

Southern Baptists pray for 'favorable' Hobby Lobby ruling

by [Adelle M. Banks](#)

June 12, 2014

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BALTIMORE (RNS) Southern Baptists prayed Wednesday (June 11) that the Supreme Court would rule in favor of the Green family, the evangelical owners of the Hobby Lobby craft chain that challenged the contraception mandate in the Affordable Care Act.

"God, we ask for a favorable, favorable ruling by the Supreme Court of the United States for the cause of religious liberty," prayed the Rev. Ronnie Floyd, incoming president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Historians said the prayer from the podium during the SBC's annual meeting about a pending court decision was noteworthy, though Southern Baptists have preached and issued statements for years on current events.

"I think it's unusual for it to happen at a convention event," said Bill Sumners, director of the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

Randall Balmer, chair of the religion department at Dartmouth College, said it was striking that the convention would be "blatant about a judicial matter."

"I suppose to some degree they feel as though they're reeling from the various same-sex marriage rulings and trying to regain their momentum" in court decisions, he said.

Steve and Jackie Green, who attend a Southern Baptist church in Oklahoma, were honored during the Baptists' annual meeting and given a standing ovation. They have been heralded by conservative Christians for challenging the mandate that they believe would require them to cover abortion-inducing drugs as part of their employee insurance plans.

“This is an award for demonstrating a steadfast commitment to religious liberty by your unwillingness to separate your faith from the daily operation of your business,” said Russell Moore, president of the SBC’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, before handing the award to the Greens.

The ERLC also honored Saeed Abedini, an Iranian-American pastor who has been imprisoned under brutal conditions in Tehran for his house church work. His award was accepted by his wife, Naghmeh Abedini, who has worked for his release.

Floyd prayed that Abedini would be freed.

“We pray for his release,” Floyd said in his petition. “We ask you again—in the name of Jesus, let him go!”

Moore was questioned by a couple of delegates who were concerned about his joining other evangelicals in supporting comprehensive immigration reform. The ERLC president responded that he does not support “blanket amnesty” but supports a just alternative to the current situation that has divided families and prompted fears of deportation.

“When we’re talking about immigration reform, we’re talking about justice, about rule of law and we’re talking about compassion for those who are in a very vulnerable situation in our country right now,” Moore said.

As the Southern Baptist meeting concluded Wednesday, representatives of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests passed out fliers outside urging the denomination to take stronger steps to safeguard children from abuse and prevent cover-ups of clergy sexual offenders.

Roger “Sing” Oldham, spokesman for the SBC’s Executive Committee, said Southern Baptists are regularly reminded that they are responsible for reporting child abuse accusations to local authorities.

“The Southern Baptist Convention remains clear and unambiguous in its condemnation of sex abuse of any kind and views molestation of innocent children as particularly heinous,” he said.