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

Phone: (904) 396-0396 Fax: (904) 396-4441 Cserve: 70420,73

April 9, 1992

IN THIS ISSUE:

- * FMB names search committee to find Parks' replacement
- * Midwestern trustees adopt abortion policy for employees
- * BJC may extend deadline for arbitration offer
- * N.C. church votes to license homosexual for ministry
- * Gay preacher challenges Baptist views on ordination

FMB names search committee to find Parks' replacement

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee

By Greg Warner

CLEMSON, S.C. (ABP) -- Trustees of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board took the first step toward replacing retiring FMB president Keith Parks April 8 by naming a 15-member committee to find his successor.

Dallas pastor Joel Gregory, a leader among Southern Baptist fundamental-conservatives, will chair the search committee, which was appointed by outgoing chairman William Hancock of Louisville, Ky.

Parks announced last month he will retire in October because of "philosophical differences" with trustees, some of whom he said now expect "theological conformity" from Baptists overseas in exchange for FMB funding.

Parks' retirement and the reasons for it have brought renewed criticism to FMB trustees, who were widely denounced last October for eliminating FMB support of a European Baptist seminary they consider "liberal."

But an effort by some trustees to ask Parks to remain as president failed April 8 when Hancock ruled the motion out of order. Instead, trustees accepted Parks' formal letter of resignation, in which the 64-year-old Parks said "mutual trust and confidence between the trustees and president...was not achievable."

The trustees' April 6-8 meeting, held in Clemson, S.C., in conjunction with an appointment service for 38 new missionaries, was quiet by comparison to the board's recent gatherings. Most trustees, stung by six months of criticism, tried to set a conciliatory tone during the three-day meeting.

But trustees signaled they plan to continue the course toward a more conservative approach to foreign missions by defeating middle-of-the-road nominees for the top two trustee offices.

John Jackson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Fairfield, Calif., was elected trustee chairman after nomination by Dallas educator Paige Patterson. Jackson defeated John Greene, a businessman from West Palm Beach, Fla., who was nominated by trustee Hoyt Savage, a pastor from Las Vegas, Nev.

Jackson, outgoing first vice chairman, was supported by the board's

more conservative trustees, while Greene was favored by those who sought a middle-of-the-road direction for the board. Supporters for both nominees lobbied fellow trustees intensely in the two days prior to the election, which was settled by a secret-ballot vote of 48 to 35.

Bonnie Westbrook, a physician from Beaumont, Texas, and outgoing second vice chairman, was elected first vice chairman over Steve Hardy, a pastor from Burlington, N.C. (57-24). Mike Goodwin, a pastor from Festus, Mo., was chosen second vice chairman over Terry Harper, a pastor from Colonial Heights, Va. (47-35). Karen Gilbert of Hampton, Va., was re-elected recording secretary without opposition.

Few controversial matters surfaced during the two days of committee meetings prior to the board's plenary session April 8. Those matters with a potential for controversy were handled by committees in closed-door sessions.

However, trustee L. H. McCollough surprised many observers when he made a motion during the plenary session to ask Parks "to continue as president until 1995 or when he chooses to retire." The motion also would have committed trustees to "cooperate with and support" Parks' leadership.

At the last trustee meeting in March, Parks asked the board to endorse his intention to serve until 1995 so that he could implement his 10-point plan for mission expansion. Instead, trustees scheduled a retreat for April to discuss Parks' tenure. It was during that retreat, Parks said, that he determined he did not have the necessary support from trustees to continue as president.

"I am not trying to change the course of history," McCollough said in introducing his motion. "I'm just trying...to say as trustees what's on our hearts."

Trustee Ron Wilson of Thousand Oaks, Calif., suggested that approving McCollough's motion would contradict Parks' stated conviction that God was leading him to resign the FMB post. "Are we publicly going to say we're not for God's will...?" Wilson asked.

Bill Blanchard, a trustee from Soddy Daisy, Tenn., said statements attributed to Parks since his retirement announcement caused Blanchard "tremendous concern" about extending Parks' tenure.

Blanchard cited a news article, written by FMB staff reporters, in which Parks told FMB employees there is a trend toward excluding people from missionary and denominational service unless both their theology and politics are right. "There are many people whose theology would be very conservative, even more conservative than some who are in control, but they aren't acceptable because they haven't endorsed the political activity within the denomination," Parks was quoted as saying.

