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Phone: (904) 262-6626 Fax: (904) 262-7745 CServe: 70420,73

August 5, 1993

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Sunday School Board staff  
braces for more cuts

By Greg Warner

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The staff of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, its ranks already thinned by a year of corporate down-sizing, is bracing for news of more personnel cuts. But board President Jimmy Draper said the next round won't be nearly as severe as the hallway rumors suggest.

Reports that the Nashville agency would eliminate more than 100 positions have been circulating among the 1,700-person staff. But the recommended cuts don't go nearly so deep, Draper said.

"There are fewer than 50 recommended, and I'm not going to accept all of the recommendations," said Draper, who in 1991 became president of the board, considered the world's largest provider of religious materials.

The Sunday School Board reduced its personnel rolls by 8 percent last year when 159 long-time employees accepted early retirement as part of the board's restructuring plan. Draper said the latest cuts are a "fine-tuning" and "streamlining" of the reorganization begun a year ago.

He said he hopes to reach a decision about the new cuts by Aug. 15 so that the plan can be presented to the board's trustees during their semi-annual meeting Aug. 16-18.

At the trustees' last meeting in February, Draper reported Sunday school literature sales, the board's top revenue source, dropped 8 percent in 1992 and that only four of the board's 17 programs made a profit last year.

Draper said Aug. 4 that the impending staff cuts are the result of a corporate overhead study, in which administrators have been evaluating the efficiency of the board's operations and looking for ways to cut costs.

The 50-or-fewer positions slated for elimination are in the board's two

non-revenue areas -- corporate services and finance/administration -- which account for about a third of the board's 1,741 employees.

The board's other two operational areas -- church growth/programs and trade/retail markets -- will come under the cost-cutting knife later, Draper added. The study of those two revenue-producing areas "could take four-to-six months," he explained.

That means no quick end to the board's down-sizing, or staff anxiety.

"It could take another year to get done with this," Draper said. "And when we're through, it will probably be time to start over again," he added, noting that a continual study of efficiency is good stewardship.

Some of the employees whose positions are eliminated will be offered jobs elsewhere in the board, Draper said. "We don't ever want anybody to go out the door, unless they just don't have the skills needed," he said.

The sudden resignation of chief financial officer E. V. King Aug. 2, as the target date for more cuts approached, has created "a lot of anxiety" among board employees, Draper said. "There are rumors all over the building that jobs are going to be eliminated."

King, vice president for finance and administration, said he resigned in part because of dissatisfaction with the results of the corporate overhead study.

"After discussing it with Dr. Draper, particularly the changing role of the chief financial officer, I think it is best for me to look for other opportunities and let the board bring in new leadership in this area," King said in a board release.

King could not be reached for further comment.

But one key board administrator said the soon-to-be-announced changes amount to yet another restructuring of top-level management, suggesting last year's restructuring of the board into four operational areas has not been particularly effective.

"The feeling is if this one doesn't work, we're beyond being fixed," said the administrator, who asked not be identified. "This one is make-or-break."

The new realignment effectively would make King or his successor the chief operating officer of the board, directly beneath Draper in the corporate structure. Sources said King was uncomfortable with that role, which would have focused more of the authority -- and blame -- on the chief operating officer instead of spreading it out among the four vice presidents.

The administrator said employees are "very apprehensive" about the impending changes. "People are distracted by what's going on now. The troops are incredibly confused by what's going on now."

"It looks like we are busily reorganizing the tops of our desks while a hurricane is blowing the roof off our house."

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-- Mike Clingenpeel contributed to this story.

Mississippi College president resigns  
as trustees investigate finances

CLINTON, Miss. (ABP) -- Lewis Nobles, president of Baptist-affiliated Mississippi College, resigned abruptly Aug. 3 as trustees moved to investigate his handling of donations to the 4,000-student school.

Nobles was "encouraged to resign" by trustees, who met with the president for about an hour Aug. 2, trustee chairman Harry Vickery told the Clarion-Ledger of Jackson.

Nobles, 67, earlier had announced his intention to retire in May 1994. He had been president of the Clinton, Miss., college for 25 years.

