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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Trustees call meeting  
to 'evaluate' Elder**

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NASHVILLE (ABP) — Lloyd Elder may be fired as president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board when trustees meet Thursday (Jan. 17) in a hastily-called special meeting.

Trustee leadership announced the meeting Friday (Jan. 11) after Elder reportedly refused to resign as president of the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention which employs 1,882 persons.

New controversy arose on Saturday (Jan. 12) after a television reporter aired a copy of Elder's confidential response to the trustee leaders apparently declining to resign.

Sources close to Elder said he was shocked and mystified as to how the reporter obtained a copy of the confidential letter. The letter also was sent by First Class mail on Friday afternoon to the members of the board's general administration committee.

The special meeting has been called for 7 p.m. Jan. 17, and may go over into Jan. 18. The called meeting is only 17 days in advance of the regular semi-annual meeting of the 90-member trustee board, scheduled Feb. 4-6 in Nashville.

In a letter sent to all trustees Jan. 11, the meeting was called "for the purpose of evaluating and responding to the performance" of Elder, who has been president since 1984.

Elder met in closed session Jan. 11 with at least three trustee officers. Reports circulated the trustee leaders had come to Nashville to hear Elder's response to an undisclosed recommendation about his future as president of the SSB.

Elder met with a five-member workgroup of the general administration committee of trustees Dec. 13, to review his performance as president.

Bill Anderson, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Clearwater, Fla., and chairman of the trustee board, said, "We discussed at length some issues that have arisen, particularly concerning the McBeth book."

The administration of the board withdrew before publication a centennial history of the Sunday School Board in August 1990, after a committee of trustees reviewed the manuscript. The book was written by Leon McBeth, professor of church history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

The trustees felt the book was "biased" and the committee voted unanimously to "counsel the administration not to proceed with the publishing of the book."

The handling of the McBeth book has become a critical issue, particularly with some trustees. ABP learned that trustee Larry Holly, a medical doctor from Beaumont, Texas, met with the Dec. 13 evaluation workgroup to criticize Elder's performance.

ABP also has learned Holly has written at least one letter critical of Elder which he sent to all members of the board. Holly, in circulating the criticisms to all trustees, brought about an hour-long discussion in August of 1989 to fire Elder. The motion to terminate was withdrawn.

ABP also has learned at least four other trustees have written letters critical of Elder which have circulated to the entire board.

After the Dec. 13 meeting, the five-member subcommittee reported to a Jan. 4 meeting of the 17-member general administration committee. The meeting, according to reports, lasted well past midnight.

"The general administration committee discussed with Lloyd (Elder) all kinds of options related to what many consider an impasse in leadership at the board," Anderson said. "The committee is still discussing options, all kinds of options."

Reports circulated the recommendation was that Elder either resign or retire. Reports also indicate that Elder declined to do either when he met with trustee leaders Jan. 11.

Anderson told the SSB office of communication he called the special session of trustees after he received written petitions from more than 20 trustees. He declined to name those trustees.

Sunday School Board guidelines say "special meetings" may be called "by or at the request of the chairman or upon the written petition of any 15 trustees."

The special called meeting—just days before the regular meeting—likely will cost in excess of \$50,000. Estimates are based on the special called meeting of the SBC Executive Committee in July, which cost about \$40,000.

Anderson was asked why the meeting was called less than three weeks before a regularly scheduled meeting of trustees. He said the written petitions had specified a called meeting prior to the Feb 4-6 semi-annual meeting.

"I believe their (trustees') desire is to go ahead with this (review of Elder's performance) and not pre-empt the other business that will be dealt with in February. We had no option but to call the meeting," Anderson said.

Elder declined to comment to reporters.

Dan Collins, an attorney from Taylors, S.C., and chair of the general administration committee, said it is his understanding the called meeting will be open. However, Anderson said he could not anticipate trustee preference on whether it will be a closed or open session.

In the August 1989 session, during which a motion to fire Elder was discussed for more than an hour, trustees opted to hold an open meeting.

Anderson said the Jan. 17 meeting had been called for the single purpose of reviewing and "responding to the performance" of Elder. He added trustee bylaws allow for other business to be transacted "upon the unanimous consent of the trustees present and voting."

Asked whether trustees likely will review the performance of other members of the administration, Anderson said he "had no information about that."

Elder, 57, was elected president-elect of the board in February 1983 and was installed as president in February 1984. He was elected without opposition, although two fundamental-conservatives on the board abstained from voting.

Previously, Elder, a native of Dallas, was executive vice president of Southwestern Seminary, 1978-83; assistant to the executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1975-78, and pastor of several Texas churches.

He is a graduate of Howard Payne University, Brownwood, Texas, and holds two degrees, including a doctorate from Southwestern Seminary.

His wife, Sue, had heart bypass surgery in Nashville's Baptist Hospital Dec. 24.

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(This story was written by ABP News Director Dan Martin and based on reports by Linda Lawson, SSB office of communications, and Ray Waddle, religion editor of the Nashville Tennessean. ABP News Director Martin plans to cover the called meeting of the SSB.)

### **Graves elected president of new seminary**

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RICHMOND, Va. — Thomas H. Graves, pastor of St. John's Baptist Church, Charlotte, N.C., has been elected the first president of Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

Graves, 43, elected unanimously by the seminary's board of trustees Jan. 7, will assume his new post in mid-February. The Charlottesville, Va., native resigned the St. John's pastorate Jan. 13.

Prior to becoming pastor of the 1,600-member Charlotte congregation, Graves was professor of philosophy of religion at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C. for eight years. He also held teaching posts at Palm Beach Atlantic College, West Palm Beach, Fla., Bellarmine College, Louisville, Ky., and Baptist Theological Seminary of Zimbabwe. As a graduate student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, where he earned the Ph.D. Degree, Graves was a teaching fellow.

BTSR was created in March 1989, when the Southern Baptist Alliance membership voted to create a new school for training men and women in the ministry. A provisional board of trustees—now a permanent board—adopted as the new school's purpose the provision of "advanced theological education and training for effective leadership in the various ministries of the church for those men and women who are called and committed to Christian ministry."

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