Blanchard asked Parks if the quote was accurate -- Parks said it was -- and if Parks could "name one" person who had been excluded from missionary service for political reasons.

Before Parks could respond to Blanchard's question, Hancock interrupted and ruled Blanchard's motion out of order, saying the discussion was "moving in the wrong direction for a public forum." Trustees voted overwhelmingly to uphold Hancock's ruling.

In his presidential address that followed, Parks said he would have liked to answer Blanchard's question and noted there is a "trend" toward excluding people on the basis of denominational politics.

As a result of Hancock's ruling, the trustees, who already had decided not to vote by secret ballot on McCollough's motion, were spared having to vote publicly on whether they wanted Parks to continue as president.

Instead, Hancock later made a motion to affirm Parks for his past leadership at the FMB. The motion passed unanimously. "I'm interpreting your action as the honesty of your heart," said Hancock, who called on reporters present to take note of the affirmation.

Jackson, the newly elected chairman, later told reporters McCollough's motion "put us in an embarrassing position" by asking trustees to vote "contrary to God's will."

"When the president has said that (God has led him to retire), we need to honor that request," Jackson said.

Jackson said he disagrees with Parks' allegations that political opinions are influencing missionary appointments and that the trustees are moving toward a "creedal" approach to overseas mission work. "I don't see the trends that he sees," the new chairman said.

Jackson, who said he will serve ex officio on the presidential search committee, declined to say what level of philosophical agreement will be necessary between the new president and trustees.

"We will never find anyone who is president who does not have philosophical disagreements with trustees," Jackson said. But he added, "The new person will have to say 'I'm willing to work with these dudes.'"

Jackson said trustees are about evenly divided over whether the new president must have missionary experience. While "probably half" of the trustees think missionary experience is mandatory, he said, "another large bloc is looking for the man for his ability to lead and his missions heart."

The new chairman said the search committee will need to draft a presidential profile that addresses both issues -- missions philosophy and missionary experience.

Jackson denied he was elected chairman by those seeking changes in the FMB's direction. "If I'm being elected by that group, I should be privy to that," he said. "I know of nothing that indicates that."

He said he asked for Paige Patterson, a leader of Southern Baptist fundamental-conservatives, to nominate him for chairman because "he is a truly spiritual man (and) a very fair person."

I think my role is to be very objective and fair-minded, but with the ability to foresee future problems," Jackson said.

In addition to Gregory, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, the search committee includes Leon Hyatt of Pineville, La., committee vice chairman; Carol Gilbreath of Florence, Ala.; Goodwin; Greene; Terry Horton of Colleyville, Texas; Reed Lynn of Shawnee, Okla.; Ted Moody of Warner Robins, Ga.; Bob Oxford of Lakewood, Colo.; Phyliss Randall of Blacksburg, Va.; Bruce Romoser of Ellicott, Md.; Savage; John Simms of Salem, Va.; Terry Williams of Batesville, Miss.; and Karol Wise of Harrisburg, Pa.

-30-

Midwestern trustees adopt
abortion policy for employees

By Bob Terry

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- "The same thing that happened at Southeastern Seminary is happening here," noted one observer leaving the April 6-7 meeting of the trustees of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. "The only difference is that here it is happening with a smile."

The evaluation was offered after Midwestern trustees:

-- Adopted an anti-abortion resolution which included wording designed to limit faculty from advocating a position other than the one approved by the trustees;

-- Changed the selection process of adjunct faculty; and

-- Attempted to adopt a policy which would allow taping of all classroom lectures and chapel presentations.

Trustees also elected Robert Johnson as associate professor of church history but not before several first-year trustees complained about the procedure used in bringing the nomination.

Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., ran into trouble with its accrediting agencies when trustees there attempted to interject themselves into administrative and classroom activities as well as to restrict academic freedom of faculty members.

Midwestern president Milton Ferguson acknowledged the similarity of issues at the two seminaries but defended his trustees and faculty. "Our trustees have not taken precipitous action in changing policy," he said. "That makes the nature of our discussions different than at some other seminaries."

Ferguson praised the Midwestern faculty, saying they had exercised "maturity and responsibility" in trying to establish working relationships with trustees. "I believe that will pay dividends in the long run."