Trustee leaders declined to discuss the specific complaints against Nobles until an investigation by private accountants is completed in a few weeks, the Clarion-Ledger said.

Vickery told the newspaper that trustees are looking into "the management of certain donations to the college that were handled directly by Dr. Nobles." In handling of some gifts, trustees found Nobles had "gone outside the system -- that type of thing," Vickery said.

Vickery, who described Nobles as "a great educator," said he was "grieved" by the controversy.

Rory Lee, vice president for institutional advancement, was named acting president of the college, which is owned by the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

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Senator warns networks  
to restrain TV violence

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Television networks had better clean up their act or Congress may do it for them, Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., warned TV executives Aug. 2.

His words proved prophetic a day later, when a bill was introduced in Congress that would regulate TV violence.

A leading advocate for reduced television violence, Simon said he continues to support self-regulation but warned that Congress and the public are growing weary waiting for results.

"When you have senators from Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio) to Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) -- and that covers a pretty broad spectrum -- saying that something has to happen to change things, the message should be clear."

Simon, speaking to an industrywide conference on TV violence, was the chief architect of the Television Violence Act of 1990. The law created a three-year antitrust exemption that would allow the networks to work together to adopt voluntary policies on television violence. The exemption ends Dec. 1.

The nation's four national networks -- ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox -- announced in June they will voluntarily attach parental warnings to the most violent TV fare. But Simon said that minimal approach is unsatisfactory.

"No one suggests that there should be no violence on television," Simon said. "A film on the Civil War is likely to have violence. But there should be less violence on the screen and, more importantly, it should not be glamorized."

Simon said people understand the pain and senselessness of violence when they see it on network news. But often, entertainment violence is made attractive.

"And just as 30 seconds of attractive portrayal of a bar of soap sells soap, and 30 seconds of the attractive portrayal of a car sells that car, 25 minutes of the attractive portrayal of violence sells violence.

"This is no longer theory. The evidence that television violence does

harm is now just as overwhelming as the evidence that cigarettes do harm."

He credited the industry leaders for the steps they have taken to adopt joint standards, but those standards are very subjective, he said. The agreement to place warnings for parents on violent programs is helpful but it's not enough.

Simon said he did not want the industry to be censored, offering seven suggestions for self-regulation:

- Use self-restraint.
- Involve the entire TV industry.
- Establish a non-governmental monitoring group to assure continuity of concern.
- De-glamorize violence.
- Avoid violent promotional ads.
- Use TV to educate people about the harmful effects of television violence.
- Reduce exports of violent programs.

"I also know that you have in your hands a tool that is unprecedented in the history of humanity in its power. You have helped move the nation away from smoking cigarettes, and by being more sensitive on issues of race, you ended the 'Amos and Andy' era in film and conversation."

On Aug. 3, congressional colleagues validated Simon's warning.

Rep. John Bryant, D-Texas, introduced a bill (H.R. 2837) that would require the Federal Communications Commission to establish regulations to reduce violence broadcasts on radio and television.

Bryant said he is "horrified" that Congress has been grappling fruitlessly with this issue for more than 30 years.

"More than 20 years of research has led to a compelling consensus that watching television violence increases children's aggressiveness and desensitizes them to the effects and implications of violence."

Before the average child finishes grade school, Bryant said, he or she sees 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence on television.

Bryant also is concerned about free expression guaranteed by the First Amendment, but he said his bill does not violate it.

"Broadcasting -- the profitable use of limited public airwaves -- is a privilege that carries with it a tremendous public responsibility. The courts have held that when there is such a compelling public interest, and everyone does not have access, equal access, to the use of the medium, speech can be regulated."

Reps. Edward Markey, D-Mass., and Jack Fields, R-Texas, also announced their intention to introduce a bill that would mandate television sets contain technology that would allow viewers to block programs labeled as violent.

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Women senators outmaneuver  
anti-abortion colleagues

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Senate Aug. 3 narrowly defeated an attempt to reinstate a decade-old ban on abortion coverage in federal employees' health plans after the chamber's five women senators outmaneuvered their anti-abortion colleagues.

