Law also introduced the amendment to the SBC Constitution to limit the role of pastor/elder/overseer to men.

First Baptist Church of Alexandria, founded in 1803, has been affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention since the convention’s formation in 1845.

EDITOR’S NOTE: The fourth paragraph from the end was added to clarify the stated grounds for the church being declared outside the bounds of friendly cooperation with the SBC.