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Southwestern trustees unanimously elect Ken Hemphill as president

By Greg Warner

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Kenneth Hemphill of Atlanta was unanimously elected president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary July 28 by trustees hoping to bring an end to six months of unrest at the world's largest theological school.

Hemphill, 46, a church-growth specialist and former Virginia pastor, was elected by the trustee board during a closed-door meeting on the Fort Worth, Texas, campus. The trustees met in the same room where on March 9 they voted 27-7 to fire Russell Dilday, the school's president for 15 years.

Trustees charged Dilday with blocking conservative reforms at the 4,000-student school, one of six Southern Baptist seminaries. Hemphill is seen as more in accord with the conservative-dominated board and promises to steer Southwestern, which already has a conservative reputation, on the rightward course adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in recent years.

Hemphill described his election as both "humbling and exciting" in a press conference after the meeting. "While being awed by the opportunity," he added, "I am nonetheless confident God doesn't call anyone to a task he has not already equipped him for?"

He pledged to trustees "my best efforts and my full cooperation." To faculty, he pledged leadership, friendship and a commitment to ministry. To students, he promised "a quality academic education combined with practical ministry skills taught in the context of a caring Christian community?"

Trustees who left their March meeting deeply divided, stood resolutely behind their choice for the seminary's seventh president. Gone was talk of division on the board.

"We are excited and we are united," said Miles Seaborn of Fort Worth, chairman of the search committee. For Southwestern, Seaborn said, "This is the brightest, most God-honoring day that it has ever known."

The vote was unanimous on a secret ballot of the 37 trustees present at the called board meeting, said Ralph

Pulley of Dallas, trustee chairman.

The nomination of the affable, energetic Hemphill had been widely praised, particularly by those who feared the conservative-dominated trustee board would choose a more strident figure for the key position.

While an avowed biblical inerrantist who supports the conservative swing in the SBC, Hemphill has stayed on the sidelines during the denomination's political machinations of the last 15 years. He did enter the fray briefly in 1990, earning kudos from conservative leaders when he and a handful of previously unaligned pastors endorsed the conservative movement -- and tacitly its candidate for SBC president.

Asked what he might do to bring healing to the beleaguered seminary, Hemphill said, "I think the healing process has already begun." Does he see resistance to his election? "I'd be naive if I said 'no' but I really don't," he said.

Hemphill, who has two degrees from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and a doctorate from Cambridge University in England, said he is "honored" Southwestern would choose a president who is not a graduate of the school -- which some observers consider a handicap. "Maybe they'll give me an honorary degree or something," he quipped.

Being an outsider may have some advantage, he added. "I come in bringing that clean slate."

Hemphill said he has "lots of ideas" about how to improve the school but will wait until he meets with faculty and administrators before discussing them.

Asked if Southwestern's faculty is too liberal -- a charge frequently hurled at other SBC seminaries in recent years -- Hemphill said he is not yet in a position to judge. "No one has led me to believe the faculty is sprinkled with liberals. We do intend to keep the seminary lashed to the cross. I don't sense there is going to have to be a wrecking crew in here."

"Every institution has a right to set limits and boundaries," he said, and the seminary will adhere to the doctrinal guidelines of the "Baptist Faith and Message" statement of 1963 and the 1987 SBC Peace Committee Report, both of which he said affirm biblical inerrancy, the belief that the Bible is free of any error.

Only inerrantists will be added to the faculty, he said. As for current faculty members who don't use the term "inerrancy" to describe their view, Hemphill said, "I'm not as concerned about a term as I am a spirit, an attitude and a conviction."

He said trustees extracted no promises about changes he will make at the school.

Hemphill declined to speculate on the future of the School of Church Music, a point of contention for some trustees who charge it focuses too heavily on "high church" styles at the expense of training in contemporary and popular music. Hemphill said the music school should emphasize both classical training and music that touches people. "Our purpose is not so much to turn out people who are great technical musicians but great worship leaders," he said.

