

Dear EFBC Members

As you are fully aware, I promised you a written report of the SBC Annual Meeting this past June. Instead of trying to re-inventing the wheel, I decided to search for what I believed to be a very good report that someone had written. After reading the below report, I decided it was better than what I could do. Furthermore, the below report is written from a layman's perspective, which I personally believe makes it even more valuable.

I have also decided to add some articles that were written by others, articles I believe are absolutely important to the conversation we need to be having. Thank you, and enjoy.

Pastor Blake

### **What's going on at the SBC?**

Report by J.R.M. Owens

In a rare second ballot vote, pastors at the Pastors' Conference elected Daniel Dickard, a North Carolina pastor, as president to host next year's Pastors' Conference in New Orleans. He beat out Voddie Baucham, a seminary dean in Zambia, 690 – 608.

Meanwhile, the Pastors' Conference that promised a "who's that, not who's who" speaker slate drew "hundreds" of attendees for its kickoff Sunday night while "about 1,000" attended a parallel Conservative Baptist Network event, per Baptist Press.

### **What is the Pastors' Conference?**

While the SBC Annual Meeting is Tuesday and Wednesday, the Pastors' Conference is held on Sunday and Monday. Think of it like a pre-Annual Meeting rally, but it's technically separate with its own president and budget.

### **Why the president matters:**

The Pastors' Conference president decides who preaches at the Pastors' Conference the following year. The speaker lineup sets the tone for the Annual Meeting.

### **More context:**

The Pastors' Conference has no bylaws, so there is no basis for any rules. For the first time in recent memory, the presidents of last year's and this year's Pastors' Conferences chose to limit voters to the pastoral staff.

- There's debate on whether or not this is allowed. But no bylaws means there's no way to answer: Can the president do that? Can attendees choose to ignore it? Nobody knows.

### **What does it all mean?**

- Baucham was the candidate serving on the steering council of the Conservative Baptist Network, though Daniel Dickard has been praised by Network leadership on social media.
- A close vote suggests motions, resolutions, and elections on Tuesday and Wednesday will come down to razor-thin margins.

Nine resolutions will be recommended to messengers at the Southern Baptist Convention, covering topics from the war in Ukraine to sexual abuse and sanctity of human life issues. The SBC will vote on these resolutions during the two "Committee on Resolutions Reports" ([scheduled](#) for Tuesday at 11:30 a.m. and Wednesday at 3 p.m. Texas pastor Bart Barber chairs the committee.

### **What's a resolution?**

A resolution is a non-binding statement that expresses the collective will of the messengers present at that SBC Annual Meeting.

- Even if a resolution is passed unanimously, nobody and no entity is required to abide by anything in it. But because an adopted resolution is affirmed by the majority at the SBC, it's a good indicator of what the messengers think that year about a given topic.
- It's also a statement that SBC leaders can point to when they're talking to external audiences like the media. For instance, if a leader is asked what the SBC thinks about abortion, he or she can point to past resolutions as examples of what Southern Baptists believe.

### **How it works:**

- The SBC president appoints people to a Committee on Resolutions.
- Southern Baptists can submit resolutions to the committee before the SBC Annual Meeting.
- In the days ahead of the Annual Meeting, the Committee on Resolutions reviews the submitted resolutions and has the power to edit, combine, and craft resolutions and to decide which resolutions to bring before the messengers.
- During part 1 and part 2 of the "Committee on Resolutions Report," the committee will make motions to adopt the resolutions the committee selected.

- Messengers may adopt (or not), make changes, or move to bring a resolution “out of committee” if the committee chose not to bring it before the SBC.
- Because the time slots for business are short, effectively editing resolutions from the floor is difficult.

### **What stands out about these resolutions?**

The committee received 29 resolutions and declined 15 of those.

- That’s a high ratio of resolutions rejected outright by the committee, and it includes 2 resolutions related to plagiarism. (Context: Sermon plagiarism has been an item of discussion and debate in the Southern Baptist Convention throughout the last year in regard to the current SBC president.)

Resolution #6 (“On Lament and Repentance for Sexual Abuse”) is oddly unclear in some areas and oddly precise in others.

- It’s oddly unclear when it reads that, “we publicly repent and acknowledge our need for comprehensive change in caring well for survivors of sexual abuse.” Who is the “we”? As a resolution, the “we” is the messengers gathered at the SBC. But how can those messengers repent for the sins of others?
- It’s oddly precise when it names individual survivors of sexual abuse within SBC churches. The SBC has several resolutions related to its past postures on racism and slavery, but apologizes to no one by name.

