



SBC Position on The Usage of Pastoral Title for Women in Ministry Question and Answers

At the 2023 Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention messengers voted to affirm the Credentials Committee’s recommendation to disfellowship Saddleback Church and set the groundwork to disfellowship similarly situated churches who have women serving as any kind of pastor or elder.¹

The National African American Fellowship, SBC (NAAF) maintains and supports the autonomy of the local church. While it is in the purview of the Messengers to determine those churches who are not in friendly cooperation, in accordance with well-seasoned Baptist polity, a core tenet of Baptist ecclesiology is local church autonomy. NAAF maintains that the decision to appoint or employ a woman with pastoral title is not a national governance matter and should be decided by the local church.

How does this decision impact my church?

While decisions made by the Messengers are not binding on any congregation. The SBC credentials committee at the national, state and associational levels have the authority to begin the process of disfellowshipping those churches who are deemed not to comply with this decision.

When will this policy become effective?

This leads to two policy issues. The first is the disfellowshipping of those churches deemed not in friendly cooperation and the second is the proposed amendment to the SBC constitution known as the Law Amendment. For the former, any church can be submitted to the requisite credentialing body for review. It is up to that credentialing body to determine and recommend

¹ “...only men as any kind of pastor or elder as qualified by Scripture.” <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/southern-baptists-pass-first-approval-of-constitutional-amendment-over-women-pastors/>

whether the church is deemed friendly or not in friendly cooperation. With respect to the latter, the decision to amend the SBC constitution will not take effect until it is ratified by the messengers in our 2024 annual meeting to be held in Indianapolis.

What impact will this have on our membership in state conventions and local associations?

Each state convention and local association are autonomous entities and are not bound by the decisions of the national SBC. This gives them the authority to determine who is or is not in friendly cooperation based on their local governing polity which means that a local church hypothetically could be deemed friendly by the state convention and/or local association and not friendly by the national SBC.

What if we have concerns, suggestions, or have identified additional issues that require address?

This matter is of great consequence. It is the position of NAAF not to determine the governing polity of the local church as they are autonomous. However, each pastor as the representative of their local congregation and by proxy a representative of NAAF must communicate with their state convention and local association. We strongly urge you to raise concerns, suggestions or issues that require address with your state executive or director of missions. You must be an active participant in this conversation and decision-making process as it has long term implications for your church and other NAAF affiliated congregations.

What's happening now?

There are several conversations currently underway regarding both the recent decision to disfellowship these congregations and the ratification of the Law Amendment to the SBC constitution. Both require further dialogue to include:

- The appropriateness of bringing changes to the SBC Constitution to the floor for a vote without referring it first to a committee or taskforce for study.
- The appropriateness of the Chair to dismiss the call for a ballot vote; and
- The lack of sufficient information and sufficient time to deliberate on such thorny issues with such significant ramifications across all levels of the SBC.

What are the next steps?

NAAF is actively engaged in this conversation. We are sensitive to the reality that even within our fellowship there are a diversity of positions. Our role is singular. To raise awareness of our shared concerns and ensure that your voice is heard by the SBC. We view our tie that binds us as the preservation of local church autonomy. No decision made by the national entity should infringe upon this fundamental position. We have sent a formal letter to that end to Bart Barber, the national SBC President and intend to continue being an active participant in shaping the way forward for our denomination in this as well as other matters. If you have questions, concerns or recommendations, we'd love to hear from you. Kindly forward them to info@naaftogether.org.