

**Office of the President
National African American Fellowship, SBC
26701 McCall Boulevard
Menifee, CA 92586**



SENT VIA EMAIL TO BART@FBCFARMERSVILLE.COM

July 3, 2023

Dr. Bart Barber
President, Southern Baptist Convention
SBC Executive Committee Office
901 Commerce Street
Nashville, TN 37203

Dear Dr. Barber:

Recently, during the 2023 SBC annual meeting, messengers voted to affirm the disfellowship of Saddleback and Fern Creek Church for not being in friendly cooperation with the SBC due to their position on women serving in pastoral ministry, which was determined to be in opposition with the Baptist Faith and Message. Additionally, the messengers elected to amend our SBC constitution to include the verbiage, "...affirms, appoints, or employs only men as any kind of pastor or elder." These actions, while within the rights of our messengers, undermine the tie that binds i.e., the autonomy of the local church and are inconsistent with our shared Baptist polity. This may signal to churches in the SBC that do not believe that women should be the Senior Pastor but allow women the usage of a pastoral title, or appoints a woman to a pastoral role, are no longer welcome in the SBC.

In a 1997 SBC Life article entitled "Local Church Autonomy" Morris Chapman posits "The principle of local church autonomy is one of the most cherished distinctives of ecclesiology among Southern Baptists today." He further states, "Long ago, in response to ecclesiastical oppression, pioneers of Baptist thought adopted this identifying mark from scripture." The ecclesiastical tie that binds is our shared understanding of and commitment to the autonomy of the local church. Further, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a constitution that affirms local church autonomy. Specifically, it states, "...while independent and sovereign in its sphere, the convention does not claim and will never attempt to exercise any authority over any other Baptist body, whether church, auxiliary organizations, associations, or conventions." The autonomy of the local church is foundational to who we are as Southern Baptist. In fact, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is a fellowship of independent, autonomous churches who agree to cooperatively fund the work of ministry while not relinquishing their independent

authority to select and hire their staff, determine compensation, make independent financial decisions for their local church, and mete out church discipline when necessary. These actions most often occur without consulting with or involving the SBC. The autonomy of the local church is a defining Baptist conviction and forms the foundational framework for our shared cooperation.

The National African American Fellowship, SBC (NAAF) is a vested SBC partner that represents over 4000 congregations who self-identify as predominantly African American. We join with you in your statement, that “this is not a time to rejoice, but a time to lament.” We respect the democratic process and recognize that the messengers have the right to vote their conscience and direct the Convention to act on their behalf. However, we strongly urge our SBC family to consider entering a time of prayer and dialogue because for many, this most recent decision is an unnecessary infringement upon the autonomy of the local church. It has created division within the SBC and may disproportionately impact NAAF affiliated congregations. Many of our churches assign the title “pastor” to women who oversee ministries of the church under the authority of a male Senior Pastor, i.e., Children’s Pastor, Worship Pastor, Discipleship Pastor, etc. To disfellowship like-minded churches who share our faith in Jesus Christ, our belief in the authority of Scripture, our mandate to carry out the Great Commission, and our agreement to give cooperatively based upon a local-church governance decision dishonors the spirit of cooperation and the guiding tenets of our denomination. There will always be issues upon which Biblically rooted and committed Christians disagree. It is in our best interest to allow a diversity of voices and perspectives to be heard. Let’s seek to better understand the full ramifications of this policy shift and engage in a vigorous, yet constructive dialogue. Rupertus Meldeniū, a seventeenth-century theologian said, “if we might keep in necessary things, Unity; in unnecessary things, Freedom; and in both Charity, our affairs would certainly be in the best condition.”

We look forward to discussing this matter with you and will reach out to schedule a mutually acceptable date and time to meet. In the meantime, should you have any questions, feel free to contact me directly at 951-707-6872 or via email at pastorperkins@theview.church.

Serving together,



Pastor Gregory Perkins
President, National African American Fellowship and
Lead Pastor, The View Church

Copy to:

Dr. Jerome Coleman, Vice President, NAAF and Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Crestmont
Dr. Willie McLaurin, Interim President and CEO, Executive Committee
Rev. Charles Grant, Associate Vice President for Black Church Relations, Executive Committee
Rev. Dennis Mitchell, Executive Director, NAAF
NAAF Executive Board