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Seminary student leaders
object to trustee actions

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Nine leaders of student organizations at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have sent an open letter to seminary trustees in which they object to "excessive expenditures," "secretive meetings" and "continual upheaval" caused by investigations of professor Paul Simmons.

Simmons, professor of Christian ethics, has been under scrutiny by trustees for several years primarily because of his views on abortion rights. However, Simmons' supporters have maintained the tenured professor has taught within the seminary's doctrinal guidelines.

Trustees met in a special session Dec. 15 to consider a proposal that would have paid Simmons up to \$362,000 to sever his relationship with the Louisville, Ky., school. That proposal, brought by trustee leaders, was rejected on a 21-34 vote.

That meeting and previous actions related to Simmons are the focus of the Dec. 17 student letter, signed by leaders of the student government and other campus organizations.

The letter implies that trustees have squandered the contributions of grass-roots Baptists to pursue action against Simmons -- against the advice of two attorneys -- and "demand(s) accountability of the board for these excessive expenditures and continual disruptions."

The letter claims trustees paid \$10,000 for legal counsel which advised them not to pursue dismissing Simmons, then paid another \$10,000 to \$50,000 for a second legal opinion that told them the same thing.

"The money that this institution receives is given by devoted persons who believe that they are supporting education for men and women preparing for ministry," the statement reads. "Yet during the last year the board of trustees has spent large amounts of money to pursue an investigation of Dr. Paul Simmons."

The letter notes that trustees have increased the number of their business meetings from one to two per year and, because of the Simmons matter, called several extra meetings of the academic personnel committee.

"Each meeting cost the seminary the expenses of the meeting and travel costs for each member," the signers explain.

Further, the letter claims the special meeting held Dec. 15 in Atlanta cost the seminary at least \$25,000.

Seminary officials have declined previous requests by reporters to tell the cost of the legal opinions or the special meeting. The trustees' twice-a-year regular meetings reportedly cost about \$35,000 each.

Most of the sessions dealing with Simmons have been held in executive session with no reporters or observers present.

The "secretive" nature of these meetings does not build trust with students, the letter continues. "If the board is serious about student concerns, and if they hope to have a healthy, candid relationship with the seminary community, they must exhibit candor themselves.

"Meetings such as the one on Dec. 15 serve to further alienate many members of the seminary community," the students say.

The letter is signed by President Ruth Davison and three other officers of the Student Government Association, Amanda Hiley, Chris Townsend, and Stacey Buford; Tommy Fitzgerald, president of the Music School Executive Committee; Eileen Campbell-Reed, vice president of the Master of Divinity Council; Hope Straughan, president of the Organization of Student Social Workers; Kathleen Stewart, president of the Christian Education Council; and Michelle Tooley, president of the Graduate Club.

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'Reverence for life' guides
Texans' statement on abortion

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Two factors should shape a Christian's views on abortion, according to an ethics statement prepared for Texas Baptists:

-- Reverence for life, especially the lives of those who are most vulnerable, and

-- Recognition that the claims of one life sometimes compete with the claims of another life.

The four-page position paper was recently adopted by the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, the ethics arm of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

The document examines biblical teachings on reverence for life and the ethical implications for Christians, focuses on underlying responsibilities for teaching the Christian view of human sexuality, and explores public policy implications of the abortion issue.

"Aborting the life of the fetus should be regarded as an extreme act undertaken under extreme circumstances," according to the statement released by the Texas Baptist CLC, an agency that addresses moral concerns and public policy issues for the state convention.

Abortion might be chosen "as the lesser of evils" only in such cases

as rape or incest, pregnancies which severely threaten the mother's physical or emotional survival, or in pregnancies involving severe fetal deformity and disease incompatible with life, the document says.

"Every instance in which reverence for fetal life is set aside in behalf of reverence for the life of the mother is intended as an urgent exception to the basic aversion to abortion," the commission paper stated.

The Texas document stands in contrast to recent statements adopted by the national Southern Baptist Convention and its Christian Life Commission. Those statements have condemned virtually all abortions.

According to the Texas CLC, the Christian responsibility is to teach by word and example a sexual ethic characterized by fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness, to encourage conception control in society at large through such methods as responsible, age-appropriate, abstinence-based sex education in public schools, and to shape public policy on abortion restrictions.

"It is right for Christians to promote reverence for life in the public forum, and the routine destruction of fetal life in contemporary society denigrates that sense of reverence," the commission paper states. "The Christian Life Commission supports legislative remedies which serve to limit abortion except in extreme circumstances."

However, the statement acknowledges "the difficulty of drafting fair, constitutionally acceptable and politically viable legislation." The statement places greatest emphasis upon addressing the abortion issue within the church.

