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Russell Dilday dismisses talk
of SBC candidacy, endorses Henry

By Greg Warner

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Russell Dilday has been asked to run for president of the Southern Baptist Convention, but the fired seminary president said April 14 he has no plans to do so.

Many Southern Baptists disturbed by Dilday's firing by trustees at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary have asked him to allow his nomination for the presidency, a position from which he could counteract the "negative type of fundamentalism" he says led to his firing.

But Dilday said Orlando pastor Jim Henry, already a candidate for the presidency, is better able to represent Baptists fed up with the SBC's current conservative leadership, which has controlled the presidency and the SBC since 1979.

"I don't think I should be the one to carry the banner," Dilday told Associated Baptist Press. "I don't have any inclination to do that."

Southern Baptists will elect a new president during their annual convention June 14-16 in Orlando. Dilday said he has been asked to seek the post by several individuals and groups, including some Southwestern alumni.

Most recently a director of missions in Silva, N.C., issued such a plea in an open letter to Dilday sent to Baptist news media April 14.

"It is time for Southern Baptists to decide that both conservatives and moderates will share equally in the governance of the convention," wrote John Reid, director of missions for the Tuckaseegee Baptist Association in North Carolina. "Let us start in Orlando this June by electing you as president of the convention."

Reid, who read Dilday the letter over the phone April 13, said he did not ask Dilday for permission to nominate him but only asked Dilday to consider running. "I want to put this idea forward and see what people think about it," Reid told ABP.

"I told him neither yes nor no," Dilday said. "If I had to make that decision right now, it would be no."

In his letter, Reid told Dilday his election would move the SBC "one

step back from the road to continued fragmentation." If he is defeated, on the other hand, "then all hope for reconciliation will be forever lost. Whatever your decision, it will be a defining moment in our convention."

Conservative leaders already are backing the candidacy of Fred Wolfe, chairman of the powerful SBC Executive Committee and pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala.

Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church in Orlando, is also a conservative but is less involved than Wolfe in denominational politicking. Henry is seen as an alternative to the close-knit conservative power structure.

With Henry in the race, Dilday said, no other candidate is needed. Henry's candidacy represents "a strong wave that is calling the convention back to a constructive conservatism," Dilday said. "I have great confidence in Jim Henry's willingness to be the leader" of that movement.

Dilday said he talked with Henry earlier in the year and encouraged him to run. But Dilday said they have not talked since Southwestern trustees fired Dilday, setting off a firestorm of criticism against the conservative trustees.

Reid, in his open letter, said a Dilday candidacy would serve "as a referendum of how Baptists should treat people. The average Southern Baptist in the pew needs a way to voice his/her opinion on not only the recent events at Southwestern but also to say the convention belongs to all Baptists and not just 'conservatives.'"

"I have great sympathy," Dilday said, "for people who see this issue at Southwestern as a rallying point for a new approach in the convention." He said he will lend his support and influence to that movement, even to the point of nominating Henry when the convention meets in June.

"I would do that, but that probably wouldn't help very much," Dilday said.

But Reid told ABP Henry and Wolfe both represent SBC conservatives and that a moderate candidate is needed. The trustees who fired Dilday from the Fort Worth, Texas, seminary accused the former president of being too sympathetic to moderates and not supportive enough of current SBC leaders.

Reid is calling for conservatives and moderates to alternate the SBC presidency as part of a plan to share power. "It would be a simple acknowledgement that there are conservatives and moderates in the convention, and that the convention will serve both and involve both," he said in his letter.

If the SBC's factions can't share power, he said, "then one could not expect those who are left out to continue to finance the convention."

Already many moderate Southern Baptists are reducing or diverting their financial support of the SBC, contributing to a three-year drop in the convention's central budget.

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Faculty ad, donors' mailing
defend Dilday as dispute widens

By Greg Warner

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- The faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary has again come to the defense of its fired president, challenging trustee allegations that Russell Dilday holds liberal views about the Bible.