The ban was instituted by President Ronald Reagan and continued by

President George Bush, but President Bill Clinton dropped it when he presented his 1994 budget.

Anti-abortion senators, led by Sen. Don Nickles, R-Okla., attempted to reinstate the ban as part of the postal-treasury spending bill.

Sen. Barbara Mikulski, D-Md., objected that Nickles' amendment was "non-germane" because it would legislate on an appropriations bill. While Senate rules forbid tacking on legislative items to spending bills, it has become a common practice rarely challenged by senators.

"I believe it is time no longer to have a back-door way of legislating that dictates how people can spend the money that they have earned. ... I can say to my colleagues that this does violate the Senate rules (No. 16) to legislate on appropriations bills.

"To my colleagues who share a different opinion on abortion, I say, let us not trample on the Senate rules and save that debate for the authorizing committees."

Mikulski, acting on behalf of the other four Democratic women, succeeded in securing 51 votes -- enough to block reinstatement of the ban.

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-- By Pam Parry

Gregory apparently not  
going to seminary post

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Joel Gregory apparently will not become dean of the chapel at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The former pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, who currently is without a permanent pulpit, visited on the school's Louisville, Ky., campus in late June. Seminary sources said President Albert Mohler had been talking with Gregory about taking the new position.

Mohler has declined to discuss the issue publicly, although he has not denied discussing the position with Gregory.

Reliable sources on campus who have asked not to be named have confirmed that Gregory will not take the position. Whether it was actually offered to him is not known.

Gregory could not be reached for comment.

Also uncertain is whether Mohler plans to find someone else to fill the slot, which would be a new addition to the administrative structure.

Mohler, who officially assumed the presidency Aug. 1, still has several other key positions to fill. Yet to be named are a dean of student life, a dean of the school of religious education, and a dean of the school of church music. The recently departed vice president for seminary relations also has not been replaced, although the title and rank of that position appear likely to change.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is a five-part series on Albert Mohler, who assumed the presidency of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Aug. 1.

Southern Seminary's new president called 'brilliant' by some, a mystery by others

By Mark Wingfield.

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- No one who has known Albert Mohler for any length of time was surprised when he was named the ninth president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, his friends and former classmates report.

Most who have known and observed him through the years believe he was destined to find such an office. They describe him as "brilliant," "an outstanding scholar" and someone who dearly loves his alma mater.

But some who have known him have been surprised by the stridency with which Mohler recently has identified with the conservative movement within the Southern Baptist Convention.

Some say the Al Mohler taking the reigns of Southern Baptists' oldest seminary this week is not the same Al Mohler they thought they knew previously. Al Mohler the doctoral student appeared to be more sympathetic to Baptist moderates than conservatives, they explain.

For this reason, many moderates on campus who knew Mohler as a student initially were pleased with his election as president. They reasoned that conservative trustees had -- for whatever reason -- elected someone who would be at least privately sympathetic to moderate issues.

But those hopes were dashed quickly, as Mohler stated his positions against women serving as pastors, for the conservative movement that captured the SBC in 1979, and against the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a group of Baptist moderates. The resignations of the provost, two deans and two vice presidents apparently were due at least in part to the unwillingness of those people to support the new president's positions.

For his part, Mohler contends his theology has not changed.

"My theological convictions have not changed, but my understanding of the nature of the crisis in the Southern Baptist Convention has changed," he said in a recent interview.

During the 1980s, Mohler said, he experienced a "dramatically increasing consciousness" of the theological problems facing Southern Baptists.

Conservatives were correct in asserting that some institutions and teachers had gotten out of line and that a course correction was needed, he explained.

And the "complete rejection of inerrancy" by Baptist moderates in the late 1980s -- along with formation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship -- moved moderates beyond where he was willing to go, Mohler said.

He identifies himself as an "evangelical conservative and inerrantist."

Although he has loved the seminary dearly, "from the very start I wanted to see change to a more conservative direction," he said. "By the late 1980s, it was clear such change could be addressed only from the conservative side."

