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**Midwestern trustees laud,
criticize faculty members**

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) — Trustees at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary adopted a resolution affirming the faculty and then spent about an hour expressing concerns about the theological stance of faculty members.

The resolution of affirmation was passed without question or discussion, and said:

“We affirm and commend the faculty and administration and express our confidence in them that they are acting within the spirit of the Baptist Faith and Message and the Peace Committee report.”

Following adoption of the resolution, drafted by the trustee instruction committee at the Kansas City, Mo., seminary, trustees adopted a resolution to consider increased trustee involvement in the seminary's faculty selection process, and heard a discussion on another motion — later withdrawn, — asking that students be allowed to tape record lectures and chapel sessions.

After the hour-long discussion, trustee Graydon K. Kitchens Jr., of Minden, La., told the board: “In view of the discussion we've had here, I'd like to make one observation. I've sat here and heard discussions of students' complaints about faculty, about imbalance of faculty, about trustee input concerning faculty selection, and then I pulled out this resolution of affirmation ... and read it again.

“If the majority of this board feels anywhere near like the discussion that's been going on here this morning, then we are grossly hypocritical in sending the faculty a piece of paper with this resolution on it. I don't think we ought to be sending them any more pieces of paper like this until we resolve how we really feel about it.”

Kitchens' remarks came at the conclusion of discussion of the two motions introduced immediately following adoption of the resolution of affirmation. Sid Peterson of Bakersfield, Calif., moved that the board's executive committee “study the method by which faculty are elected and, if feasible, recommend a plan by which the trustees can be involved earlier in the process of faculty selection.”

Peterson said trustees do not have enough early involvement in the faculty selection process. “By the time it comes to the trustees, it has already gone through the dean, the president, the faculty. Everyone has already determined who's going to be here except the trustees, whose duty it is to elect the faculty.”

His motion was adopted by 25 of the 27 trustees present.

Jerry Davenport, a trustee from Sheffield, Texas, then moved that “students be allowed to tape record class lectures and chapel sessions.”

Although there was considerable discussion, Davenport withdrew the motion after Ferguson, seminary president, said, “We do not have any regulation that prevents taping a class lecture and chapel messages are taped routinely.”

Davenport said he had been approached by 15 or 16 students with “conservative views of Scripture” who said they were “intimidated in classes” and “threatened with being thrown out.”

“My perception is that it's a closed door,” Davenport said. “My evaluation is that this school is not where Southern Baptists are; it is to the left.”

Davenport, a trustee since 1982, said: “When I came on as a trustee there was not one, to my knowledge, not one on the faculty that had a higher view of Scripture. We do not have very many today, I am sure.

"So, if that's the case, this school is in an imbalance. I feel like there are some things that we need to do to correct that, where students who do have a higher view of Scripture can come in and feel comfortable."

Ferguson said Davenport's criticism "is not an accurate representation of the quality, commitment or performance of our faculty in general."

"I take exception to your presupposition regarding a 'higher view' of Scripture. I challenge your charge that these professors don't have a high view of Scripture. I understand you to be saying, 'They don't have my view of Scripture'"

"I would lay their view of Scripture alongside yours, mine and others. They're betting their lives on the Bible as the inspired Word of God and the final written authority for our faith and practice."

In regard to Davenport's claim if a student said how he really feels, he would not get to graduate, Ferguson said: "That I do resent. That is an attack on the integrity and quality of these faculty members and that is irresponsible. There is no evidence for that. There is no evidence that any student has been punished or penalized at the point of receiving his grades or meeting the requirements for graduation because of his theological views."

"I stand ready to be confronted with any evidence to the contrary. If you have any evidence to the contrary, I hereby invite you to give us that evidence. We'll deal with it openly and publicly and will report it to you."

Other than the reference to it in the resolution of affirmation, trustees did not deal with the 1987 report of the Southern Baptist Peace Committee. Trustees at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., set off controversy when they adopted the report and its findings as an additional guideline for hiring and promoting faculty.

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(This story was compiled by Interim News Director Dan Martin from stories provided by Brenda J. Sanders of the Midwestern office of communications.)

