



August 17, 2023

The Executive Committee of the  
Southern Baptist Convention  
901 Commerce St.  
Nashville, TN 37203

Dear Fellow Baptists,

We write after prayerful consideration on behalf of Hayes Barton Baptist Church (“HBBC”), an affiliate of the Southern Baptist Convention (“SBC”) since this church’s establishment in 1926. We do so to express our dismay and disappointment at the SBC’s recent disfellowshipping of churches which have women serving in pastoral roles as well as the tentative vote to amend the Constitution of the SBC to provide that no church which calls women to serve in pastoral roles may remain in friendly cooperation with the SBC. We suggest that the actions of the SBC are unwise, arbitrary and overstep its function as an organization of cooperating Baptists.

In Christian love we respectfully suggest that the SBC has acted to divide us rather than to bring us together to accomplish evangelism and good works in the name of Jesus. We pray that your direction will change.

The doctrine of the priesthood of the believer is a biblical principle foundational to most Protestant denominations and in particular Baptists. We Baptists historically affirm “soul competency”: the right and responsibility of each person to deal personally with God without the imposition of creed, clergy or civil government. Indeed, E. Y. Mullins (1860-1928), Baptist educator and theologian, stated that it is “... a distinctive Baptist contribution to the world’s thought...” Herschel H. Hobbs (1907-1995), Baptist pastor and theologian, stated his analysis that, “Out of this principle flows all other elements of Baptist belief...”. H. Leon McBeth (1931-2013), Baptist educator and historian, articulated that, “The concept of the soul’s competency is more than a single doctrine; actually it undergirds all the other doctrines of the (Baptist) faith.”

These observations are confirmed in the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 (“the Message”), specifically in Article VI on which the SBC relied to oust churches from fellowship. This section states in part that the office of pastor is limited to men. But the underlying premises of Article VI (entitled “The Church”) as revealed in the first sentence of the article is that, “A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel...” It continues, “Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes.”

Article XIV of the Message (entitled “Cooperation”) declares that organizations such as the SBC “... have no authority over one another or over the churches...”. Thus the SBC should not denigrate the democratic process of soul competent members of autonomous churches to make decisions concerning the role of women as pastors in those churches as there are numerous Biblical examples of women leaders in both the Old and New Testaments.

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The SBC was never intended to be and is not the arbiter of orthodoxy or consistency of the Baptist faith for autonomous churches. Rather, it was intended to be an organization of cooperating churches working to promote and implement the goals stated in Articles XI and XV. Article XI (entitled Evangelism and Missions): "It is the duty of every fellowship of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations." Article XV (entitled "The Christian and the Social Order"): "We (Christians) should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the aged, the homeless, and the sick."

As for Hayes Barton Baptist Church, our soul competent members acting through the democratic process has a long (more than 40 years) and ongoing commitment to call women to leadership positions in our church. Our current staff includes a Senior Associate Pastor and an Associate Pastor of Children and Families and Communication, both of whom deliver God's word in our Sunday worship.

They perform under God's inspiration through the Holy Spirit, displaying unique interpersonal and leadership skills and talents, as well as a love for Christ and a sound scriptural basis for their ministry. Their service fulfills a call from God to them and a blessing for the congregation of this church and those we serve. Thus we perceive no basis for or desire to change our practice of accepting and encouraging women to serve in leadership roles in Hayes Barton Baptist Church.

At the same time, we respect the right of other autonomous churches to decide otherwise for themselves. We Baptists have always been diverse in our understanding of how to articulate and implement God's call while cooperating to make disciples of all nations and to do good works in Jesus' name for those in need. May the SBC be a voice which calls us together to accomplish these goals; not one which divides us based on how we understand, articulate and execute God's call. As Paul reminded those diverse Christians of the First Century, "We are one in Christ." Galatians 3:28.

Is it your intention to disfellowship all churches which call women to serve in pastoral roles? If not, what are the criteria for determining which are subject to be disfellowshipped? We would very much appreciate the courtesy of a response to these questions as that response will assist us in discharging our responsibility to inform and advise the congregation of HBBC concerning its relationship with the SBC.

Respectfully submitted,

The Denominational Relations Committee  
Hayes Barton Baptist Church