Some who have known Mohler, though, say they have been surprised by some of the positions he has espoused recently. He has been theologically conservative in the past, they explained, but not in the way they see him now.

Rupert Coleman, Mohler's former pastor at Southside Baptist Church in Lakeland, Fla., has known the new president since he was 6 years old. Mohler cites Coleman as having a formative influence on his life and call to ministry.

It was Coleman who as a pastor counseled Mohler to attend Southern Seminary. And Coleman was one of several people who recommended Mohler to the presidential search committee.

"At that time, my opinion of him was that he was a solid, traditional Southern Baptist and was strong for the denomination," the retired pastor said.

But Coleman said he has "been surprised at some of his announcements since he was elected."

"I was very much surprised when he announced that he did not favor the privilege that Christ has given all who believe in him," he said. Although an apparent reference to Mohler's position on women's roles in the church, Coleman would not expand upon the comment.

Mohler and his mentor continue to express a great admiration for each other but have taken different tracks on another controversial issue. While Mohler adamantly has denounced the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Coleman has embraced the Fellowship and even led a prayer during the Fellowship's annual meeting in Birmingham, Ala., last spring.

Ross Brummett, a professor at Carson-Newman College in Tennessee, was a classmate of Mohler's during doctoral studies. He and Mohler and a group of three other students ate lunch together every Monday for more than two years.

Brummett describes Mohler as a friend whose intellect and academic brilliance are "beyond question. He is very, very bright."

However, Brummett draws a distinction between the Mohler he would have classified as an "evangelical conservative" as a doctoral student and the person now serving as seminary president.

There is a difference between an "evangelical conservative" who says, "This is what I believe" and a "fundamentalist" who says, "You must believe," he explained.

"Where he is now, I don't know. I don't know how to label him. And I hate labels," Brummett said. "He's my friend."

"I recall Al's social conservatism," said John Baker, pastor of Druid Hills Baptist Church in Atlanta, "but this religious conservatism that's being expressed in connection with the convention I did not see." Baker was in the doctoral program with Mohler, and their families have considered each other friends.

"His public displays may be a window to who Al really is, or they may simply be reflecting the change in the denomination which many leaders at this time feel they must follow," Baker said.

Others contacted by the Western Recorder expressed similar confusion about Mohler's recent positions but declined to be quoted by name for this story.

Even most of those who say they are concerned about the direction Mohler is headed claim to be willing to give him a chance before writing the seminary off. The real test, they say, will be in how he actually acts as president.

Others who have known Mohler say they see no change in his positions.

"When you're in academic studies, you don't deal with a lot of practical, ongoing things," said Robert Canoy, another friend from doctoral days. "I never heard Al, frankly, impugn the current movement within the convention. I never heard him speak favorably about it either.

"I can't say he was this way and now become another way," said Canoy,

who now is pastor of Ashworth Road Baptist Church in Des Moines, Iowa.

Nor is it accurate to label Mohler an opportunist, Canoy said. "I believe in his own mind, he's doing what he thinks will be for the genuine good of the seminary."

Some friends believe Mohler has been wrongly caricatured and his positions misunderstood.

"A lot of people who know him very little have gone to great lengths in describing so-called character flaws that I don't think are there," said Michael Duduit, editor of Preaching magazine and a close friend of Mohler's since they worked on the seminary staff together in the mid-1980s.

Duduit said he has not seen theological change in his friend.

"Theologically he is very much the person I got to know as a graduate student," he said. "He was always a person of strongly held conservative views, but certainly not a knee-jerk reactionary. His views always are very carefully thought through, and he can defend them."

Doug Walker, perhaps one of Mohler's best friends and another of the former Monday lunch group, also contends the president has been misrepresented.

"There's a caricature that's been painted of him. Al is certainly a conservative evangelical. But he's been painted, I think, as a fundamentalist."

That portrait is not true, said Walker, pastor of Ruhama Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala. "Al certainly is a thinker; he's open to examining ideas. At the same time, he's confessional. He's willing to say, 'This is what I believe and why.' Sometimes I think that comes across not necessarily as warm and pastoral as he would like it."

