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Civil Rights Group Condemns SBC as un-Christian *Expulsion of Ranchland Heights Baptist Church contrary to Gospel*

Raleigh, North Carolina | February 19, 2020—The National Association for Rational Sexual Offense Laws (NARSOL) strongly condemns the recent decision of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) to “disfellowship” a Midland, Texas church for having a registered sex offender as its pastor.

The SBC’s Executive Committee voted on Tuesday to expel Ranchland Heights Baptist Church of Midland for employing Rev. Phillip Rutledge as its pastor. Pastor Rutledge was convicted of aggravated sexual assault against two girls 17 years ago. In 2016, thirteen years after his conviction, he was called by the congregation to be its pastor even despite his criminal conviction from 2003.

In an interview by the local CBS affiliate in 2016, Deacon DJ Rambo said, "Our administration knew about Bro. Phillip's history before the hiring, and the vast majority of the church knew about it as well. We believe that God can change people, and we believe that God has forgiven Bro. Phillip as well."

The SBC has no power to control hiring decisions made by member churches because of its credal confession that believers in Jesus Christ are priests and that the “priesthood of believers” is sufficient ecclesiastical authority. SBC churches are “autonomous local congregation[s] of baptized believer[s]” and “each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes.” (The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message)

“By all accounts, Pastor Rutledge is a man who has acknowledged his sins of the past, repented of them, and has gone on to live a law-abiding, exemplary life as an example for others to follow. He is also privileged to lead a congregation of Christians who called him to its pulpit through a democratic process. It beggars the mind how the lofty prelates of the SBC can reconcile expelling a member church when it’s done nothing other than follow—to the letter—precisely what the SBC expects . . . to operate under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes,” stated Robin Vander Wall, a former registered citizen and vice chair of NARSOL.

“It seems reasonable to ponder whether the Lordship of Christ is operating through the Executive Committee of the SBC or the congregation of Ranchland Heights Baptist Church. Surely He cannot be said to operate through both. Scripture clearly depicts Jesus Christ as a man who sought after sinners and was even called ‘a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” (Luke 7:34), Vander Wall continued.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RATIONAL SEXUAL OFFENSE LAWS

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“Can there really be any doubt who Jesus would scold in this situation? The Southern Baptist Convention should be ashamed of its decision to expel Ranchland Heights Baptist Church from its association. This may be a great victory for victim rights attorneys prowling around like lions looking for something to devour, but this is a total abnegation of the gospel of Jesus Christ,” Vander Wall concluded.

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NARSOL is the nation’s largest civil rights organization advocating on behalf of registered citizens and their families. NARSOL opposes dehumanizing registries and works to eliminate discrimination, banishment, and vigilantism against persons accused or convicted of sexual offenses through the use of impact litigation, public education, legislative advocacy, and media outreach in order to reintegrate and reconcile affected individuals and restore their constitutional rights.