### **Resolutions being considered include:**

**1: ON THE MISSION FIELD IN RURAL AMERICA**

**2: ON THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

**3: ON THE WAR IN UKRAINE**

**4: ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, FORCED CONVERSION, AND THE FEDERAL INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL INITIATIVE INVESTIGATIVE REPORT**

**5: ON SUPPORT FOR CONSISTENT LAWS REGARDING PASTORAL SEXUAL ABUSE**

**6: ON LAMENT AND REPENTANCE FOR SEXUAL ABUSE**

**7: ON ANTICIPATION OF A HISTORIC MOMENT IN THE PRO-LIFE MOVEMENT**

**8: ON THE *IMAGO DEI* AND THE HELPFUL CONTENT SUBMITTED IN SEVERAL RESOLUTIONS**

## 9: ON APPRECIATION FOR THE CITY OF ANAHEIM

The big story from the first day of the Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention is the election of Texas pastor Bart Barber as president after a run-off vote, defeating Tom Ascol: 3,401 – 2,172. Since the views of a candidate are well known, the election of a new president is the simplest barometer for the direction of the SBC regarding key controversies.

### Who was running?

Four candidates ran for SBC president, but none received more than 50 percent of the vote required to win. In the run-off, Ascol lost 160 net votes, and Barber picked up 143 net votes to win with 60 percent of the votes.

- Barber, who campaigned for president on the platform that the SBC is generally moving in the right direction, is widely seen as the establishment candidate and as a vote of confidence in the current health of the SBC.
- Ascol, who campaigned on the platform that the SBC lacks the fear of God, is widely seen as the candidate who wants to “change the direction” of the SBC and as a vote of no confidence in its current health.

*Context:* Frank Cox (a pastor in Georgia) entered the race just hours before the election took place. The question then became whether Cox would take more votes away from Ascol or from Barber.

### What does it mean?

- Barber’s election is a significant affirmation by the SBC that it needs no change of direction: that it is basically healthy. The key controversies in the SBC can be summed up among those who believe the SBC’s current direction is healthy or not.
- Some of the key controversies are:
  - Whether the Bible permits women pastors
  - Whether Critical Race Theory is a helpful analytical tool
  - Whether the SBC can be guided by a third-party company that celebrates sexual sin or if such a company’s embrace of an anti-Christian worldview affects its judgment to offer sound advice to the SBC
  - Whether plagiarizing sermons is wrong.

But perhaps the simplest and most incisive dividing line is represented in who messengers choose as their president: establishment versus non-establishment, or status quo versus change.

### Other points of interest from Tuesday:

- Messengers debated the question, “What is a pastor?” Seminary presidents Al Mohler (Southern) and Adam Greenway (Southwestern) spoke from the floor at odds on the recommendation. *(More in-depth coverage of this to come – Stay tuned.)*
- Nathan Finn, provost at North Greenville University, was elected recording secretary—a mainly administrative role—defeating Javier Chavez and David Roach by garnering 51 percent of the vote. Roach received 13 percent of the vote, and Chavez received 34 percent.
- Messengers adopted amended recommendations from the Sex Abuse Task Force to set up an Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force and a “ministry check” website. One messenger was unsuccessful in seeking to strengthen due process provisions.

### **Southern Baptists debate ‘What is a pastor?’ on the heels of America asking, ‘What is a woman?’**

By Sharayah Colter

June 17, 2022

ANAHEIM, Calif. – Recently, many Americans watched in disbelief when then-United States Supreme Court Justice nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson was unable or unwilling to answer the question, “What is a woman?”

This week, at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, many watched in similar disbelief as Baptists struggled to answer the question, “What is a pastor?”

While Scripture provides a clear definition of “pastor,” Southern Baptists demonstrated uncertainty during their annual meeting June 14 in Anaheim, Calif., as messengers debated whether women can serve as pastors—something Baptists have long-opposed as unbiblical. During the Credentials Committee report, chairwoman Linda Cooper explained to messengers the committee was not yet ready to make a recommendation about whether Saddleback Church in Anaheim, Calif., which has ordained women as pastors, should no longer be considered in friendly cooperation with the SBC. The Convention’s most recent confession of faith—The Baptist Faith and Message 2000—conveys that Southern Baptists believe pastors should be male, as prescribed in Scripture.

