

# **Voices: My view of the 2024 SBC annual meeting**

June 19, 2024

I became a Southern Baptist by accident—providence, really—but I remain a Southern Baptist by choice and conviction.

Not only am I in doctrinal alignment with the SBC, but I am convinced the Cooperative Program is the absolute best option for like-minded local churches to leverage our resources to reach the world for Jesus.

After this year's annual meeting, my commitment to the SBC is as strong as ever.

## **As committed as ever**

First, I love the fellowship. I can see and enjoy old friends and new.

If all you know about the SBC comes from social media, you might think we are tearing each other apart and our meetings border on a brawl. But social media is not real life. While we have some malcontents in our midst, even in our disagreements, we mostly are agreeable in spirit.

Second, the fruit of our cooperation was on full display. We participated in the commissioning of 83 new international missionaries and heard inspiring reports from our North American Mission Board about record numbers of church plants and baptisms.

We heard from our six seminary presidents and were encouraged greatly that they are all doing well and growing. We heard how Cooperative Program giving is up, as are contributions to the Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong mission offerings. From platform reports to exhibit hall displays,

I was reminded once again of why I am Southern Baptist.

Third, as you probably know, the annual meeting is a very long business meeting with some amazing worship and a couple of sermons built into the agenda. We conduct a lot of business during those two days. Some of it is mundane, but some of it makes headlines and can inflame emotion. I'll give my take on a few of the weightier matters.

## **Weighty business**

For one thing, as has happened for the last couple of years, a motion was made to defund the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. The motion, as in years past, was defeated soundly. A motion to have the president of the ERLC fired was ruled "out of order."

Two somewhat contentious debates surrounded proposed resolutions. Resolutions are nonbinding statements issued at each annual meeting to address various issues of interest to Southern Baptists.

The first debate had to do with the resolution "On Defending Religious Liberty." In case you are unaware, religious liberty is one of the defining marks of Baptists. We long have advocated for religious freedom for all. That's why I was surprised at the impassioned debate about this one.

Some people actually opposed the resolution, arguing Christianity should be the official—or at least favored—religion by our government. Thankfully, the resolution passed overwhelmingly.

Another emotional discussion concerned the resolution "On the Ethical Realities of Reproductive Technologies and the Dignity of the Human Embryo." You might have seen headlines declaring Southern Baptists now oppose IVF. That is inaccurate.

The resolution, which passed by a large margin, simply raises the concern

of creating embryos that later will be destroyed. The resolution was in keeping with Southern Baptists' long-time advocacy for all human life, beginning at conception.

## **Women in pastoral roles**

Finally, the hottest topic leading up to the meeting, and the tensest debates on the floor, concerned the issue of women in pastoral roles and a vote on a proposed amendment to the SBC constitution. Much misinformation has been disseminated about this, and even many people in attendance walked away with differing perspectives. I'll give mine.

Before I do, however, I'll put my cards on the table. I am a complementarian in full agreement with the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, which states, "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."

There is, however, a full range of complementarianism, and I probably am somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. Many women serve on staff and hold leadership positions in our church. However, I believe the Bible teaches the office of pastor is limited to qualified men.

I know many disagree with me on this, and I respect their position. Some of them are good friends. I do not believe they are heretics or that they have rejected the authority of Scripture. I simply see them as having a different interpretation.

Frankly my greater concern is that of unqualified men serving as pastors in our convention. My observation after 31 years as a pastor and 6 years as a seminary professor is we are too quick to ordain as pastors those who simply "feel called" to the task. I believe our standards are too low.

# Big-tent Baptist

But back to convention business. To amend the constitution requires a two-thirds-majority vote two years in a row. This year was the second vote on what has become known as the “Law Amendment” first proposed by a messenger named Mike Law.

It failed to pass, having received only 61 percent in favor. The proposal would have codified in our legal documents that churches who employ a female pastor of any kind would be deemed as “not in friendly cooperation” with the SBC. I voted against the amendment. I’m glad it failed.

But if I’m a complementarian, why wouldn’t I want it to pass? For one thing, I don’t think it’s wise or necessary to put such language into our governing documents, especially when our doctrinal statement is sufficient.

But I’m also a big-tent Baptist. While I will not ordain a woman to be a pastor, I don’t think we need to cut ties with every church that has a female children’s or women’s pastor. Of course, our tent does have boundaries, and we always will disagree as to how tightly to bring in our stakes.

Over all, I left the annual meeting encouraged and inspired. I understand not everyone feels like I do. But we are Baptists. Some of the votes went my way; some did not. That’s the way it goes. We have a system, and the system works. I look forward to our future, as I believe it is bright.

*Mike Miller is the senior pastor of Central Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Texas. The views expressed in this opinion article are those of the author.*