Mohler does have outstanding political instincts, but he is not a political opportunist, Walker added.

"Some people have claimed, 'Here's somebody who has just gotten on the conservative bandwagon.' On some issues he has changed, but his basic commitments to Scripture are the same.

"There's been some theological movement from when I first knew Al," Walker admitted. "But it is not motivated by politics. It is motivated by his study of Scripture and his reading and understanding of historical Christianity."

There is a "warm and personal" side to the 33-year-old president that doesn't come across in public, Walker said. "He's a typical daddy who loves to get in the floor and play with his kids."

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Mohler says he changed  
on women's issue

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Women in ministry is the one theological position on which Al Mohler admits having a change of heart in the past decade.

As president-elect of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Mohler recently stated his opposition to women serving as pastors and in positions of "teaching authority."

But as a doctoral student, Mohler took a different stance. In 1984, he publicly opposed a resolution passed by the Southern Baptist Convention which

stated a position similar to what he now believes.

The 1984 resolution, "On Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry," says Southern Baptists "encourage the service of women in all aspects of church life and work other than pastoral functions and leadership roles entailing ordination."

The resolution gained notoriety because it also blamed the woman as being "first in the Edenic fall," a statement interpreted by many as meaning the woman was responsible for the initial sin of humanity in the Garden of Eden.

Soon after the Kansas City convention, Mohler apparently took some form of leadership in enlisting 412 people from churches in Louisville, Ky., to sign a document opposing the SBC resolution and affirming "equal participation of women and men in the life and work of the church."

The rebuttal document was printed as a large display ad in the Louisville Courier-Journal on Aug. 4, 1984. Mohler's name and the name of his wife, Mary, appear on the list of signers immediately above the name of Roy Honeycutt, who then was seminary president. Mohler was working as an assistant to Honeycutt at the time.

The Aug. 21, 1984, issue of the Western Recorder, newsjournal of Kentucky Baptists, carried a letter to the editor from Mohler, in which he explained the ad had been published as "an unprecedented move by grass-roots Baptists expressing concern about the recent action of the Southern Baptist Convention."

The newspaper ad states the signers' "disapproval" of the SBC resolution and affirms, among other things, "the equality of men and women in creation and their common formation in the image of God," as well as "equal participation of women and men in the life and work of the church."

Asked to explain his change of position, Mohler said: "I went to the 1984 Southern Baptist Convention ... and did oppose that resolution and joined in a statement encouraging women in ministry. At that time, I had not really considered the issue of women serving as pastors. I saw it as an issue of women serving in other roles in church -- minister of education, minister of music, children's minister."

Mohler said his perspective was called into question a few years later and he spent "a considerable amount of time" struggling with the issue before defining his beliefs differently.

The position he reached is that women and men "stand equal before God" but have distinct roles within the church.

Mohler said he supports women serving on church staffs in some roles but that "the pastorate, as evidenced in the New Testament, is male."

Such a position is not discriminatory, he explained, because "ministry is not a civil right."

Defining Mohler's position beyond the pastorate is complex. He does not uniformly oppose women serving as deacons, but looks to see what role deacons play in a church. When deacons function as elders, that should be a male role, he said. But when deacons function solely as ministry helpers, they may be men or women.

The key, he explained, is a distinction between roles of "teaching authority" which belong exclusively to men and other roles of teaching and leadership which should be available to all.

Southern's new president seeks  
blend of academic, practical

By Marv Knox

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Can a seminary polish its reputation for world-class scholarship and not lose touch with the churches it serves?

Albert Mohler hopes so. And he took up that challenge Aug. 1, when he became the ninth president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Mohler, 33, succeeded Roy Honeycutt, who retired after more than a decade at the helm of the Southern Baptist Convention's 134-year-old flagship seminary.

In an interview shortly before he assumed the presidency, Mohler described his vision for the Louisville, Ky., school, where he earned two degrees.

"This institution, if it is to be faithful to the glory of its own heritage and founding, will be the pre-eminent leadership institution of theological education in the evangelical world," he said. "But it will understand that it was founded in order to serve the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention."

