

# SBC Executive Committee postpones vote on Broadway

February 17, 2009

Lyn Robbins, left, discusses action with Stephen Wilson, chair of the Executive Committee's bylaws work group.

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) — The Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee has asked a Texas church to clarify its views on homosexuality before determining whether its toleration of gay members violates a constitutional ban on churches that "act to affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior."

A motion referred to the committee by the SBC last June seeks to declare [Broadway Baptist Church](#) in Fort Worth "not to be in friendly cooperation" with the denomination.

While the original motion did not state the cause of the action, SBC leaders interpreted it to be in response to news stories about a controversy within the congregation over whether to allow same-sex couples to be photographed together in a church directory. Rather than vote up or down, the church opted for a compromise that used candid photos of members instead of separate family portraits to illustrate the membership.

The full Executive Committee voted unanimously and without discussion Feb. 17 for a recommendation "that the study of whether Broadway Baptist Church of Fort Worth, Texas, should continue to be considered to be in friendly cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention, and further

inquiries and continued communications with the church be made, with the goal of arriving at an appropriate report to the convention at its June 2009 annual meeting in Louisville, Kentucky."

The vote came after long discussions in two subcommittees open to the press under background rules forbidding direct quotation or attribution.

In written correspondence with the Executive Committee, church leaders said members hold a "variety of views" on homosexuality, but the church has not acted in a way that violates the constitutional membership requirement.

Several Executive Committee members said the church's clear declaration that it does not affirm homosexuality seemed in tension with the admission that five of its 1,400 church members are openly gay and two of the five are assigned to a committee.

The Executive Committee asked the church to provide more information about the congregation's views on homosexuality and the church before it reports back to the convention on the referred motion at the SBC annual meeting in June.



Jorene Taylor Swift, minister of congregational care at Broadway Baptist Church, greets Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Church leaders appealed to Southern Baptist leaders to help them to get past a number of difficult issues troubling the church, adding that homosexuality isn't one of the major ones.

"We are not a church where homosexuality is a defining issue," church leaders said in a letter. "While we extend Christian hospitality to anyone — including homosexuals — we do not endorse, approve or affirm homosexual behavior."

The SBC, the nation's second-largest faith group behind Roman Catholics, changed its constitution in 1993 to exclude churches that are welcoming and affirming of gays. In the past, the amendment has been interpreted to apply to churches that take some formal action, like ordaining or licensing a gay minister or conducting a ceremony to bless a same-sex union.

In 2006, an SBC-affiliated state convention with a similar policy said a church could be expelled for simply being perceived as affirming homosexual behavior.

The next scheduled meeting of the Executive Committee is June 22, just prior to the SBC annual meeting scheduled June 23-24..

If Broadway Baptist Church is disfellowshipped, it will have implications for four of its active members who teach at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, including the church's choir director and Sunday morning worship leader. Southwestern requires all full-time faculty members to belong to a Southern Baptist church.

"We are pleased that we were received so graciously," Lyn Robbins, a Broadway member and the church's general counsel, said after the vote. "We believe that we are in friendly cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention. Our purpose here today was to express that and also to share who Broadway is and what we are about."

Robbins said the church members at the meeting would relay the Executive Committee's request for more information back to the church, and he anticipates Broadway will be willing to have more communication.

"Nothing happened today that makes me believe that we cannot reach a conclusion that will be in the best interest of both Broadway and the SBC," he said.

*-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.*

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