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Editor's note: The following story is an update of the version that ran under the same headline in the May 17 issue of ABP. New information from Southwestern trustee chairman Ralph Pulley appears in the ninth through 13th paragraph.

Terms of severance agreement
still unresolved, Dilday says

By Bob Allen

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Fired Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary president Russell Dilday said he plans to vacate his seminary-owned house by a June 7 deadline, but his long-range plans are on hold as negotiations continue over severance benefits promised by trustees.

More than two months after trustees dismissed Dilday as president of the Fort Worth, Texas, seminary -- a post he held for nearly 15 years -- Dilday said in a May 17 telephone interview that terms of the severance plan have not been finalized.

Dilday said an attorney is representing him in negotiations with leaders of Southwestern's board of trustees. At issue are terms that would permit trustees to cancel severance benefits should Dilday make statements or involve himself in activities they perceive as harmful to the seminary.

"My effort in negotiation is to avoid being muzzled or limited in my activity and to give the severance some sort of permanence so we can make further plans," Dilday said.

One tangible and immediate concern for Dilday is a place to live. Trustees permitted Dilday and his wife, Betty, to remain in the seminary-owned president's home for 90 days after the May 9 firing. Dilday said they have submitted a contract on a house in Fort Worth, and if financing is approved they will move "in a couple of weeks."

That arrangement "still is somewhat temporary, because we don't know what our longer range future is going to be," Dilday said. He said he will need to be employed another two or three years in order to accumulate adequate retirement resources.

Dilday declined to discuss details about the negotiations but said he has been paid the two month's salary and office expenses promised in a severance package approved by the board of trustees when they fired him.

During the March 7-9 meeting, trustee leaders met privately with Dilday to offer him severance benefits totaling about \$400,000 if he would retire immediately. The leaders reportedly said if he did not retire, they had the votes to fire him and he would receive severance of only two months' salary.

The full board made good on the first threat, voting 27-7 to fire Dilday after he declined to retire. However, supportive trustees persuaded the board to grant Dilday the full benefit package anyway, including his base annual salary -- about \$85,000 -- until September 1995, when he turns 65, along with a housing allowance, medical and annuity benefits and a \$3,000-a-month allowance for an off-campus office.

Ralph Pulley, a Dallas attorney and chairman of the seminary's board of trustees, said while he and Lee Weaver, trustee vice chairman, agreed to discuss concerns about the severance terms with Dilday's lawyer, they are not subject to Dilday's approval. "This is part of what the board approved for him as a dismissed employee," Pulley said. "There is nothing for him to sign."

The provisions of Dilday's severance package give trustees the right to terminate benefits if he takes new employment or engages in conduct "not in the best interest of the seminary," said Pulley. That, Pulley added, includes criticizing the trustees -- either collectively and individually -- administration, faculty or staff and working with or promoting any entity "not in harmony and cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention."

But, Pulley said, that protection does not amount to a gag order. The type of activity prohibited by the severance document "is not difficult to ascertain," he said. Dilday is free to preach, speak or discuss this theology, Pulley said.

"He certainly is entitled to his personal views provided the public or private expression of those views does not violate the conditions and requirements described in the severance package passed by the trustees on March 9," he said.

Dilday said initially he could live with those restrictions, noting nothing in the provisions would prevent him from speaking his convictions.

He did not see a written severance document until two or three weeks later, however. He told Associated Baptist Press May 17 he balked at the language placing conditions on what he could do or say and give the board of trustees arbitrary power to determine if he keeps faith with those conditions.

In other recent developments at Southwestern:

-- A mostly orderly procession of 403 graduates received degrees at the school's spring commencement May 13 at Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth. One student, Robby Jones, 25, tore the signature of Damon Shook, immediate past trustee chairman, off his master of divinity diploma to protest Dilday's firing. "I just felt I couldn't have lived with myself if I hadn't done something," Jones said.