"We will not allow the academic to be at odds with ministerial training but will combine the two in such a way that Southern Seminary will focus on preparing ministers for service in the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention."

In other words, the seminary must bridge the gap between the theoretical and the practical. "This has always been a delicate balance for theological institutions," he suggested.

The challenge is compounded by a wide array of models for theological education, Mohler said. They range from a "trade-school approach," which treats seminary like vocational education, to strict academic study, which shows "little or no concern for ministry in local churches."

Southern Seminary must stand in the middle of that mix and also compete effectively for students from an ever-broadening range of educational options, he added. Those include "divinity schools at the state level and what I would consider to be the alternative seminaries of the denominational left," he said.

And seminary courses must give increased attention to church growth, evangelism and church planting, he said. "It will mean bringing into the life of the institution exposure with some of the leading-edge models of church development within the SBC."

Most of the innovative models of church growth have not been encouraged by seminaries, Mohler said. "That must change."

And it will change by hiring professors "who will represent these concerns," he added. "I will expect every course within the life of the institution to have as a necessary focus, 'What does this have to do with preparing ministers for churches?'"

That answer will be shaped by a faculty comprised of "churchly scholars who are at the forefront of their academic disciplines and have a heart focused upon the local church."

The degree to which current faculty members are part of that change is up to them, Mohler said.

"The issue is not so much the ability of the persons to come along, but the willingness of the persons to come along," Mohler noted. "At this point, I am unwilling to prejudge the willingness of others to join with us. That will be demonstrated by their actions and responses in the months and years

to come."

Together with the faculty who join him, Mohler hopes to build "a new evangelical theological consensus within the Southern Baptist Convention," he said. "This means a shift from the merely pragmatic and political to face the depth of the theological crisis which now faces this denomination.

"I will expect Southern Seminary to articulate, to represent and to embody a theological posture which is clearly and unquestionably conservative, evangelical and Baptist."

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Enrollment, donations  
steady at Southern

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Two questions stand out among the unknowns about Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's future: What will happen to enrollment? What will happen to fund raising?

The people most enthusiastic about the changes have hailed the fall semester as the beginning of a new day that will bring more students, more money and more prestige to Southern.

But even some people favorable to the changes have expressed concern privately about a possible dip in enrollment and giving, at least initially. And critics of the new administration have forecast a bleaker future of declining enrollment, decreasing contributions and diminished prestige.

Most knowledgeable sources admit it is far too early to assess the impact the change of directions will have on either enrollment or fund raising. The initial outlook for the fall semester is neither dismal nor glamorous. But it does appear to be positive, seminary administrators report.

"We have seen no net effect (in student recruitment) when we look at the broad picture," said Roger Sims, admissions director. "We've had some students to withdraw their applications, yet we've had some to apply on the basis of the changes."

As of late July, the number of applications received from new students was up 7.5 percent over the previous year, Sims said. And the number of new students already approved for admission in the fall is up 6 percent, added David Dockery, vice president for academic administration.

Further, the number of returning students pre-registered for the fall semester appears steady, Dockery said.

"If those pre-registered come back, and the new students who have applied come, we will be up 3 percent to 4 percent," Dockery predicted.

Dockery admitted he has signed several transfer slips for students leaving Southern for other schools. But at the same time, he said, he has talked with students who are coming to Southern because of the new direction.

Although no one knows at this point which students will return and which won't, only a trickle of students appear to be transferring to the three schools most talked about as alternatives.

The Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Va., a new moderate-backed school, has five students transferring in the fall from Southern, said Nell Summerlin, registrar.

At Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, located practically across the street from Southern's campus, applications for six Southern transfers currently are in process, said Jim Hubert, admissions director.

Lexington Theological Seminary, a Disciples of Christ school in nearby Lexington, Ky., has noticed an increase in inquiries from Baptist students, said Ruth Kitchen, a seminary official. But Kitchen said she knew of no transfers from Southern.