Southwestern trustees, president 'make peace'

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FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) — Trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and President Russell Dilday apparently buried their differences and called for healing in the controversy which has engulfed the Southern Baptist Convention.

Meeting amid rumors Dilday would be fired, trustees and Dilday emerged from a three-day retreat Oct. 15-17 calling for building trust and moving forward out of the 12-year controversy in the SBC.

"This is the first bright light of hope I've seen in moving forward to solve our problems," Dilday said. "Maybe God is working through us to show ways Southern Baptists can work together again."

Trustees made no attempt to dismiss Dilday, nor to install the 1987 report of the SBC Peace Committee as a doctrinal guideline for hiring and promotion. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees set off controversy when they added the report to guidelines for staff selection and promotion.

Trustees, however, did ask Dilday to explain comments made during the annual meeting of the SBC in New Orleans in June, when the president described as "satanic" political methods used during the fundamental-conservative takeover of the 14.9-million member denomination.

Dilday apologized for the remarks in a written statement in July, saying he was criticizing the political methods used by both moderate-conservatives and fundamental-conservatives and did not intend to refer to any fellow Baptist as "satanic."

"My convictions (about the SBC) are still strong in my heart. For that I make no apology. But in my attempt to convey those convictions I used harsh language. I apologize. I'm sorry if I have offended any of you," Dilday told trustees.

Board Chairman James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas, and a former president of the SBC, emphasized no one is being asked to compromise convictions.

Both he and Dilday said results of the retreat should not be viewed as "capitulation" by either the board or Dilday, but rather as a desire to accept differences, build trust and move forward.

William Tolar, vice president of academic affairs and provost, told trustees the trustees' confidence in the faculty is appreciated. He added the faculty is grateful the board did not implement further doctrinal guidelines, such as the Peace Committee report.

In other action, the trustees unanimously approved Bruce Corley as dean of the school of theology and gave unqualified support for the SBC's unified giving plan, the Cooperative Program.

Corley, 47, who has taught New Testament at Southwestern for 15 years, was recommended by Dilday. Prior to his election, trustees questioned Corley for more than two hours. The academic affairs committee unanimously endorsed him and he was elected unanimously by the entire board.

Trustees joined a growing number of SBC agencies in endorsing the Cooperative Program. The resolution says the board "strongly affirms the Cooperative Program as the best method God has given our denomination to support missionary, benevolent and educational causes. We strongly encourage all churches ... to fully and generously support the Cooperative Program."

It adds that "withholding and/or designating ... funds will hamper or even jeopardize the ministry of dedicated persons, programs and activities of the SBC."

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(This story was compiled by ABP from material provided by Scott Collins, news director at Southwestern Seminary, and Jim Jones, religion editor of the Fort Worth (Texas) Star-Telegram.)

South Carolina calls meeting about Furman

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COLUMBIA, S.C. (ABP) — The General Board of the South Carolina Baptist Convention will be called into special session Nov. 12 to consider action by Furman University to revise its charter to create a self-perpetuating board of trustees.

Furman University trustees, meeting in called session Oct. 15, voted to amend its charter to give the board sole power to elect trustees. Since its founding in 1826, trustees have been elected by the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

The executive committee of the General Board met in emergency session Oct. 18 to consider response to the Furman action.

After the meeting, Ken Harmon, pastor of First Baptist Church of Newberry, S.C., chairman of the executive committee, announced the special meeting of the 87-member General Board will be called for 2 p.m. Monday, Nov. 12, "to further discuss this matter and make other decisions about the resolution of it."

The meeting is on the day before the annual meeting of the convention in Columbia.

He also announced the executive committee will ask the convention president "to appoint a seven-member committee to dialogue with the Furman trustees to find mutually satisfactory solutions to the needs of both organizations."

In a statement released following the Oct. 18 meeting, Ray Rust, executive director of the South Carolina convention said, "We are not at war and we do not anticipate a battle. Our commitment is to find solutions in a Christian manner, with the highest level of integrity and mutual respect for the purpose and mission of each organization."

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BGCT committee named to study Baylor action

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DALLAS (ABP) — Moving to deal with what was called “one of the most significant issues ever faced by Texas Baptists,” the Executive Board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas Oct. 17 appointed a 26-member special committee to study recent unauthorized changes in the charter of Baylor University.