Dilday "strongly affirms traditional, conservative Southern Baptist

views of the Scripture," the faculty wrote in a statement they approved April 13. Using their own money, faculty members purchased a full-page ad in the April 20 issue of the Texas Baptist Standard to publish their open letter to Southern Baptists.

A separate document from the school's music dean also challenges trustee accusations that the seminary's music curriculum is "out of step with church music as revered and sung in most Southern Baptist congregations." Dean James McKinney said the music faculty has "documentary evidence refuting these claims."

Both statements will be included in a mailing from Dilday supporters to all Southern Baptist churches -- an attempt to counter a similar mailing from trustees.

Trustee leaders issued a letter March 31 defending their decision to fire the 63-year-old president March 9. The four-page letter sent to 39,000 Southern Baptist churches leveled a variety of charges against Dilday, including an allegation that Dilday's 1982 book on biblical authority advocates destructive views about the Bible.

"Dr. Dilday demonstrates a commitment to the principles of higher criticism, which spawned theological liberalism (modernism), neo-orthodoxy, the death of God, situational ethics, etc.," the trustees said. "From a decidedly biased position, Dr. Dilday is dedicated to berate, misrepresent and assail those who hold the Bible to be God's inerrant, infallible and authoritative Word."

Dilday himself denied the charges to reporters March 31. A point-by-point response from Dilday will be part of the latest mailing, which is scheduled to go out April 18.

"It clearly answers all the criticisms that they (trustees) had in that letter they sent out," said Kenneth Cooper, a Dilday supporter and former chairman of the seminary's advisory council.

Cooper and other members of the Southwestern Council raised the \$18,000 required for the mailing. The effort is led by Cooper and two other council leaders; trustee Wayne Allen of Dallas; and two leaders of the Baptist General Convention of Texas -- current president Jerold McBride of San Angelo and past president Phil Lineberger of Tyler.

The faculty, which denounced the firing in a previous statement, responded in the ad to specific charges in the trustees' March 31 letter. "We are dismayed and offended by misrepresentations, distortions and the use of guilt by association in the letter from trustee officers," the faculty said.

Citing supportive passages from Dilday's book, the faculty said, "No careful reader should miss his repeated statements about his firm confidence in the full truth, inspiration and authority of the Bible. ... Nothing in the book raises any question about the author's conservative views of the Scriptures."

The faculty said Dilday "has repeatedly urged us" not to berate those who hold conservative views of the Bible.

But the faculty also defended the use of biblical criticism. "Christians must remain free to use in a reverent way literary and historical tools of Bible study to understand what God is saying to us through the biblical authors."

The seminary's School of Church Music has been at the center of another struggle between Dilday and trustees. Differences over the music school were cited as one reason why trustees felt Dilday's firing was necessary. Trustees earlier blocked the election of two of Dilday's nominees for music dean.

Leading the criticism has been trustee secretary T. Bob Davis, a dentist active in the music program at Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas. In an Associated Baptist Press story March 17, Davis said the music faculty has

been unresponsive to trustee calls for a more contemporary and informal music style, as opposed to the school's traditional, "liturgical" approach.

Retiring music dean McKinney, in an April 11 statement to Baptist media, said the music school "has been given no opportunity to defend itself or attempt to refute this criticism." (The school was closed for spring break when the March 17 story was issued.)

McKinney cited a 1988 study, initiated in response to trustee criticism, that showed Baptist constituents were "overwhelmingly supportive of the church music work offered at Southwestern."

Despite the positive findings, McKinney said the school added courses in evangelistic music, evangelistic piano playing, instrumental arranging, pageants and electronic media.

An advisory council of local music ministers was established in 1991, McKinney said, to get feedback from churches. And music students are required to visit churches to be exposed to different styles.

McKinney said Davis and fellow trustee John McKay met with McKinney and visited music classes in 1991. They later made "an extremely favorable report" to trustees in March 1992, expressing no concerns, McKinney said.

