
A S S O C I A T E D B A P T I S T P R E S S

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Draper expected to take
Sunday School Board post

By Greg Warner

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Texas pastor Jimmy Draper is expected to become the next president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Members of the board's presidential search committee say they have made their choice but won't confirm that Draper, pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, is the candidate. Although Draper has declined to discuss the position publicly, he has told several close associates that he has decided to take it.

A special meeting of all board trustees will be held in the next few weeks to elect the new president, according to trustee sources. A letter mailed to trustees this week names the candidate, according to a report in the Tennessean, a Nashville newspaper.

If elected, Draper, 55, would replace Lloyd Elder, who agreed Jan. 17 to retire from the post rather than face probable firing by trustees. The Sunday School Board is the agency responsible for church programming, curriculum and publishing for the 15 million-member denomination.

Draper has been a leader among fundamental-conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention, serving as president of the SBC in 1983 and 1984. His election to the Sunday School Board would likely please fundamental-conservatives, who have insisted that the post go to someone committed to their campaign to turn the SBC in a more conservative direction.

Yet Draper, who during the 12-year SBC controversy has played a more conciliatory role than other fundamental-conservatives, is not considered as volatile a choice as others under consideration.

"He's a fundamentalist but he's not mad about it," said Euless evangelist Freddie Gage, a member of Draper's church. "I've never met a man who reaches out to hurting people like Jimmy Draper."

Draper released a statement June 18 in which he said he had

"been asked to consider a position in another city that would necessitate a move from Euless." He declined to identify the position since "no formal offer has yet been extended."

Draper delivered the same message to church members June 16, according to Dan Taylor, minister of education at the Euless church, which is located between Dallas and Fort Worth. He also discussed the position in greater detail with church deacons June 12 and with his staff, Taylor said.

Wayne DuBose of Shreveport, La., chairman of the board's search committee, was not available for comment.

But trustee chairman William Anderson, who also serves on the search committee, confirmed the recommendation of a new president is imminent.

"We're down to one person," Anderson, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Clearwater, Fla., told Associated Baptist Press.

Draper has been considered a leading candidate for the job ever since it became vacant. He was interviewed by the search committee early on but told friends in May that he had turned down the job.

"He was hesitant to talk to us at first," confirmed Anderson. However, it is "not really" true that Draper first turned the committee down, Anderson said, since the committee couched its discussions with candidates carefully.

But the search committee reportedly returned to Euless in late May and convinced Draper to consider the position.

At the time, sources say, the committee also was considering John Sullivan, executive director of the Florida Baptist Convention, and Ralph Smith, pastor of Hyde Park Church in Austin, Texas.

Anderson confirmed that Sullivan was "a very top candidate." He would not say if the job was offered to Smith.

The committee "was impressed with many" of those considered and with the quality of leaders available, Anderson said. "I think I can say we would have been happy with several of the people."

In recent months, most rumors about the Sunday School Board position have focused on Paige Patterson, president of Criswell College in Dallas and a key strategist of the fundamental-conservative movement. Although Patterson reportedly had many supporters among board trustees, others -- including members of the search committee -- considered him too controversial a choice.

Anderson declined to say if Patterson ever was a candidate.

But in an interview with ABP June 6, Patterson acknowledged he was interviewed for the job. He added, however, he did not consider his selection likely.

"It's hard to believe that any agency in Southern Baptist life would call me because of the baggage I carry from the Southern Baptist controversy," he said.

Draper holds a master of divinity degree from from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas,

where he currently serves as chairman of the trustees. He has a bachelor's degree from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, which he also served as board chairman, and an honorary doctor of divinity from Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas.

Born in Hartford, Ark., Draper is the son and grandson of Southern Baptist preachers. He and his wife, Carol Ann, have three grown children.

Before becoming pastor of the Euless church in 1975, he was associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas and pastor of five churches in Texas, Missouri and Oklahoma. He is the author of several books, including Foundations of Biblical Faith.

Draper also wrote the Sunday School Board's special-emphasis lesson on abortion, which was taught in many Southern Baptist Sunday schools last January.

The Sunday School Board post is considered one of the most influential positions in the SBC. The 100-year-old publishing agency, based in Nashville, Tenn., reported \$188 million in assets and net sales of \$172 million in 1989.

Elder, 57, has served as president of the board since 1984. In January he agreed to take early retirement after trustees accused him of mishandling publication of a controversial history of the board, poorly managing the finances of three board ventures, and secretly tape recording three telephone calls involving trustees.

While Elder was considered a hands-on administrator, Draper is expected to take a less active role in running the board, leaving many of the operational details to a second-in-command. Associates say Draper is less comfortable with the job's administrative duties and will place more emphasis on public speaking and other duties outside the office.

Anderson confirmed the committee is open to such a style of leadership. "The job is too big for one person," he told ABP in May. Other recent presidents have relied heavily on a chief operating officer for the day-to-day operations of the board, he noted.

--Contributing to this story was Ken Camp