On Sept. 21, the Baylor board of trustees revised its charter to establish a board of regents “with sole responsibility for governance of Baylor” and elected 16 people to the new body. Previously, Baylor’s charter provided for governance by a 48-member board of trustees elected by the BGCT.

The study committee, to examine the legal, financial and relational issues arising from the Baylor trustees’ action, will be chaired by Robert Naylor, president emeritus of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

It was directed to make the study and recommend “with all deliberate speed” a response. As its first major assignment, the committee will study BGCT funding of the Waco, Texas, school, the nation’s largest Baptist university with about 12,000 students.

Currently, the school receives about \$6 million per year from the BGCT. All funds, except those for ministry scholarships and faculty study grants, will be escrowed until the issue is settled.

During the five-hour called meeting — the first by the Executive Board since 1981 — the board also:

- rejected a resolution asking the Baylor trustees to meet before the annual meeting of the BGCT Nov. 13-14 and rescind their action;
- rejected a proposal to have the study committee report to another called meeting of the Executive Board before the November convention;
- approved a motion that no action by the convention or any committee be intended to “acquiesce in or consent to the action of Baylor University or pass judgment either way on its conduct.”

In opening remarks, BGCT Executive Director William M. Pinson Jr., said the Texas Baptist response “will affect relationships between state conventions and institutions throughout the United States.”

During the meeting of the 193-member Executive Board, Baylor President Herbert H. Reynolds presented the rationale for the trustee action, saying it is to protect religious freedom and to avert a takeover of the university by “fundamentalists” as he said has occurred in the last 12 years to institutions of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Several board members, including some who said they favored the action of the trustees, expressed disapproval of the fact the charter change was done without notice to the convention and especially to BGCT Executive Director Pinson.

Reynolds explained it was done without notification — although it had been planned for about two years — because to have done so would have prompted persons who opposed it to have sought an injunction to stop it.

Reynolds said attendance at BGCT meetings by Baylor alumni has kept Texas free of SBC problems, and acknowledged no one in Texas Baptist life has been “forcibly removed, but some have been almost ground to death.”

“It is the day after day, week after week, year after year grinding away that erodes not only one’s physical health but also one’s spirit,” Reynolds said of the conflict in the SBC.

He noted the university’s desire to continue as a part of Texas Baptist life, regardless of the funding decisions by the board or the convention.

“We will continue to be Baptist regardless of how you folks vote. We are a Texas Baptist institution because of our principles and of commitment, not because of the money.”

Joel Gregory, immediate past president of the BGCT and pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, and Reynolds had words about Gregory’s criticism of Baylor’s religion department.

Gregory, although not a member of the Executive Board, read into the record a statement by the "Baylor Recovery Group" asking Baylor trustees to reverse the Sept. 21 action and calling on the BGCT to "seek recovery of its historical relationship with Baylor."

The statement was signed by eight people, including Gregory and four Baylor trustees.

"We call upon them (Baylor trustees) to fulfill their fiduciary responsibility to the Baptist General Convention of Texas which elects them," the statement said.

Approval of the recommendations and establishment of the study committee will be reported to the state convention. A progress report from the study committee likely also will be presented.

No further action at the convention is anticipated, it was noted, and attorney James P. Guenther of Nashville said that any attempt at the convention to ratify the action of the Baylor trustees would be out of order since prior approval of charter changes by the Executive Board is required by the BGCT Constitution.

When several board members raised questions about whether some action should be taken before the November convention, Guenther said that while delay might be detrimental, it is legitimate. Such delay would not be undue delay and would allow the study committee to do its work.

Guenther, who is legal counsel for the SBC, said the BGCT should elect trustees for Baylor and if the school doesn't receive them, it is Baylor's decision.

The special study committee will hold its first meet at 10 a.m. October 30 in the Baptist Building in Dallas.

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(This story was compiled by ABP Interim News Director Dan Martin from articles by Toby Druin, associate editor of the (Texas) Baptist Standard, and Ken Camp, BGCT public relations department.)

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