

SBC Votes to Uphold Removal of Saddleback Church

The Southern Baptist Convention voted to uphold the previous decision to remove Saddleback Church from the denomination at their annual meeting.

The California megachurch founded by Rick Warren was removed for the appointment of female pastors, a stance and practice the SBC rejects.

According to reports, the representatives attending the conference in New Orleans voted in overwhelming numbers to affirm the removal of Saddleback, 9,437 votes (%) to 1,212 votes (%), as well as Fern Creek Baptist Church of Louisville, Kentucky, (9,700 to 806) and Freedom Church of Vero Beach, Florida, (9,984 to 343).

The SBC is the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S., even after losing large swaths of congregants from its fold over the last few scandal-ridden years.

The decision to remove Saddleback came back in February and the megachurch has since doubled down on their stance on female pastors by appointing new Lead Pastor Andie Wood's wife, Stacie, to role of "teaching pastor."

According to the Baptist Press, "Saddleback Church was deemed not to be in friendly cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention's statement of faith, the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, due to the church continuing to have a female teaching pastor functioning in the office of a pastor."

Yet it has been Warren and his immense influence and presence when it comes to the challenging of the SBC's executive committee's initial decision.

Appealing to the members at the Annual Meeting, Warren implored them not to go through with these expulsions and to follow in similar fashion when the SBC did not disassociate from the churches who held onto Calvinist doctrines.

"We should remove churches for all kinds of sexual sins, racial sin, financial sin, leadership sin, sins that harm the testimony of our convention," Warren said. "But the 1,129 churches with women on pastoral staff have not sinned."

Warren says studying the Great Commission was one of the driving factors for his change of heart when it came to ordaining women pastors.

"There are four verbs in the Great Commission: 'go,' 'make disciples,' 'baptize' and 'teach,'" Warren says. "Women are to go. Women are to make disciples. Women are to baptize and woman are to teach, not just men. This is one of the reasons why Saddleback Church has baptized more people than any church in American history—57,000 baptisms in 43 years. Anybody can baptize anybody that they led to Christ."

The SBC however has not had such a change of theological interpretation.

Speaking in favor of upholding the expulsion, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Albert Mohler says he believes that Saddleback's actions represented a threat to the unity of the entire SBC:

"It's not just a matter of church polity; it's not just a matter of hermeneutics," Mohler argued. "It's a matter of biblical commitment, a commitment to the Scripture that unequivocally we believe limits the office of pastor to men."

"Here we face the unusual situation in which Dr. Warren himself has made repeated statements, and the church has taken repeated actions that make very clear it rejects the confessional understanding of the Southern Baptist Convention

on this issue,” Mohler adds.

Section six of the SBC’s Baptism and Faith Message discusses the role of the church, which reads: “While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.”

Judging by the great disparity in the votes to uphold Saddleback’s, Fern Creek Baptist’s and Freedom Church’s expulsions, they do not plan on changing that interpretation anytime soon. {eo}

James Lasher *is Staff Writer for Charisma Media.*