The Credentials Committee originally asked messengers to approve a study committee to study the office and function of pastor in more depth, but after vigorous debate ensued on the

convention hall floor, the committee withdrew the recommendation and decided to take more time to consider the matter as a committee.

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) President Albert Mohler spoke against the recommendation.

“If we eventually have to form a study committee over every word in our confession of faith, then we are doomed as a convention,” Mohler said.

Mohler served on the committee that revised the Baptist Faith and Message in 2000 to produce its most current iteration.

“Dr. Mohler, I understand totally,” Cooper responded from the platform. “To me, I know what the word pastor means, but in some of our Southern Baptist churches, a pastor is a spiritual gift that is given to many people, so we want to have clarity in what that ‘pastor’ means,” Cooper said.

Audible shouts of “No!” could be heard throughout the convention hall.

Tom Ascol, the pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Fla., also spoke to the recommendation and to an amendment proposed by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS) President Adam Greenway, saying it seemed to him Southern Baptists were “making things far more complex than they should be.”

“We do have the Baptist Faith and Message,” Ascol said. “It is not equivocal in its language. It’s very simple. It’s very clear. If churches choose to call people pastors who are not biblically qualified to be pastors, that is a matter for the church to resolve. I think we have spoken rather clearly as a Convention. I think if we adopt this amendment, it will further complicate something that has no reason to be complicated. It’s simple. Saddleback had ordained women to be pastors very loudly. They’ve celebrated it. The Southern Baptist Convention has said we do not believe that women can serve in the office of pastor. So, let’s not do this amendment. Let’s defeat it, and then let’s defeat the original recommendation.”

Later in the day June 14, Saddleback pastor Rick Warren was given an opportunity to speak at a microphone to “read a love letter” to the Convention since he said the 2022 Annual Meeting may be his last. In his speech to messengers, Warren highlighted a list of his ministerial accomplishments and talked about his love for the Southern Baptist Convention. He urged messengers not to focus on secondary issues, presumably referencing the issue of his church ordaining female pastors.

“Are we going to keep bickering over secondary issues, or are we going to keep the main thing the main thing?” Warren asked?

Newly elected SBC President Bart Barber expressed thankfulness for Warren via Twitter on June 16 while noting their “different opinions over pastoral complementarianism.”

Complementarianism is the doctrinal belief that God in the Bible gives certain roles to men and certain roles to women within the spheres of the church and the home. The doctrine affirms that both men and women have equal value but different roles, whereas the counterpoint doctrine, Egalitarianism, affirms that men and women have equal value and no distinction in roles.

Despite Warren’s effort to minimize the issue and despite the affirmation he received by many leading Southern Baptists, still many other Southern Baptists view departure from Baptists’ long-held beliefs about the roles of men and women as a clear indication of liberal drift.

“In 2000, Southern Baptists overwhelmingly adopted the Baptist Faith & Message revision,” Mohler said in a Twitter post. “We explicitly stated that we confess and believe together that ‘the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.’ Southern Baptists knew what they were doing. Words matter.

“Rick Warren has been kind to me, but if he has led his church in violation of our confession of faith, the act was entirely that of the pastor and his church. The SBC cannot order a local church on its doctrine. It has every right and power to define its own association.”

### **What’s going on at the SBC?**

J.R.M. Owens

Buckle up—lots to unpack here.

The presidential election is the best, simplest indicator of the direction of the SBC. You can read about what Bart Barber’s election means in [pt. 3](#).

But the SBC also hashed out its key controversies via motions (which mandate a required action) and resolutions (which state a non-binding opinion).

Many average messengers attempted to highlight and reform accountability and transparency of the organizations that work for them (like the North American Mission Board and the Executive Committee)—and failed. **This demonstrates a bottom-up lack of trust in the SBC system.**

The platform (ex: the president, Ed Litton) attempted to highlight and reform sexual abuse issues and racism—and succeeded. **This demonstrates a top-down lack of trust in Southern Baptists.**

*(Skip to the end for the TL;DR version.)*

## **Motions**

Messengers made an unusually high number of motions, with this common thread: an apparent lack of trust in the organizations created and funded by Southern Baptists to serve local churches. Important motions by topic:

Abolish the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, which is the SBC's public policy and advocacy organization. Abolishing the ERLC requires successful votes at two consecutive SBC Annual Meetings, and this year's vote failed.

