

North Carolina Baptists adopt strictest ban on gay-friendly churches: Deny membership to gays or face expulsion

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Baptist churches in North Carolina will have to deny membership to gays or face expulsion from the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

Messengers to the convention's annual meeting voted November 14 to add language to its governing documents that will exclude from convention membership any church thought to affirm homosexual behavior.

It is the most rigid antigay policy of any statewide organization affiliated with the nationwide Southern Baptist Convention and is similar to an SBC policy approved more than a decade ago. The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, with more than 4,000 churches and about 1.2 million members, is the second-largest state body that relates to the SBC.

After a show-of-ballots vote, leaders of the state convention determined that the amendment passed by more than the required two-thirds margin—as it did last year during the amendment's first reading.

The revision adds a section to the articles of incorporation that says, "Among churches not in friendly cooperation with the Convention are churches which knowingly act to affirm, approve, endorse, promote, support or bless homosexual behavior. The Board of Directors shall apply this provision. A church has the right to appeal any adverse action taken by the Board of Directors."

Supporters of the amendment said North Carolina Baptists need to take a stand against homosexuality. Opponents said the convention already had a policy in place that has removed churches that affirm homosexuality.

Convention president Stan Welch, a conservative leader, later told reporters that the previous policy “did not have teeth.” Passage of the amendment gives the convention clarity on the issue, he said.

During discussion on the convention floor, Jeff Dawkins, pastor of Jewel Baptist Church in High Point, said he has dealt with homosexuality in a “close and personal way.” He said when a person repented of the homosexual lifestyle, the church welcomed him. But when the person returned to that lifestyle, the church removed him from membership. “We can be against the sin and love the sinner,” he said.

Mark Harris, pastor of First Baptist Church in Charlotte, chaired a committee that recommended the change. He said nothing would please him more than if the motion were unnecessary. But, he argued, there is a national agenda promoting homosexuality. “We truly believe this convention must stand with courage.”

Don Gordon, pastor of Yates Baptist Church in Durham, said, “You can still believe homosexuality is sinful behavior and oppose this amendment.” The change turns the convention into a “watchdog” over a single issue, Gordon added. *-Associated Baptist Press*