

Southern Baptists Poised for Historic Election

The man expected to be in the running to become the first African-American in the No. 2 position of the nation's largest Protestant denomination didn't choose to become a Southern Baptist. By Fred Luter Jr.'s account, it just sort of happened.

In 1986, Luter was hired as the head pastor at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, a Southern Baptist Convention affiliate. Ever since, he has been breaking racial barriers in the predominantly white denomination.

In 1992, he was the first African-American elected to the executive board of the Louisiana Baptist Convention. In 2001, he was the first African-American to preach the convention sermon at the SBC annual meeting.

When the Southern Baptist Convention elects new officers at its annual conference in Phoenix beginning Tuesday, the 54-year-old Luter will be in the running for first vice-president. And some prominent Southern Baptist leaders already have said they hope that position will lead to his election as president next year when the 2012 convention is held in Luter's hometown.

Luter said he doesn't want to speculate on that.

"I'm a street kid from the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans," Luter said in an interview on Friday. "It's very humbling. It's really an honor just to be nominated."

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