As for Davis' recent criticisms, McKinney wrote: "Perhaps it should be pointed out that these harsh criticisms were made by a person who has never served as a full-time minister of music in a church, who has no undergraduate preparation in music, who plays the piano in a style that was fashionable in the 1950s, who has limited music-reading ability, but who has set himself up as judge and jury on how to train church musicians."

McKinney, citing growth in the seminary's music program, asked, "If the 'music curriculum is out of step' as stated by trustee Davis, why are so many churches wanting our graduates and why are so many students wanting to enroll here?"

McKinney's statement was endorsed by the seminary's 24-member music faculty.

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Home Mission Board directors
'clarify' stance on Masonry

By Bob Allen

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Stung by criticism that the Southern Baptist Convention's balanced critique of Freemasonry in 1993 amounted to a tacit endorsement of the fraternal order, trustees of the convention's Home Mission Board, which authored the report, have issued a "clarification."

The statement, adopted unanimously by trustees meeting April 12-13 in Atlanta, emphasizes the trustees disagree with Masonic teaching that individuals can attain heaven through membership in the Masonic Lodge, regardless if they profess a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

The statement reiterates the "longstanding position of the Home Mission Board" that "universalism" -- which teaches that salvation can be found outside Christianity -- is "unbiblical and heretical" whether advocated by an individual, religious body or "a fraternal order."

An attempt to take that resolve a step further and bar any Mason from appointment as a home missionary failed by the narrowest of margins. The board's chairman, Brad Allen, cast a tie-breaking vote against a policy prohibiting missionary service by Masons.

A recommendation by the Home Mission Board adopted at the 1993 Southern

Baptist Convention in Houston, said "many" tenets of Freemasonry are incompatible with Christianity but did not brand the order's teaching as heretical. The recommendation said Masonic membership should "be a matter of personal conscience."

That decision was hailed in Masonic publications and criticized by Freemasonry foes both within and outside the SBC. A small group of HMB trustees recently asked for a minority report taking a stronger stand against the Masonic Order.

Sentiment against a minority report apparently prompted the board's administrative committee to draft an additional statement. An Associated Baptist Press reporter asked permission to attend a meeting of the committee April 12 but was told the meeting was closed to the press.

Allen, pastor of First Baptist Church in Duncan, Okla., reported to trustees that the administrative committee had adopted a statement to clarify the 1993 recommendation which, he said, "left very weak the issue of membership in the Masonic Lodge."

The Home Mission Board never intended to imply embracing universalism is "just up to the personal conscience of Baptist people," Allen said.

So "that there be no misinterpretation or misunderstanding," Allen said, the administrative committee "wishes to reiterate the longstanding position of the Home Mission Board on the subject of universalism."

"Whether it be the teaching of a religious body, a fraternal order or an individual, the universalist plan for human redemption is unbiblical and heretical," he said.

It was never the board's intent, Allen said, that individual Southern Baptists feel justified to affiliate with such teaching on the basis of personal conscience.

"We would call on Southern Baptists never to embrace or perpetuate such heresy," he said.

Allen reiterated that despite claims to the contrary, last year's convention action did not simply make Masonic membership a matter of individual conscience but exhorted Southern Baptists to evaluate Freemasonry in light of the Lordship of Christ, the teaching of Scripture, the findings of the HMB report and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. "Then, personal conscience can be used," he said.

The statement does not change action taken by the board last year, Allen said. The HMB report and recommendation, which stemmed from a study of Freemasonry referred by the 1992 convention to the board's interfaith witness department "no longer belongs to us. It is the property of the SBC," he said.

The new statement is an attempt "to clarify what we took to the convention," he said. "We're changing nothing of what we took to the convention. We're simply clarifying we oppose universalism, in any form, anywhere."

Trustee Wade Armstrong of Ceredo, W.V., moved that the entire board adopt the administrative committee's statement. With the addition of an introductory clause citing "all the questions and confusion raised concerning Freemasonry" and the board's recommendation to the SBC, Armstrong's motion passed unanimously.

In discussion, several board members expressed their hope that the statement would put the Masonry issue behind the HMB forever. Ironically, minutes later, another motion related to Masons divided the board down the middle.