Some students wore buttons bearing Dilday's likeness and one student marched across the stage in bare feet to accept his diploma. But most heeded an appeal by acting president William

Tolar not to let demonstrations of anger mar the ceremony. Students smiled broadly when they received their degrees. They broke into sustained applause when Tolar announced that their diplomas would bear Dilday's signature.

Faculty members had planned to wear white ribbons to the commencement to show their solidarity with Dilday, but at Tolar's request did not.

-- Dilday said he will not attend the June 15 annual gathering of Southwestern alumni and friends because it would detract from presentation of the school's distinguished alumni award, scheduled to be given to three recipients.

Some alumni had hoped the luncheon meeting at the Clarion Plaza Hotel in Orlando, Fla., would provide an opportunity for them to demonstrate support for Dilday.

However, Dilday said he has decided he will not be in Orlando either for the alumni meeting or the Southern Baptist Convention, scheduled June 14-16. "I think my being there would simply refocus attention on this whole sad affair," Dilday said. "I would rather that not happen."

Advanced ticket sales for the luncheon are reportedly well behind last year. A spokesperson in the seminary's alumni office would not comment about ticket sales, but a recent report indicated about 200 advance tickets had been sold. Typically, about half the tickets are sold in advance of the meeting, said another seminary spokesperson. About 800 alumni attended last year's meeting in Houston.

"It is my perception that people are planning not to be there," said Roberta Damon, national alumni president. "I think the fat lady has sung."

But a seminary spokesperson said the slow ticket sales may simply mean many alumni have not made up their minds about attending the luncheon. He said he expects a larger-than-usual sale of tickets at the convention.

-- Longtime administrator and teacher Scotty Gray has been appointed acting dean of the seminary's School of Church Music. He succeeds James McKinney, who retires July 31 after leading the music school 38 years.

Acting President William Tolar announced the appointment at the seminary's May 13 commencement. "I am extremely pleased we could go with an insider for acting dean of the School of Church Music and that insider is Scotty Gray," Tolar said. "I have no doubt he will be highly effective as acting dean."

Gray, executive vice president at Southwestern and member of the music school faculty since 1966, will assume the role of dean in addition to his current responsibilities Aug. 1.

Dilday recommended the music deanship be added to Gray's responsibilities in a cost-cutting staff realignment proposal that trustees blocked at the March 7-9 board meeting. The board's apparent willingness to endorse the move now on an interim basis "is an affirmation of the wisdom of the plan being recommended to the board at the last meeting," Dilday said.

Dilday predicted the alignment will be temporary, because outspoken board members critical of the music school's historic emphasis on classical training prefer an "outsider" as the permanent dean. In the interim, however, Dilday said, "I think Scotty Gray is certainly the best person to handle that job."

One complaint leveled by trustees against Dilday was he was not responsive to their insistence that the music school broaden its emphasis to include more training in popular and contemporary music. Both Dilday and music school faculty members say trustee concerns were taken seriously.

-- Scott Collins, director of public relations for Southwestern, will leave the seminary to take a similar post with Buckner Baptist Benevolences in Dallas. "I felt I couldn't work in that environment anymore," he said of the seminary. "But I feel this is providential. Buckner is a great organization." Owned by the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Buckner operates nine children's homes and four retirement centers and offers adoptions, child assessments and other

services.

-- While Dilday's firing spawned a flurry of inquiries about Baylor University's new George W. Truett Theological Seminary, the Waco, Texas, school remains on target for an inaugural class of about 50 students, said dean Robert Sloan.

The school announced May 12 the acceptance of its first student, Chad Prevost of Richmond, Va., who May 14 received an undergraduate degree from Baylor. Classes at Truett are scheduled to begin in August. They will be held at First Baptist Church of Waco until a permanent seminary facility is built.

Sloan said the Truett seminary has stated it is willing to increase the enrollment ceiling if necessary to accommodate students seeking an alternative to Southwestern. "I think the situation at Southwestern is still unresolved," Sloan said.

