

Law Amendment fails on second vote by SBC messengers

In a highly anticipated vote on the final day of this year's Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting, messengers narrowly defeated the proposed Law Amendment which specified that only men can serve "as any kind of pastor or elder as qualified by Scripture."

During last year's annual meeting in New Orleans, messengers adopted a motion by Mike Law, pastor of Arlington Baptist Church in Virginia, that the SBC Constitution be amended to note that any church in "friendly cooperation" with the SBC "does not affirm, appoint or employ a woman as a pastor of any kind."

The motion was amended by Juan Sanchez of Texas to read that a cooperating church "affirms, appoints or employs only men as any kind of pastor or elder as qualified by Scripture."

The motion, which was approved last year with a reported two-thirds raised ballots, required a two-thirds vote again in 2024 to take effect.

The vote took place by ballot this year. While the amendment received a majority of votes, it failed to gain the needed two-thirds vote by a margin of 5,099 (61.45 percent) for to 3,185 (38.38 percent) against the amendment.

Debate on the floor

The proposal was included among recommendations from the SBC Executive Committee.

Despite the amendment falling short of a two-thirds majority this year, the SBC's 2000 Baptist Faith & Message statement still specifies that the office of pastor "is limited to men

as qualified by Scripture.”

During debate on the proposed amendment, messenger Ryan Fullerton of Immanuel Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, said there “is a lot of misinformation about what the Law Amendment is about. The amendment is not about opposing women serving as church ministers or keeping women off church staffs.”

Fullerton said those arguments are used to “scare away” messengers from what the amendment is really about. “The Law Amendment affirms what the Bible affirms and what the Baptist Faith & Message affirms – that the office of pastor is limited to men qualified by him.”

Fullerton also noted that confusion over gender is rampant in today’s culture. “What better way to express our countercultural commitment to the goodness of God’s Word than to affirm God’s creation order related to the office of pastor?”

Spence Shelton, lead pastor of Mercy Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, spoke against the amendment.

“The question before us today is not whether or not we’re complementarian. That’s clear. The question is not, ‘Do we believe the Bible?’ That’s also clear,” Shelton said.

“The question is, ‘Is this amendment necessary for our convention to respond when churches act in a way to our complementarian doctrine?’” Shelton continued.

Shelton said that last year’s annual meeting “showed that we have an effective mechanism that allows us to act with conviction and unity when it comes to this issue.”

Law spoke in favor of his amendment. “This amendment is not about women in ministry,” he insisted. “It’s specifically about women in the pastoral office.

“The Bible still teaches that the office of pastor is reserved for biblically qualified men.”