Board member James Guenther of Schenectady, N.Y., offered a motion asking the administrative committee to consider automatic rejection of missionary candidates who belong to the Masonic Lodge or advocate its "universal teachings."

After debate, chairman Allen called for a vote by show of hands. Initially, he announced the motion passed 30-29. Then, informed the board's secretary had also voted against, creating a 30-30 tie, Allen broke the tie by voting against the motion.

"What a way to go home," Allen quipped about casting the decisive vote in his last meeting as board chairman. "I vote in the negative. The reason is I think it is a mistake to blanket anything like this," he added.

However, he predicted that even considered case-by-case, candidates espousing support for controversial Masonic teachings likely would have a hard time being appointed to home missions service.

After the tie-breaker, Walter Collett, a trustee from Columbia, Md., asked for a roll-call vote because of confusion in the way the initial vote was counted. In the interest of waning time, he consented to allowing members to use a signed ballot to register their vote. Then another trustee asked to vote on Collett's roll-call request. Allen called for a show-of-hands and announced that a majority preferred not to vote again.

Larry Holly, a Beaumont, Texas, physician who made the 1992 motion that the convention study the Freemasonry issue, hailed the trustees' clarification statement as "a good step in the right direction" but "ultimately not enough to resolve this issue for the Home Mission Board."

Holly, the leading critic of the interfaith witness department study, had asked the HMB to clarify distortions of the report by Masons. Though he had not seen the board's new statement, based on a reporter's reading of it over the phone, he said it "comes close to doing that if it does not in fact fulfill it."

He also asked the board to renounce the interfaith witness department study, which he says is unscholarly and biased, and withdraw its 90-page printed version from circulation. The trustees did not repudiate the study but did report that no more copies are available and it will not be reprinted.

Earlier, HMB administrators had defended the study as "a major contribution to the Christian faith," Holly said. He believes the decision now not to reprint it is a tacit admission that his criticism was valid, he added.

Holly said the motion to exclude Masons from missionary service went "even further than I asked them to go."

He concurred that while an anti-Mason policy was not "objectively stated," that "functionally, the policy will be in place."

The fact that the motion failed is "unfortunate," he said, because, "We could help the local church situation if we had made the statement overtly."

Still, he said the fact that the motion failed by one vote "is little comfort to Masons -- the message is getting across."

Holly said the trustees who voted against the policy probably do not favor Freemasonry but wanted to cooperate with the administration and bring and end to controversy, "not realizing the most controversial thing in the world is truth."

Gary Leazer, the lead researcher in the HMB study, said the statement raises serious questions.

"The refusal to appoint missionaries was the reason the Southern Baptist Convention split from the Northern Baptists in 1845," Leazer said. "Are they saying to Masons it's time to get out of the convention?"

Holly estimates that 1 million Southern Baptists are members of the Masonic Lodge. Leazer said he believes a more accurate figure is about 500,000.

Leazer, who was fired last October for speaking on the Freemasonry issue after the board's president reportedly ordered him to cease any involvement

with the issue, said he disputes Holly's basic contention that Freemasonry is a religion. Since the organization welcomes both Christians and non-Christians, it is only natural that non-Christian Masonic writers would not espouse Christian views, he added.

Christian Masonic writers, on the other hand, do espouse a Christian world view.

"The problem with many Masonic writers is they are not theologians. They do not understand the nuances of theology," Leazer said. "They write in such a way that somebody who is looking for dirt on Freemasonry can find it sometimes."

Leazer said he disputes the position that Masons prevailed in the Freemasonry statement adopted by last year's convention. However, he said, "some Masons felt it was a victory because it stopped short of condemning them."

In other business at the April 12-13 board meeting, trustees elected Bob Curtis, pastor of Ballwin Baptist Church near St. Louis, Mo., as new HMB chairman. Previously he was the board's first vice chairman. He was elected by acclamation.

