

Voices: Vote for the layman, and fill the baptistry

January 28, 2020

In an apparent preemptive strike on Oct. 31, 2019, H.B. Charles Jr., senior pastor of Shiloh Metropolitan Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla., announced by tweet that [he would nominate](#) R. Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, to be the next president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

On Jan. 14, a group of Southern Baptists announced [their intent to nominate](#) Randy Adams, executive director of the Northwest Baptist Convention to be the next president of the SBC.

Besides being Baptists and being members of churches that are a part of the SBC, what do these two men have in common? If you guessed they both are professional clergy, you win.

I've never met either man, and I'm not likely to meet them. Based on what I read about each in the news reports of their prospective nominations, there is every reason to believe either one can do the job of president of the SBC just about as well or as poorly as any of their predecessors over the last 40 years or so.

My question to you is: Is that good enough?

Is another member of the clergy what we need?

Are you personally satisfied with the direction of the SBC? A cursory internet search will reveal numbers indicating we are in decline, as well as

revealing numbers indicating we are on the upswing. As a living, breathing, praying, thinking, God-fearing member of an SBC church, how do you see our situation?

If you are satisfied, I encourage you to vote for one of these fine men, from whom you reasonably can expect more of the same, no matter what their public platforms. If you are not satisfied, I encourage you to “Vote for the layman,” by which I mean a man or woman.

Decades of clergy, all cut from more or less the same cloth, have brought us to our current situation, a situation I consider unacceptable and not worthy of a convention of churches committed to carrying out Christ’s mission on earth. It is time to nominate—and to elect—a layperson who will supply the vision and leadership necessary for real change.

Can a layperson lead the SBC?

At least some of you may be thinking, “Great idea, John, but no layperson has agreed to be nominated,” and you’d be correct.

So, the second half of my call is for a layperson to step forward, to have a colleague to nominate him or her, just as Mohler and Adams will have, and to lead the SBC to be what God intends it to be.

Others of you may be thinking, “Yeah, that’s gonna happen.”

Those around Gideon, Esther, David and Elijah probably were thinking the same thing. Do we have similar faith today?

I don’t kid myself, though. Institutional inertia is a powerful thing, and it well may take divine intervention for a layperson to be elected this year or any year. But might nominating a layperson this year, no matter the odds, be the first step? Maybe a layperson doesn’t get elected until two years from now after yet another member of the clergy has run things further

into the ground. By then, might a majority of those voting at the annual meeting have wised up to reality?

A call to laypeople to lead the SBC

I don't know who this year's layperson should be. I do know there are laypeople all across the SBC who lead major institutions, such as industrial firms, banks, hospitals and universities. There are retired military officers and retired politicians, entrepreneurs and agency executives, among others. Many of these are more qualified, organizationally speaking, than yet another preacher, no matter how high his profile.

If you are the one, I beg you to step forward and begin the change. If you know someone who is qualified, convince him or her to agree to be nominated.

The pews are filled with laypeople. Our churches are funded by the freewill offerings of laypeople. No church doors would remain open without laypeople. Organizations and institutions across America are led and populated by laypeople who make a difference for Jesus Christ every day. Laypeople can lead the SBC, too. Laypeople *should* lead the SBC, too.

Vote for the layman, and fill the baptistry!

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