

# 'Best Days Are Ahead': Rick Warren's Saddleback Church Ordains Three Women to Pastorate

California-based megachurch Saddleback broke from the Southern Baptist Convention's deep-seated views on women in leadership and recently ordained three women pastors.

The church, led by founding pastor Rick Warren, made the announcement via Facebook, saying the best days are ahead of the congregation.

*Yesterday was a historic night for Saddleback Church in many ways! We ordained our first three women pastors, Liz...*

*Posted by Saddleback Church on Friday, May 7, 2021*

The three newly ordained pastors include Liz Puffer, Cynthia Petty and Katie Edwards, longtime members of the church who had been involved in other ministerial aspects during their time with Saddleback.

The church website lists its 18 "campus pastors," all of whom are male. However, as a writer points out, the full staff directory is not listed online. According to their LinkedIn profiles, Petty has served as a children's minister for 22 years, while Puffer uses "minister" in her bio. Edwards is listed on staff for the junior high ministry at Saddleback's Lake Forest campus for the last 24 years.

Other denominational affiliates approve of and endorse women in leadership, but the SBC holds to complementarian beliefs, which affirm that male leadership in ministry as well as in

leading a family is God-ordained. Egalitarian beliefs, however, hold that roles should be ability-based and not gender-based, with men and women equally able to hold church leadership positions.

Mixed responses sounded on the May 7 Facebook announcement, with many agreeing with and referring to the SBC's guidelines, which prohibit women from operating in pastoral capacities on the basis of the biblical instruction found in 1 Timothy 2:9-15: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to usurp authority over a man, but to be silent."

Longtime Southern Baptist and bestselling author Beth Moore, who left the SBC earlier this year in part over the issue of women in ministry, did not directly address Saddleback's decision, but her recent reply to her own tweet about "Jesus to our last breath, Sisters" clearly alluded to it, noting that the men and women involved in gospel ministry and greeted by the apostle Paul in Romans 16 "weren't just packing the brothers' lunchkits.' They were fellow servants of Christ Jesus":

*Jesus to our last breath, Sisters. Jesus to our last breath.*

*– Beth Moore (@BethMooreLPM) May 10, 2021*

A Facebook user, who, according to his Facebook bio, studied at the Mid-America Reformed Seminary, commented, "Time for anyone who cares about the truth of Scripture to leave Saddleback. You should've done so before. But now is most urgent."

"So much for 1 Timothy 3 and Titus. Sad to see a church that doesn't even look to God's word for instruction," another commented on the post.

Referencing the same Scripture, Jason Keith Allen, president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Spurgeon

College said the verse does not contain suggestions but qualifications.

*This is a disappointing departure from the clear teaching of Scripture, the BF&M, & long-held SBC consensus & practice.*

*I Tim 3 & Titus 1 list qualifications, not suggestions. Let's hold fast to Scripture.*

*Saddleback Church ordains first female pastors –*

*– Jason Keith Allen (@jasonkeithallen) May 9, 2021*

Owen Strachan, provost and research professor of theology at Grace Bible Theological Seminary, urged those troubled by the ordination to seek out a “strong Bible-believing church in the area.” He sees this circumstance as an “opportunity to leave an unsound flock, and to place yourself under the care of faithful shepherds who obey the Bible.”

He concluded with a strong call to action: “The time to leave is NOW.”

Others were more supportive of Saddleback's controversial move.

Ashley Easter referenced the uphill climb women have had to take to get to this point, congratulating the three on their historic ordination.

*I'm glad Saddleback Church ordained 3 of their first women pastors.*

*But don't forget these women have been with the church since the 90s. That's how long it takes for a church to say “oh, these women are pastoral.”*

*Thats the hill women have to climb*

*p.s. still no women elders*

*– Ashley Easter (@ashleymeaster) May 8, 2021*

Rachel Cagwin Dennis commented on the Facebook post, “Thank you for empowering and elevating women just as Jesus did in His day,” with another affirming the same sentiment: “Thank you for having the courage to recognize and validate God’s calling of women in ministry. Praying for all of the leadership of Saddleback.”

Saddleback Church has not released a statement as to why the decision was made to step out of line with the SBC’s views or the process of ordaining the three women.

According to , where an interview with Cynthia Petty was published, Pastor Rick Warren first approached her with the idea in November 2020.

“He explained that he and the elders had been discussing for many months the possibility to ordain women as Pastors at Saddleback Church,” Petty says of Warren’s call. “He told me that the elders unanimously voted to appoint me one of the first three women pastors at Saddleback Church! And that it would be announced in the staff meeting that afternoon! He affirmed my leadership and my calling to ministry, and it was a conversation I will not forget.”

She concludes the interview, “As I mentioned previously, my desire to have the title of Pastor was never anything I pursued. However, as I see young women in the church begin to learn more about their own giftedness, their desire to lead and be used to the fullest extent has been greatly enhanced by opening these new opportunities as Pastor.

“This is a new day for women in ministry and I am honored and blessed to help carry the mantle of being a Pastor and have the title as NextGen Ministries Pastor at Saddleback Church!”

{eoa}