The true test for Southern's enrollment likely will come in the spring semester rather than the fall semester, several seminary administrators believe. A much-larger-than-usual group of students appear poised to graduate in December, meaning a larger number of incoming students will be required to keep enrollment steady.

The forecast for fund raising also is unclear, said Tom Mabe, Southern's vice president for development. "It's too early to tell what the direction's going to be on either side."

The seminary's major donors will continue to stand with the school, Mabe predicted. Among donors of smaller amounts, Mabe said, he has heard both positive and negative comments about the seminary's direction.

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Opinions vary on what changes  
mean for Southern Seminary

By Marv Knox

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Almost everyone affiliated with Southern Baptist Theological Seminary expects it to change under Al Mohler's administration.

After all, "Change!" has been a battle cry of Southern Baptists who elected the school's conservative trustees, who in turn laid the presidential mantle on Mohler, who now will direct the seminary into the future.

As the new president takes office this week, the expected nature of that change is subject to interpretation. Representatives of the seminary's various constituencies were asked to describe the changes they anticipate. Here's what they said:

-- John Michael, a Louisville businessman and a seminary trustee: "I expect to see change come from two primary areas. No. 1, I sense an evangelical thrust and commitment that I'm very enthusiastic about. Also, I sense Dr. Mohler intends to channel that through the local churches by preparing leaders for the churches in the future. ... We should never engage in intellectual pursuit for its own sake, but it should undergird the mission of the church."

-- Stephen Anderson, a real estate executive from Memphis, Tenn., and a seminary trustee: "I'm very optimistic about Dr. Mohler, if he can get hold of his responsibilities and have the support of a number of good leaders out of the trustees and not radical individuals."

"I'm hopeful Southern Seminary's leadership will recognize women do have a place in the church and will not do anything to harm that relationship. If anything, they need to temper their efforts, because the women's issue will not go away."

-- Bill Leonard, a professor of church history at Southern until he joined the faculty of Samford University in 1992: "There is still a major question concerning who will determine the future of Southern Seminary -- the faculty, the administration or the trustees. I see signs the trustees are divided between militant and moderate fundamentalists.

"It will be a question of whether Southern is an evangelical or

fundamentalist seminary, and there is a difference. 'Evangelical' will tolerate some diversity on the faculty; 'fundamentalist' will not. The fundamentalist agenda will be to continue to find 'enemies' ... and to press for their removal or recantation. That approach will bring continued stress."

-- Wade Rowatt, professor of psychology of religion who has known Mohler since he served on staff at the president's boyhood church: "It's in the faculty's best interest for Al to succeed in reaching his goals and our goals. ..."

"He has said he doesn't want the seminary to be a fundamentalist school, but an excellent conservative evangelical school. He has said he will talk to each of us to hear our vision. I hope we will see some common ground."

-- Gerald Keown, professor of Old Testament and president of the Faculty Association: "I'm waiting to see what the new president will do or say. I'm not aware of anyone who knows what's going to happen."

"I will do everything I can to make his presidency successful. On the other hand, I hope he will work with the faculty and not create an agenda upon which we constantly will have conflict."

-- Tommy Fitzgerald, president of the seminary's Student Government Association: "Since Dr. Mohler has not had an official forum to spread his ideas, no one has had an opportunity to know what course the seminary will take." Fitzgerald forecast a "fairly calm" transition, although he said students have expressed much curiosity about Mohler's administrative structure.

-- Paul Blizzard, pastor of Reidland Baptist Church in Paducah, Ky., who graduated from the seminary this spring, said the seminary "needs a balance" between traditional neo-orthodox perspectives and conservative evangelical perspectives.

"I believe Dr. Mohler's administration will bring that on the faculty. That will be a refreshing change, a breath of fresh air to students who maybe have held back from coming to Southern because of its reputation. It may be threatening to some because they believe their academic freedom is being hindered. I do not believe this will be the case."

The change at Southern actually began before Mohler's election, Blizzard noted. "As a conservative, I wasn't allowed to express my views because they were considered antiquated. But in the last few years, I've seen an openness to my views. I have no second thoughts for studying at Southern, ... but I wish I were starting now."

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