- While the function of the ERLC is important, some question whether the SBC is unified enough to use that function in any meaningful way.

Appoint a task force to conduct/oversee a third-party forensic audit of finances at the North American Mission Board.

- Amid questions of financial mismanagement and lack of transparency, a third-party audit should be no problem if there are no problems. A similar logic was employed last year to initiate an investigation into the alleged mishandling of sexual abuse claims at the Executive Committee.
- *More context: In the last decade, NAMB has become well known for spending significant financial resources, including giving out brand-name swag to thousands at SBC Annual Meetings, including Amazon Dots this year.*

SBC seminary presidents Al Mohler (Southern) and Adam Greenway (Southwestern) publicly spoke in disagreement with one another over a motion from the Credentials Committee regarding Saddleback Church in light of its ordination of women pastors.

- *In a nutshell:* The motion in question came from the Credentials Committee. At last year's SBC, there was a motion directing the Credentials Committee to study whether Saddleback Church (an SBC megachurch pastored by Rick Warren) should be disfellowshipped from the SBC because of its ordination of women pastors. The Credentials Committee recommended that a task force be created to study what the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 means by the word "pastor."
- *What Mohler wanted:* was to reject the Credentials Committee's recommendation. He said it is very clear that the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 means the role of pastor is limited to men and that to create a task force to study the plain meaning would make confessions of faith meaningless. Words either mean something, or they do not, he said.

- *What Greenway wanted:* to amend the Credentials Committee recommendation and broaden the issue. He wanted the SBC to explore what it means for a Southern Baptist church to be of “like faith and practice” (which is the current standard). By broadening, this move would allow for the current controversy regarding female pastors to extend to other topics.
- *What actually happened:* SBC president Ed Litton allowed Rick Warren unscheduled time to speak from the floor. Given the applause Warren received, it seems the room confused the question “Has Saddleback done a lot of good?” with the question “Is Saddleback in line with our statement of faith?” Afterward, the Credentials Committee withdrew its task force recommendation, which means nothing was actually accomplished.
- *More context:* On *Twitter*, Jason Allen (Midwestern Seminary president) *supported* Mohler’s view, and Mohler *doubled down*.

Many motions put forward by messengers targeted specific organizations for investigation or heightened transparency. While the SBC ideally is designed so that each organization’s trustees hold the organization accountable, these motions demonstrate lack of trust in that system:

1. Conduct a forensic financial audit of NAMB.
2. Prohibit the use of executive session at the Executive Committee (ex: all meeting proceedings must be public).
3. Make a transparent vetting process for Executive Committee members.
4. Create a task force to investigate Southeastern Seminary’s handling of sexual abuse cases.
5. Publish contact information for trustees.
6. Amend the SBC Constitution to require meeting recordings and internal communications from all SBC organizations to be made available upon request.
7. Require the Executive Committee to give the SBC an update on the legal consequences for having waived attorney-client privilege.
8. Explore how to give Baptist Press editorial independence (it is currently housed under the Executive Committee).
9. Abolish the ERLC.
10. Require Southern Seminary (led by Mohler) to remove the names of 19th-century slaveholders from its campus.
11. Explore the relationship between the messengers and the trustees (ex: can the messengers give mandates to the trustees?)
12. Create a task force of non-trustees to study accountability in SBC power.
13. Study accountability over the day-to-day work of Executive Committee staff.
14. Keep motions intended to investigate a particular organization from being automatically referred to that organization for self-investigation.

These may not all be good ideas or even legal ones, but they suggest SBC leadership has lost the trust of many average Southern Baptists.

## **Resolutions**

The SBC adopted the nine resolutions recommended by the Resolutions Committee.

- Read about the oddities of this year's resolutions [here](#).

## **TL;DR: What does it mean?**

The root exasperation in the SBC is this: whether or not the SBC is basically healthy. The “yes” group and the “no” group are both coalitions straddling various groups that a few years ago did not pair well: Calvinists and non-Calvinists comprise both sides, for instance.

The groups debate over whether the Bible permits women pastors and vicarious repentance for others' sin (ex: past racism), how to handle sexual abuse reform, and more.

**It all boils down to this: The Cooperative Program is a shared funding mechanism that runs on trust like a machine runs on oil. And bottom-up, top-down, and top-to-top trust dwindles.**