Most current Southwestern students are likely waiting for further fallout and to learn who the next president will be, Sloan said. Typically, those already enrolled will be inclined to finish their degrees at Southwestern, if possible. The largest impact on enrollment will most likely not be transfers, he said, but a decline in new students. Next year's application process was well in progress when Dilday's unexpected firing occurred, Sloan said.

-- Another denominational casualty, Lloyd Elder, who was forced out as president of the Baptist Sunday School Board by adversarial trustees, has written a reponse to a mass mailing from Southwestern Seminary trustee officers. Elder, who earlier served as seminary vice president under Dilday, offered a detailed critique of the trustee mailing, which was sent to 40,000 Southern Baptist churches to state the trustees' rationale for firing Dilday. Elder listed 72 questions, asking for full response and documentation by May 15.

Elder said May 17 that he received a letter of acknowledgement from trustee chairman Ralph Pulley, but that response did not answer his questions or request for documentation. Elder said he wrote a follow-up letter reiterating his request.

-- Friends and supporters of the ousted president have scheduled a dinner to honor Dilday and his wife June 6 at a Dallas hotel. Among the planners are Ken Cooper, who before Dilday's termination chaired the Southwestern Council, a fund-raising group, and Wayne Allen, a conservative trustee who opposed Dilday's firing.

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-- Jim Jones of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram contributed to this story.

America's moral, spiritual condition
in 'Absolute Confusion,' Barna says

By Mark Wingfield

GLENDALE, Calif. (ABP) -- "Absolute Confusion," best describes America's moral and spiritual condition, according to pollster George Barna.

That's the title of his new book, the third in a series of annual profiles of American attitudes on a wide range of issues.

There's good news and bad news for the church in this report.

The good news is that there is plenty of room for the church to make a significant impact on a deteriorating culture, Barna writes. "Millions of adults are desperately seeking the keys that will unlock the secrets to achieve significance in life and bring them greater fulfillment. ... Comparatively few have arrived at what is deemed to be a reasonable or satisfying conclusion."

But the bad news is that the church hasn't fared well in influencing society so far, he adds. With that in mind, he offers nine challenges to Christians, based on findings from this year's report and previous reports:

-- Churches need strong leaders. "The need for strong, visionary leaders is acute," he notes. "To revolutionize a secularized culture such as ours, we need the cream of the crop at the helm of each church, to motivate, encourage and direct our ministry energies."

In another of his books, "Today's Pastors," Barna gives further explanation to this challenge: "Our churches are failing to have much influence because we have good-hearted, well-intentioned pastors in our churches, who, by their own admission, do not possess the ability to lead people."

-- Teach the basics. "Before we can hope to create a church that is a spiritual force to be reckoned with, the people who are the church must have a solid comprehension of what they believe and why," Barna suggests.

The problem today, he explains, is that most church members don't know the basics of the faith they espouse. And in real life, Christians make decisions off-the-cuff, without any sense of a holistic, biblical worldview, he says.

-- Focus on the unchurched. The American church is ministering on automatic pilot, Barna charges, rather than by the Great Commission.

"Evangelistically, we have a terrible track record. Concerning discipleship, our record is no better," he adds.

Meanwhile, one of every four American adults is unchurched, and at least that many more are only nominally churched, Barna reports. "In other words, probably more than half of all adults in this country are not really living in a true community of faith."

The challenge to the church, he says, is to begin living by the Great Commission, Jesus' command to go into the world and make disciples of all nations.

-- Live love. The American church could set itself apart from the larger society drastically by one action, Barna suggests: Aggressively pursuing interracial harmony.

"What a clear and powerful message we would send to a me-first, materialistic, distrusting world by truly serving other people, sacrificing to meet their needs, consistently striving for unity with others -- especially when those others are of a different color, upbringing or locale."

Based on current trends, the consequences of not pursuing racial harmony are likely to be dire, he projects. "We can virtually count on race riots ripping America apart in the next 10 years unless radical steps are taken by key people in our nation to defuse the impending explosion."

