

Woodmont pastor addresses ties to SBC and CBF

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NASHVILLE (BP)—After the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting, many people at Woodmont Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn., were upset, Pastor Nathan Parker said.

“They had heard press reports coming out of the convention and asked if we could face it,” Parker told Baptist Press. “Some members were calling for us to withdraw from the SBC.”

So, Parker called a town hall meeting.

Woodmont Baptist Church wasn’t the only one holding such talks after SBC messengers’ approval of the first step toward a constitutional change limiting the office of pastor to men.

But in the case of Woodmont Baptist, the church’s history cannot be ignored as it provides context for that family meeting—as well as why Woodmont is being discussed among Southern Baptists now.

As listed on the church’s website, Parker earned degrees from Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and Lipscomb University. The executive pastor is a graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The other two ministry staff members are women and listed as ministers, holding degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The staff all support the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message, Parker insisted.

Those details are important, as Woodmont is currently part of the broader

SBC discussion, particularly online.

Historic role in forming CBF



Bill Sherman

Bill Sherman, Woodmont's pastor for 30 years, led the congregation when the church was instrumental in forming the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. CBF broke away from the SBC in the early 1990s in response to what CBF characterized as the fundamentalist takeover of the SBC and what supporters in the SBC call the conservative resurgence.

Sherman's brother, Cecil, was a key leader—arguably the key leader—among that group that formed CBF while serving as pastor of First Baptist Church in Asheville, N.C.

Fast forward to 2023. On Aug. 17, interim SBC Executive Committee President and CEO [Willie McLaurin resigned](#) from that role after acknowledging he falsified information on his resume. He was removed by the president and CEO search committee as the likely candidate to fill the position.

The next day, Executive Committee Vice President for Communications

Jonathan Howe was announced by Chairman Philip Robertson as the [new interim president](#) and CEO.

In recent days, social media posts and articles reported on Woodmont's CBF connection while pointing out Howe's wife, Beth, serves at Woodmont as minister of students and discipleship.

Writers on social media noted the SBC debate over women serving in pastoral roles on church staffs.

"I've told my church that I see a lovingly designed, spiritual male headship in Scripture, but it's not a make-or-break issue," Parker said. "Originally, we wanted Beth's position to be for a male pastor.

"But when she emerged as the best candidate, we changed the job description to remove some of the 1 Timothy elder-qualification [language] because she's not an elder and doesn't want to be an elder. None of the women on our staff want to be elders or pastors."

At the town hall meeting, Parker taught for 30 minutes from Genesis 1-2 about the "God-given, lovingly designed, spiritual male headship to be exercised in the church and the home" as he sees it.

Parker said he did not see it as a gospel or salvific issue "as long as we are still submitting ourselves to the authority of Scripture."

Wounded by the SBC conflict

Parker's congregation consists of many who remember the division of the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980s and early 1990s differently than the majority of the SBC today.

"There are folks who were deeply wounded by those on the SBC side," said Parker, a Nashville native who became Woodmont's pastor in January 2017.

“There’s real trauma there, from both sides. Mud was thrown in both directions.”

According to the 2022 Annual Church Profile, Woodmont designated 1.6 percent of its budget to be given through the Cooperative Program, the highest in eight years.

Members are free to designate the denominational giving portion of their regular budget giving to either the SBC, CBF or both as well as above their regular tithe at Christmas for international missions efforts.

The “vast majority” of those gifts go toward the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, Parker said. Woodmont gave \$42,134 to that offering in 2022.

The church also financially supports the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions, the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board’s state offering, the Nashville Baptist Association, Tennessee Baptist Children’s Homes and Tennessee Baptist Adult Homes.

COVID dealt Woodmont, like churches everywhere, a financial hit in 2020. Since then, the church has steadily increased giving to Southern Baptists’ signature missions offerings by 35 percent.

‘We’re better together. But some days it’s hard.’

Accusations over a lack of commitment to Southern Baptist causes can have an impact, Parker admitted.

“I like to believe that we’re better together,” he said. “But some days it’s hard.”

The front steps of Woodmont’s sanctuary are only a few minutes away from

the SBC building in downtown Nashville.

“We’re focused on being the healthiest church we can be to the glory of God,” he said. “My job as pastor is to shepherd the flock, to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandment as faithfully as possible. Those denominational power struggles are not necessarily part of that mission.”

At that church town hall meeting this summer, a 92-year-old Bill Sherman approached Parker, thanking him for the leadership displayed at that moment.

The two are friends, Parker said. They see eye to eye on what they deem to be faith essentials. Tertiary issues, not as much, and they believe that’s all right.

“He has been nothing but encouraging and kind to me,” Parker said. “He said we can agree to disagree on this, and we walked out of that meeting as a family of faith. No one was upset. No one cried.

“We disagreed on something, and it was really healthy. It exhibited a lot of Christian maturity and love for one another.”