The resolution on abortion expressed the trustees' belief that abortion on demand is "immoral, unethical and unbiblical." It continues by saying the trustees are "hopeful that all employees of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary share this understanding of Scripture."

The resolution then "requests" that any Midwestern employee who does not share this view "refrain from publicly espousing the right of a woman to have an abortion on demand."

Speaking for the faculty, Hullitt Gloer asked the trustees to postpone adoption of the resolution "until such time as there has been adequate opportunity for faculty-trustee dialogue with regard to the implications of the resolution."

Gloer told the trustees that the faculty did not question the right of the trustees to express their opinion on abortion. Faculty members were concerned because "the resolution suggests a directive for faculty/employee behavior without involving faculty or employees in the formulation of that directive."

He said the "resolution has the effect of setting parameters on acceptable responses to an issue which lies outside the bounds of the seminary's Articles of Faith. In so doing it sets up a new test of orthodoxy and acceptability which goes beyond the governing documents of the institution."

However, the trustees voted 17-9 to adopt the resolution without discussing issues raised in the faculty response.

The trustees' instructional committee proposed a change in the seminary's procedure for securing adjunct professors, which previously gave the seminary administration responsibility for selection.

The change required that the names of prospective adjunct teachers be submitted to members of the instructional committee 30 days before appointment "for their information and input." In emergency situations, adjunct teachers may be appointed "after telephone notification of the trustee instructional committee."

Roger Oldham of Tennessee attempted to amend the proposal, giving the president the authority to appoint adjunct professors in emergencies without advanced notification of instruction committee members, but the amendment lost 15-10.

In the closing business session, Jerry Davenport of Texas moved that the school adopt a policy allowing students to tape all classroom and chapel lectures. Seminary president Ferguson asked why the policy was needed. He said the school had never had a policy prohibiting taping classroom lectures and that taping was done all the time.

Taping "is at the discretion of the professor," Ferguson explained. "If a professor chooses to request that a lecture not be taped, that's his prerogative in the class that he or she is teaching."

Trustee Ronnie Rogers of Arkansas said he favored the motion because "it would move the discretion (for taping) from the professor to the student." He added that tapes of classroom lectures would provide the seminary administration and trustees with "a mechanism to substantiate allegations" concerning the orthodoxy of a professor's teachings.

Trustee chairman Peterson observed that "if a person is taping a lecture for the purpose of using it against somebody, he has no business being in the seminary."

"If a professor is teaching something he doesn't want to be accountable for on tape, he shouldn't be teaching in this school," countered Timothy Harvey of Georgia.

Trustees sidestepped a decision by referring Davenport's motion to the instructional committee for additional study.

The election of Johnson as church history professor was the first time a new method for faculty selection had been used. The policy was adopted in April 1991 and called for extensive trustee involvement at every step of the process.

In Johnson's case, that entailed a three- to four-hour meeting between Johnson and members of the trustee instructional committee.

However, when Johnson's name was presented for election, Harvey objected, saying he was being asked to vote for a person he had never met "who was being recommended by trustees I barely know." He said he wanted to know the candidate's feelings about a just war, artificial insemination, when life begins, the American Civil Liberties Union and other topics.

Anthony Mattia of Kansas supported Harvey, calling for prospective candidates to appear before all the trustees so every trustee could ask any question he or she desired.

Instructional committee chairman James Jones of Michigan acknowledged the committee did not ask about all of Harvey's concerns. He said the committee did make sure the candidate was a biblical inerrantist, that he believed Adam and Eve were real people, and that he believed in the miracles, the resurrection and the return of the Lord.

"We asked everything we could think of and were very satisfied with his answers," Jones said.

Johnson was elected to the faculty by a 20-6 vote but not before trustees learned that Johnson had been contacted by fundamental-conservative leader Paige Patterson of Dallas and quizzed about his theological beliefs and about his feeling about "the conservative resurgence."

Patterson, a trustee of the Foreign Mission Board, later said several Midwestern trustees asked him about Johnson because the faculty candidate is a former FMB missionary to Brazil.

Patterson told Associated Baptist Press he telephoned Johnson, whom he had met on the mission field, but Patterson added, "I don't recall the nature of the questions."