-- Live differently. Despite the Bible's admonition for Christians to be in the world but not of it, polls consistently find little difference in attitudes and actions between Christians and non-Christians in most areas, Barna reports.

The most notable differences are found in comparing the small segment of the population described as "evangelicals" to the larger society, he says.

-- Use resources wisely. The American church and American Christians have a skewed understanding of how to use the resources God has given them, Barna asserts.

"The issue we must focus on is not a lack of funds but how we use the resources at our disposal," he says, noting that Christian churches in America collect \$50 million annually -- more than the annual budget of many nations of the world.

But that money gets spent in ways inconsistent with the Great Commission, he says. For example, American churches spend five dollars on buildings and property maintenance for every one dollar spent on evangelistic activity.

-- Strengthen the family. Americans have heard plenty about the problems facing the family today, Barna says, but not nearly enough about what to do to strengthen families.

This could be addressed practically through providing tangible assistance to individuals,

fostering close relationship-building both inside and outside the family, and fighting for the family in the public arena, he suggests.

-- Learn media discernment. Despite Christians' protests about the negative influences of modern media, they are just as likely as anyone else to be influenced by these forces, Barna says.

"The truth is that Christians are virtually indistinguishable from other adults in their media consumption habits," he writes. "Our study indicates that the mother lode of immoral programming -- MTV -- is just as popular among Christians as non-Christians."

-- Pray earnestly. In extensive studies of churches that have become healthy models of ministry or that have reversed a severe decline to become healthy again, two things have been present in every case, Barna reports. Those things are a visionary leader and a "deep, lasting commitment to prayer."

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What Americans believe
subject of research

GLENDALE, Calif. (ABP) -- Based on research gathered over the last three years, pollster George Barna offers this profile of the aggregate belief system of Americans:

- Four out of 10 people believe Jesus made mistakes.
- Two out of three people reject the notion of absolute truth.
- One out of three adults believe God is something or someone other than the perfect, all-powerful, omniscient Creator of the universe who lives and rules the world today.
- Three out of five do not believe in Satan.
- About half believe all religious faiths are basically the same.
- Three out of five say all people pray to the same god, regardless of what name or character that god is addressed by.
- Bible knowledge is thin. Most Americans can't name half the Ten Commandments of who preached the Sermon on the Mount.

Source: "Absolute Confusion," George Barna.

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Two groups file suit against
D.C. school-prayer initiative

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A proposed school-prayer initiative that would allow student-initiated voluntary prayer in District of Columbia public schools has been challenged by People for the American Way and the National Capital Area American Civil Liberties Union.

The two groups filed suit May 16 against the D.C. Board of Elections, stating that the school prayer initiative is unconstitutional and a threat to religious freedom.

"Under this initiative, school officials will become religion police with the authority to say which prayers are unacceptable and which are not," said Judith Schaeffer, People for the American Way senior staff attorney.

The initiative, sponsored by council member and former mayor Marion Barry and co-sponsored

by four other members, would allow student-initiated prayer during required or voluntary school-related assemblies, sporting events, graduation and at other student events. Barry's press representative was unavailable for comment May 20.

Students pray in public schools in ways that do not infringe on the religious rights and freedoms of others, such as silent prayers or grace before meals, Schaeffer said.

"But when we require the public schools to have vocal, organized prayer at all school events, including daily classes," she said, "we trample on the constitutional rights of our school children.

"We violate the separation of church and state that is the guardian of our religious liberty that has allowed religious freedom to flourish in this country for over 200 years," Schaeffer added.

Wilbert Miller, pastor of Augustana Lutheran Church and a supporter of the suit, said that God cannot be taken out of schools. He was joined by Jenice View, a parent and citizen, who said she believes prayer belongs with families.

This measure is a re-draft of a similar 1993 initiative rejected by the D.C. Board of Elections on constitutional grounds.

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-- By Ashley Householder

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