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By Allie Martin
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(AgapePress) - The executive board of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention has broken off affiliation with a Baptist congregation over its apparent support of another church that welcomes and affirms homosexuals.

According to Baptist Press, the SBTC's Credentials Committee met last month with the pastor of Faith Harbour Church of Baytown, which is near Houston. The committee was attempting to clarify Faith Harbour's stance toward a church called Ekletos, whose congregation was being allowed to meet in the Baptist church's facilities.

Ekletos has a female senior pastor, while the Southern Baptist Church's position on women in ministry stipulates that women "participate equally with men in the priesthood of all believers" but "pastoral leadership is assigned to men." Also, the Ekletos website says that church welcomes and affirms homosexuals, bisexuals, and transgendered people. Southern Baptists officially affirm that "God's plan for marriage and sexual intimacy" is "one man, and one woman, for life" and that the Bible condemns homosexuality as sin and therefore "not a 'valid alternative lifestyle.'"

SBTC chairman Joe Stewart is pastor of First Baptist Church of Littlefield in west Texas. He says the move to disassociate from Faith Harbor was not a decision the executive board made lightly. "Our goal in the whole process is biblical fellowship, and biblical fellowship is based on truth," he explains.

"The scriptures tell us in First John that if we're going to walk in the light 'as He Himself is in the light,' that we have fellowship with one another," Stewart continues. "So we want to base fellowship on a lot of things. But really, the parameters for fellowship in scripture is truth."

The SBTC executive board chairman says the denomination tried to resolve its differences with Faith Harbour's leaders. "We took the steps of sitting down with them and trying to do the Matthew 18 thing -- to bring some reconciliation -- and asked for them to take some steps to do away with this."

Despite these efforts, however, Faith Harbour officials refused to distance their church from the female led, homosexuality-affirming congregation sharing the use of its sanctuary. "Since they were not willing to do so and were not willing to remove Ekletos from their website or say that they didn't affirm the homosexual lifestyle, we took the steps to go ahead and remove our affiliation with that church," the convention spokesman says.

However, the possibility of reconciliation still exists. Stewart says the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention might renew its association with Faith Harbour if the church's staff agree to follow the theological guidelines of the denomination.

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