Midwestern trustees spent about an hour and a half in executive session dealing with what Ferguson called "the recent resignation of a faculty member," an evident reference to the medical retirement granted to religious education professor Temp Sparkman. Following the executive session, the board voted without opposition to commend Ferguson for the way he handled Sparkman's retirement.

In other business, trustees:

-- Elected Peterson to a second year as chairman of the trustees. Richard Proctor of Arkansas was re-elected first vice chairman and James Reimer, pastor of Second Baptist Church, Springfield, Mo., was elected second vice chairman.

-- Approved an operating budget of \$3.7 million for fiscal year 1992-93. The budget includes an average 3 percent salary increase for

faculty and staff, the first increase in three years.

-- Approved up to \$40,000 for engineering studies about the best ways to use the seminary's 200-acre campus.

-- Voted to increase student matriculation fees from \$475 to \$500 per semester.

-30-

BJC may extend deadline
for arbitration offer

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Baptist Joint Committee's general counsel has recommended that the religious-liberty agency consider extending the April 17 deadline for its offer to use Christian conciliation to settle a dispute over \$300,000 on deposit at the Southern Baptist Foundation.

Oliver Thomas made the recommendation after James Guenther, attorney for the Southern Baptist Executive Committee, indicated that his client could not respond to the conciliation offer by the deadline, because the Executive Committee does not meet again until June 8.

In an April 9 letter, Thomas told Guenther he would contact him as soon as BJC officials reach a decision. Thomas told Associated Baptist Press he expects the officers of the BJC executive committee to respond to his recommendation within a week.

The Foundation recently sent the Baptist Joint Committee a check for approximately \$81,000, the amount of interest currently in the account. But the Foundation has declined the BJC's request for the \$300,000 principal in the account.

SBC messengers approved a proposal to provide \$300,000 for BJC capital needs in 1964. The funds were allocated in 1967 and 1968 and placed on deposit at the Foundation.

"We feel we have no choice but to pursue this matter, as the intention of the messengers of the 1964 SBC must not be defeated," Thomas wrote Guenther in his initial offer to use binding arbitration to settle the dispute. "Before we consider other remedies, however, we want to extend a final offer of Christian conciliation."

In his second letter, Thomas also responded to "some apparent misunderstandings" in Guenther's reply, including the assertion that the BJC has threatened to sue the SBC to recover the account.

"We have never threatened a lawsuit," he wrote Guenther.

He acknowledged that the BJC has retained a law firm and has been unwilling "to rule out litigation as a final means of protecting property that until recently both the Southern Baptist Foundation and the Executive Committee openly acknowledged belonged to the BJC," but Thomas insisted the agency has never threatened to file suit.

Thomas also disputed Guenther's assertion that a lawsuit would violate the church-state separation principles espoused by the BJC. Property disputes, he said, can be resolved by courts without violating separation of church and state.

"Taking someone else's property is illegal even if the perpetrator is a church," Thomas said, "and courts have never hesitated to resolve such disputes if, as here, it can be done without deciding questions of doctrine."

Guenther was not available for comment.

-30-

-- By Larry Chesser

N.C. church votes to license
homosexual for ministry

By Ruth Sheehan

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. (ABP) -- Deciding that homosexuality does not affect a person's calling to preach, members of the Olin T. Binkley Memorial Baptist Church in Chapel Hill, N.C., voted April 5 to license a gay divinity student to the gospel ministry.

The vote will allow John Blevins, 24, a Duke University student, to be licensed in the church, which is a step short of ordination.

After almost four hours of debate Sunday night, April 5, 57.5 percent of the members voted in favor licensing Blevins. Reporters weren't allowed in while members debated.

With its vote, the congregation is thought to be the first Southern Baptist congregation in the nation publicly to state it will disregard a person's sexual orientation during the ordination process.

The vote is almost certain to incur the wrath of state and national leaders of the denomination.

After Binkley's board of deacons voted last month to endorse Blevins' candidacy, the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution condemning "the gross perversion and unquestioned sin" of homosexuality.

And in June, the Executive Committee -- targeting Binkley and Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C. -- will try to oust congregations that condone homosexuality. Pullen recently voted to bless the "union" of two gay men.