"While it is urgent that we work in the legislative arena toward public policies which promote reverence for life, we must also face the reality that Christians are called to an abortion ethic more rigorous than can be realistically imposed on the larger, pluralistic society. The faithful practice of this ethic within our own community may be our greatest witness concerning the issue of abortion."

Before drafting the position paper, the commission called together a special committee of Texas Baptists representing a diversity of views on the abortion issue for a full day of wide-ranging discussion, according to Phil Strickland, CLC director.

"We discussed how the (Texas) Christian Life Commission could be most redemptive on this issue, and the clear feeling of the committee was that our most redemptive work will be done in helping churches to understand the issue and to implement programs to teach Christian sexual values," Strickland said.

An initial draft of the document was prepared following that committee meeting, and the special committee joined members of the commission and its board of consultants at a two-day retreat in April for further discussion of the issue and the proposed paper.

The Texas CLC staff incorporated changes suggested at that meeting. A few additional revisions were offered by CLC directors, who later approved the final draft by mail ballot.

The document's purpose is to help churches grapple with the abortion issue redemptively and deal with the problem pro-actively by teaching Christian views on human sexuality, according to Strickland.

"The answer to abortion primarily is not found in changing public policy, though we would support efforts to restrict abortions. The answer lies deeper than that, resting in the attitudes and behavior of

individuals. That is where the church must play a crucial role," Strickland said.

A consistent and comprehensive understanding of reverence for life also will lead churches to respond compassionately to all of society's most vulnerable members, including abused and neglected children, Strickland said.

The position paper was released for churches to utilize in preparing for Sanctity of Life Sunday, observed Jan. 17 in many Southern Baptist churches, Strickland said.

The national CLC has distributed its own materials for the Sanctity of Life observance.

The Texas CLC is making the position paper on abortion available to churches upon request. The document is one part of a projected literature series on reverence for life that will include resources on decision-making and counseling, legal background and views on abortion from the perspective of church history.

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Poll finds American teens
say they're religious

PRINCETON, N.J. (ABP) -- Most American teenagers consider themselves "religious," according to new research by the Gallup Organization.

About seven in 10 teens surveyed said they agree with the statement that they are religious, including 19 percent who agree very strongly.

And many teens who don't attend worship regularly still consider themselves religious.

Among the 30 percent who said they are not religious, only 5 percent held this position strongly. This statistic coincides with previous Gallup surveys which have shown only about 5 percent of Americans consider themselves atheists or agnostics.

Younger teens are most likely to consider themselves religious, the new poll found. However, a dip in identification with religion occurs around ages 14 to 15, presumably during a period of teenage rebellion.

Teenagers who live in rural areas are more likely than those who live in urban areas to consider themselves religious. For example, only 15 percent of urban teens strongly agreed that they are religious, compared to about 25 percent of rural teens.

Of teens who had not attended church or synagogue in the past week, 55 percent still said they are religious-minded.

Males and females showed about equal interest in religion, the poll found, but more females reported having stronger convictions about their faith than males.

The survey was reported in Emerging Trends, the newsletter of the Princeton Religion Research Center. The poll was based on telephone interviews with a nationwide representative sampling of 12- to 17-year-olds during June and July of this year.

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-- By Mark Wingfield

SBC should investigate integrity
of its leaders, layman tells Chapman

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Morris Chapman, who recently called on dissident Southern Baptists to leave their denomination as a matter of "integrity," should examine the integrity of the "deceptive political machinations" used to elevate Chapman and others to Southern Baptist leadership, according to one critic.

In a Nov. 30 open letter to Chapman, chief executive of the Southern Baptist Convention, Houston layman John Baugh said "a non-partisan panel of good and honest men and women" should be appointed to examine "whether the conduct of SBC leadership has been consistent with the norms of Christianity."

Baugh, who for several years has campaigned against what he terms political abuses within the denomination, said the integrity of current leaders should be compared to the "level of Christian proprieties that existed in the SBC prior to 1979," when fundamental-conservatives gained control of the denomination's structure.

"I believe it to be self-evident that SBC leaders who were involved in the 1979 takeover of the convention -- and many who have served in leadership positions since that time -- have made no efforts to cleanse the bloodstains that continue to despoil the character and besmirch the witness and work of our denomination."

A millionaire grocer and active Baptist layman, Baugh is founder of Southern Baptist Denominational Relations Information Inc., an organization that educates laypeople about Baptist heritage and the 13-year denominational battle.

In his letter, Baugh listed 20 questions which should be part of the panel's examination. They cover alleged "dirty tricks" and the political "spoils system" employed by fundamental-conservatives, attempts to "banish" dissident Baptists, mistreatment of denominational employees, and the detrimental effect of the SBC controversy of Baptist outreach efforts.

