

Southern Baptist pastor resigns after celebrating former KKK leader

by [Yonat Shimron](#) in the [August 26, 2020](#) issue



(Photo via Alabama House of Representatives)

A Southern Baptist pastor who gave an invocation at a celebration honoring the first grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan stepped down from his rural Alabama church in late July.

Will Dismukes, who is also a Republican state representative for the city of Prattville, 14 miles northwest of Montgomery, boasted on a Facebook page that he participated at an annual birthday party for Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest, a prominent figure in southern history.

“Had a great time at Fort Dixie speaking and giving the invocation for Nathan Bedford Forrest annual birthday celebration. Always a great time and some sure enough good eating!!” read the post, which has since been taken down.

The Facebook post appeared on July 25, the same day the body of civil rights icon Rep. John Lewis made its final crossing over the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, where 55 years earlier Lewis was brutally beaten after a march known as Bloody Sunday. Lewis, a 17-term Georgia congressman, died July 17.

Dismukes’s post drew outrage from many Alabama state legislators, both Republican and Democratic, with some calling on him to resign.

Forrest, the Confederate general Dismukes was honoring, is infamous for his role at the Battle of Fort Pillow in April 1864, when his troops massacred black soldiers following a Union surrender. After the war, Forrest joined up with the newly formed Klan to oppose Reconstruction efforts.

On July 28, a group of Alabama Southern Baptists met with Dismukes, according to the *Alabama Baptist* newspaper. The following day, at a deacons meeting at Dismukes’s rural church, Pleasant Hill Baptist, he resigned.

Although each Baptist church is independent, the officers of the Alabama Baptist State Convention and State Board of Missions affirmed a statement against racism on July 27. The statement originated as a “personal credo” issued by mission board executive director Rick Lance.

“Everyone of all races and backgrounds is made in the image of God!” wrote Lance. “Those words should never be considered as ‘cheap talk’ but as an unchanging and nonnegotiable core value.”

This is not the first time Dismukes's actions have drawn calls for his resignation. In June, his support for continued state funding for a Confederate memorial park north of Montgomery also drew controversy. So far he has not resigned from the state legislature. —Religion News Service