Last month six leaders of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention proposed a policy amendment that would exclude the two congregations by forbidding churches that support gay rights from remaining members of the convention.

After Binkley's vote, the church released a statement:

"We recognize that all human beings, regardless of sexual orientation, seek the love, acceptance and support of others. Our individual uniqueness results in a wide variety of lifestyles as we search for our own humanity.

"As a majority group, heterosexuals have found many different ways of gaining acceptance. As a minority group, homosexuals have been subjected to a wide range of discrimination, harassment, misunderstanding, intimidation and violence.

"These reactions by heterosexuals are clearly contrary to the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. Moreover, they greatly restrict the ability of lesbians and gay men to form the life-affirming relationships that we all desire."

The church's vote ended almost eight months of deliberations.

Earlier in the week, Dick Helwig, moderator of the congregation, said the process had been a positive one for the church.

"Any time a congregation gets together to discuss a social issue of the times, that's going to be an exciting time for its members," he said.

Helwig said although people were divided, the debate had not been particularly heated. Church members worked very hard, meeting in small groups twice a week for the last few weeks, he said.

Gay preacher challenges
Baptist views on ordination

By Ruth Sheehan

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. (ABP) -- John Blevins heard the call to the gospel ministry during the summer after the 11th grade.

Five years later, as a freshman at Duke University's Divinity School, he acknowledged his homosexuality.

On April 5, the combination of those two events made history.

After nearly eight months of scrutiny, Blevins, who turned 25 April 8, became the first openly gay person licensed to preach in the Southern Baptist Convention.

"It's been a long process, a growing process for me as a person as well as for the congregation," Blevins said at a news conference Monday after being licensed by Olin T. Binkley Memorial Church in Chapel Hill.

Although Blevins' journey has been a direct challenge to conservative Baptist doctrine, the Winston-Salem, N.C., native said his course has not been "embattled." But neither has it been easy.

For months, his sexual orientation has been the subject of open and heated discussion among Baptists in Chapel Hill and throughout the Southern Baptist Convention.

In addition to the standard theological questions posed to all ministerial candidates, Blevins was asked about his sexual orientation.

At a series of congregational and small group meetings, Blevins countered Bible passages condemning homosexuality with his view that God's revelation to man doesn't stop with the Scripture. He talked about same-sex marriage and sexual intercourse outside of matrimony. He suggested gays and lesbians can be positive role models for children. He was even asked by one member whether he had been tested for HIV.

But Blevins said he does not resent the intrusion. "While my sexuality is intimate and personal, it also has social implications," he said.

Linda Jordan, Binkley's pastor, said that Blevins' request for licensure forced the congregation to look at the broader question of whether a person's sexual orientation affects his ability to preach.

In the end, 57.5 percent of the congregation voted that it does not. Of 544 church members eligible to vote, 266 were present at the meeting Sunday.

"His theological credentials are as sound as those of anyone who has come through this church seeking licensure," said Dick Helwig, the church moderator and chief lay officer.

Helwig said the congregation's ability to see beyond Blevins' homosexuality to those credentials is another step along a path of inclusiveness and acceptance that began at Binkley in the 1960s.

"Blacks have always been welcomed, and women have been welcomed in leadership roles," he said. "This action is the next logical step for this church to take."

But the vote to disregard sexual orientation in the ordination process, like Binkley's controversial stances in the past, is sure to anger and alienate as well.

Conservative Baptist leaders -- in the Southern Baptist convention and the North Carolina Baptist State Convention -- already have threatened to oust the church, which is also a member of the more moderate American Baptist Convention.

In addition, a number of the congregation's longtime members have begun to vacate the pews in Binkley's modern sanctuary.

According to Helwig, the same sort of exodus occurred when Jordan became the congregation's first female pastor in May 1990.

"We need some time for the people in this congregation to process this decision," said Jordan of Blevins' licensure.

Blevins, who will likely be ordained in a church other than Binkley, said he hopes churches will take the congregation's lead.

"I don't think Binkley's action will make a quick societal change but I think it could be a harbinger," he said, noting that he hoped one day to lead a congregation of his own.

"I hope," he said, "that people will be able to see beyond my being a gay minister and see me simply as a minister."

-- This story is reprinted with permission from the Raleigh (N.C.) News and Observer.

***** END *****