



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on June 14, 2023

Southern Baptists Cut Ties With Rick Warren's Saddleback Church

At their annual meeting on Tuesday in New Orleans, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) overwhelmingly upheld the decision of their Executive Committee to remove Saddleback Church, a megachurch in California previously pastored by Rick Warren, from the nation's largest non-Catholic Christian denomination.

The vote was 9,437 — or 88 percent — in favor of disfellowshipping Saddleback from the Southern Baptist Convention. Less than 12 percent — only 1,212 members — voted against the recommendation of the Executive Committee to expel the church because it had opted to allow a woman to fill the role of teaching pastor. Also removed from the SBC was Fern Creek Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, for the same reason. Freedom Church of Vero Beach, Florida, was ousted because the church had not removed its pastor, considered to have been credibly accused of sexual misconduct.



AP Images
Rick Warren

Andy Wood became lead pastor of Saddleback when Warren officially retired, and Wood's wife, Stacie, was made the church's teaching pastor. The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M) included wording specifying that the office of pastor is restricted to men, asserting that this is the teaching of the New Testament.

Warren spoke to the convention on Tuesday prior to the vote, asking the convention to overrule the Executive Committee, [arguing that](#) "the 1,028 churches in the SBC with women on pastoral staff have not sinned."

Al Mohler of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary spoke against granting Saddleback's appeal, with a warning that the decision of Warren's church to defy the denomination's teaching was threatening the SBC's unity, and that the issue was not nonessential. "This is not just a matter of church policy. It is not just a matter of hermeneutics [biblical interpretation]. It's a matter of biblical commitment. A commitment to the scripture that unequivocally we believe limits the office of pastor to men."

In the days leading up to the vote, Warren's public statements had become increasingly strident, even charging that his opponents were "angry fundamentalists."

After the initial decision of the Executive Committee to oust Saddleback, Warren said that the SBC needed Saddleback more than Saddleback needed the SBC, although apparently he decided there was a need to remain in the denomination. But considering that the church, founded in 1980 by Warren, does



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not even use “Baptist” in its name, much less “Southern Baptist,” and with 30,000 in weekly attendance, in more than a dozen locations, it could be argued that Warren has already built a separate denomination. Historically, Baptist congregations have created new congregations — known as “mission churches” — but after a short time of nurturing and financial support, these mission churches become independent of their “mother church.” That is, of course, not the case with a church that exists in more than a dozen locations.

While the SBC has no control over what is taught in an individual member congregation, or how its officers are selected, the other congregations in the SBC certainly have a right to disassociate with a congregation that they believe is practicing false doctrine. Both the denomination and the independent congregations, of course, must make the decision as to which beliefs are essential to continued fellowship.

Other denominations may hold differing views on the issue of ordaining women or other doctrinal questions, but Rick Warren’s history of challenging conservative orthodoxy is of interest beyond the SBC. In a *Time* magazine article in 2008, Warren was described as one of the preachers who was “leading and riding” a “wave of change in the Evangelical community.” While evangelicals have been mostly associated with more conservative political philosophy and activity, Warren has been a vocal advocate of more liberal causes.

The *Time* article noted that Warren is “leading ... an expansion beyond social conservatism to causes such as battling poverty, opposing torture and combating global warming.” According to the magazine, Warren has shifted away from issues like abortion and gay marriage, and is now “more interested” in issues such as global climate change.

Warren told *Time* that he even led a march in the 1960s with the radical Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). The SDS was a “New Left” organization founded as a branch of the League for Industrial Democracy, which itself was descended from the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, founded by Upton Sinclair, Walter Lippmann, Clarence Darrow, and Jack London.

Since that time, Warren has been an active member of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), an organization of world government advocates. He has even spoken to the globalist World Economic Forum (WEF) — the organization known for promoting the idea that in a decade we will own no property of our own.

The support of the religious Left for the progressive agenda is pretty much old hat by now, and the only ones who really care what progressive preachers and left-wing seminary professors have to say are progressive members of progressive denominations. As such, success in changing evangelicals into political progressives — or at least in neutralizing them — lies in promoting preachers in more conservative denominations such as the Southern Baptists.

Hopefully, the expulsion of Warren’s church will cause many of the evangelicals who may have been taken in by him to see his statements on public policy issues for what they really are: the views of an SDS radical who remains to this day in an organization that calls for world government.



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