

Rolland Slade elected first black chair of Southern Baptist executive committee

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [July 15, 2020](#) issue



(Video screengrab)

Rolland Slade, senior pastor of Meridian Baptist Church in El Cajon, California, has been elected as the first African American chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, the group that runs the business of the nation's largest Protestant denomination outside its annual meetings.

He was elected unanimously.

Slade was previously vice chairman of the Executive Committee and chair of its Cooperative Program Committee, which handles the denomination's central funding mechanism.

“He’s next in line, you could argue, as the vice chair, but that’s not why I’m placing his name into nomination,” said SBC pastor Jared Wellman during an online meeting of the committee on June 16. “I’m nominating him because he’s the first in line when it comes to following Jesus. Whether it’s serving his family, the needs of his community, the people of his church, or the SBC and its Cooperative Program, Pastor Rolland has always been first in line.”

After outgoing Executive Committee chairman Mike Stone announced the unanimous election as a “wonderful and historic moment,” an emotional Slade addressed his fellow committee members. “Brothers and sisters, I am humbled and I thank God,” he said, noting that he hadn’t expected to be “blubbing” in reaction to the vote.

Slade’s election comes at a time when the denomination continues to grapple with issues of race.

Earlier this month, SBC president J. D. Greear declared in an online address that “of course, black lives matter” and then noted that he does not align with the Black Lives Matter organization that was founded in 2013. A day later, he said the denomination should retire a gavel named for a slaveholder that is traditionally used to open annual meetings.

The lack of diversity in leadership has been questioned in the denomination, which has had one black president. New Orleans pastor Fred Luter served two one-year terms starting in 2012. People of color have been appointed as SBC vice presidents, but the denomination has been criticized for the lack of minorities in many executive positions at its seminaries, mission boards, and agencies.

SBC Executive Committee president Ronnie Floyd congratulated Slade on his election during his report at the committee meeting.

“For the first time in the 103-year history of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, we have today elected our first African American chairman,” Floyd said. “God bless you, and may others follow you in days to come.” —Religion News Service