Other officers are Wade Armstrong, an itinerant evangelist from Ceredo, W.V., first vice chairman; Marvin Capehart, pastor of First Baptist Church of Alameda, Albuquerque, N.M., second vice chairman; Cloma Odom, a homemaker from Centerville, Ga., secretary; and Marti Hefley, a college speech teacher from Hannibal, Mo., assistant secretary.

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Church wins legal right
to feed the hungry in D.C.

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A federal court suspended a district zoning board decision April 14, permitting a Washington, D.C., church to feed homeless persons in its neighborhood.

Western Presbyterian Church sued to retain the right to run a feeding program after the District of Columbia zoning board voted to ban the ministry when the congregation moves to a new location April 17.

The 139-year-old church is scheduled to move a few blocks from its current location near the White House, and residents at the new location have complained that the feeding program will attract undesirable people to their upscale neighborhood. The congregation has maintained a feeding program for 11 years, serving breakfast to about 150 to 200 people every weekday.

Brent Walker, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, worked with the church's attorney. He said the federal district judge applied the Religious Freedom Restoration Act "to keep government from trying to tell the church how to do its ministry."

RFRA, which was signed into law in November, restored a high level of protection for religious practice abandoned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1990. Under RFRA the government must demonstrate a "compelling state interest" before it can restrict religious practice, and then it must use the least restrictive means to safeguard that interest.

The court rejected the district's argument that shutting down the homeless ministry would not "substantially burden" the church's religious liberty, Walker said. He predicted the case will be a "persuasive precedent" in similar cases in the future.

"We are very grateful to God, the judge, the religious community and the

people who got RFRA through Congress," said John Wimberly, the church's pastor.

Wimberly said publicity about the case has galvanized the city around the awareness of the contribution made by the religious community.

The church would have continued to run the feeding program with or without government permission, despite facing heavy fines, the pastor said. "We are relieved," he added.

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-- By Pam Parry

BJC joins national effort
to reduce youth violence

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A coalition of major educational, religious, police, business, sports and civil-rights organizations -- including one Baptist group -- is seeking to focus public attention on youth violence during the week April 25 through May 1.

The Baptist Joint Committee, a Washington-based religious-liberty watchdog group, joined CBS and FOX television networks and a broad range of national organizations to highlight youth violence, which results in the death of 14 children daily.

"When Jesus likened the little children to the kingdom of heaven, he placed an inexorable responsibility on all believers," said James Dunn, BJC executive director.

"We must be good stewards of our responsibility for youth, protect their innocence and opportunity to live a healthy and wholesome life and engage, through churches and schools, all our energies to prevent youth violence," he added.

The week will feature a new one-hour television program, "Kids Killing Kids," to be broadcast at 8 p.m. Tuesday, April 26, on CBS, FOX, PBS and TNT. Television star Malcolm-Jamal Warner will host the special airing.

A toll-free telephone line will be manned by trained operators who can help youths and families in crisis.

The program will be followed by a segment about youths helping others, with several local tie-in activities nationwide that will offer relief to families.

The week of social action also will feature different themes for each day, including a call to the religious community for prayers for non-violence on April 30 and May 1.

President Clinton, who has aired several public service messages on the issue of violence in America, has said he supports the effort.

In an April 4 letter to Jerry Abramson, president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Clinton said: "The tragic problem of youth violence, which so afflicts the neighborhoods of every city across America, demands the attention and concerted action of every sector of our society.

"Your effort, which has brought together so many different groups, is an important step in marshalling the vast resources of our country to reverse the deadly cycle of youth violence.

"Please be assured of our support for 'Let's Stop Kids Killing Kids Week.'"

Other religious groups represented in the coalition include the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Evangelicals for Social Action,

Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the National Council of Churches.

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-- By Pam Parry

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CORRECTION: In the April 12 ABP story "Ethics of assisted suicide....," please replace the second paragraph with the following:

Both points of view -- and others -- were aired April 6 during two public dialogues on "Ethics and Dying." The forums, which attracted about 1,000 area residents, were sponsored by Stetson University, a Baptist college in DeLand, Fla. Workshops for health-care professionals and others involved another 100 participants.

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