He invited Chapman to add his own concerns to the list.

Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, declined to discuss Baugh's proposal. However, he apparently has no intention of endorsing such an investigation, said Chapman spokesman Herb Hollinger, editor of Baptist Press.

In a newspaper interview in November, Chapman said the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a group of Southern Baptists opposed to the SBC's current conservative direction, should separate itself from the denomination.

"Their greatest integrity," he said of the Fellowship, "would be openly declaring they no longer are Southern Baptists, rather than claiming to be Southern Baptists and trying to draw funds from good-hearted, grass-roots Southern Baptists."

In a statement released to ABP Dec. 17, Chapman said he stands by his comments about the Fellowship.

"The vast majority of Southern Baptists -- moderates and conservatives -- have chosen to remain loyal to the Southern Baptist Convention and supportive of the Cooperative Program (SBC budget)," Chapman wrote. "Regrettably, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is attempting to build its

organization at the expense of Southern Baptist missions on both home and foreign fields."

In his letter, Baugh said he had hoped Chapman would be committed to "the integrity of Christian conciliation" and work to restore trust between warring factions of the SBC.

His proposed investigation, Baugh said, could help re-establish cooperation among Southern Baptists and rebuild credibility for the denomination in the eyes of the nation.

Otherwise, he suggested, "millions" of Southern Baptists might take Chapman's advice and leave the SBC. But such a split could bring a lawsuit, he warned.

While personally opposed to litigation between Christians, Baugh wrote, "it is feared that litigation would be deemed necessary to obtain equitable terms of an irrevocable resolution of the matter."

Baugh said the panel should be composed of well-known, respected Southern Baptists, such as evangelist Billy Graham. Or the editors of the 30-plus Baptist state newspapers could serve that function, he said.

But Jack Brymer, president of the editors' organization, discounted the value of the investigation.

"The Peace Committee didn't bring peace, and neither will yet another panel change anything," said Brymer, editor of the Florida Baptist Witness. "Being a Texan, Mr. Baugh should understand this analogy: When the horse is dead, dismount."

Brymer said most of Baugh's concerns have been investigated, although Baptists on both sides of the dispute reject some of the conclusions reached.

If a panel is convened, Brymer said, the editors will better serve Baptists by reporting and editorializing on it.

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-- By Greg Warner

Bivocational ministers seek help
from Baptist agencies, others

By Don McGregor

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- A group of bivocational ministers have asked Southern Baptist agencies for help in addressing their unique needs.

The request for help -- in the form of audiotapes -- came from the National Council on Bivocational Ministries, which met Dec. 10-11 in Fort Worth, Texas.

The council instructed its executive committee to "initiate a joint effort on the part of Southwestern (Baptist Theological) Seminary, the Baptist Sunday School Board, the Home Mission Board, and other interested institutions and/or agencies to consider developing audiotapes addressing the personal ministry needs of bivocational ministers...."

The council is a companion organization to the Southern Baptist Bivocational Ministers Association. The groups held consecutive meetings at Gambrell Street Baptist Church in Fort Worth, across the street from

Southwestern Seminary.

In other actions, the council also took upon itself the responsibility to "equip and assist bivocational ministers in recognizing the ministry giftedness of the laity and in enabling the laity to discover and implement their various ministry callings."

The Council also voted to establish a bivocational minister's needs list to be published in the association's quarterly newsletter. The council called on the Home Mission Board to fund the use of a toll-free telephone number to gather the list of needs and called on local directors of missions to make the needs known in their associations.

Charles Stewart of Ashland, Ky., was elected president of the national council. Stewart, who in November was elected president of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, is believed to be the first bivocational minister to serve as president of a state convention.

Vice president of the council is David Palmer of the Home Mission Board in Atlanta. The secretary is Bob Ray, a bivocational minister living in Burleson, Texas.

Ray also was elected president of the Southern Baptist Bivocational Ministers Association. Elected vice presidents were Ronald Ward of Loris, S.C., and Lawrence Hudson of Memphis, Tenn. Michael Saunders of Ashland, Ky., was elected secretary and Ken Cook of Jackson, Miss., was named treasurer.

Four members of the association were named exemplary bivocational pastors of the year. They were Leonard Foster, pastor of Happy Valley Baptist Church in Carlsbad, N.M.; Lawrence Hudson, pastor of Monument of Love Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn.; Keith McGraw, pastor of Sturgis Baptist Fellowship in Sturgis, S.D.; and Roberto Quiroz, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Hispana in Sherman, Texas.

In its one action, the association amended its constitution to recognize as associate members all Southern Baptist persons with an interest in bivocational ministry.

The association had two keynote addresses, one by Paul Powell, president of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board in Dallas, and one by council president Stewart.

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