Asked if he would "punish" members of the faculty who belong to churches that support the SBC-rival Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the new president said, "I'm not sure how you punish faculty." The seminary will abide by its governing documents in dealing with faculty, he said. But he added, "It is important for the faculty of this school to be supportive of Cooperative Program (the SBC's central budget). It pays our salaries. ... That is our heritage. That is our future." He said he hopes faculty would be involved in churches "that are fully supportive of our task."

Hemphill was asked if Dilday would be welcome back on the campus, but before he could answer Seaborn interrupted to rule the question "out of order." Earlier Seaborn said he would not allow questions about past board actions or anything that did not address "the future and the love and reality of this moment."

Pulley later declined to state Hemphill's salary but said it is "comparable" to that paid other seminary presidents and Dilday. He said trustees questioned Hemphill for about 45 minutes during the closed session. Then, after praying, voted on written ballots.

The meeting was closed to all but trustees, Pulley said, because "we wanted everybody to be free to have whatever discussion they wanted without outside interpretation."

Hemphill has directed the Southern Baptist Center for Church Growth in Atlanta, a joint venture of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the Baptist Sunday School Board, since 1992. Before that, he was pastor of First Baptist Church in Norfolk, Va., which grew from 975 resident members to 6,529 during his 11-year

tenure.

He has written six books on church growth and is considered in Southern Baptist circles a guru on the subject.

A native of Morgantown, N.C., Hemphill is a graduate of Wake Forest University. Hemphill's wife, the former Paula Moore of Greenville, S.C., is a past trustee of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. They have three daughters.

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Study calls strong families key to rescuing 'troubled' children

By Lacy Thompson

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- America's children are in trouble and strong families are the key to their rescue, a new report suggests.

"Strong, capable, resourceful families are the sine qua non (the essential condition) of improving outcomes for children," reported the 1994 Kids Count Data Book, a study published annually by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Washington.

"The inescapable reality is that we have no alternative, no substitute for families," the report said. "There is no institution, program or policy available that will successfully rear kids in the absence of strong families."

Almost 4 million of the nation's children now live in "severely stressed neighborhoods" beset by poverty, unemployment and family disintegration, the report said.

The study tracks key areas related to children and their well-being. Despite improvement in some areas, overall numbers and trends point to trouble for American youth. The report listed six problem areas which worsened between 1985 and 1991:

-- Low birth-weight, which is linked with later developmental problems, increased 5 percent.

-- Births to single teenagers increased 20 percent, citing alarm. "Research indicates that children born to single teenage mothers are more likely to drop out of school, to give birth out of wedlock, to divorce or separate and to be dependent on welfare," the data book notes.

-- The arrest rate for juvenile violent crime jumped 50 percent. The study notes that 1985 was a statistically low year for juvenile arrests and that this area has improved slightly in the last two or three years.

-- The number of teenagers who graduated from high school on time dropped 4 percent. In 1991, only 68.8 percent of students who should have completed their senior year did so. Meanwhile, the cost of not having a high school diploma increased, the report said.

-- Violent death among teenagers increased 13 percent, even though one category -- deaths related to automobiles -- declined. The overall rise is due to increased homicides and suicides among teenagers. "Every two hours in America today a child dies of a gunshot wound," the report said.

-- The number of children living in single-parent homes continues to rise, jumping 11 percent in six years. "Children growing up in single-parent households typically do not have the same economic, housing or human resources available as those growing up in two-parent families," the report said. Assistance programs help, but rarely make up the difference, it said.

Other areas, however, showed improvement between 1985 and 1991. Infant mortality declined 16 percent. The child death rate improved by 9 percent. The number of teenagers not in school or the work force dropped 7 percent. And the number of children living in poverty fell by 4 percent, which may reflect a leveling off in child poverty. Still, that trend remains high, with one American child in five living in poverty.

One devastating trend in recent years has been the decline of key institutions in the nation's troubled neighborhoods, including churches, the report said. Churches and other institutions are necessary "to shield children and families from the economic and social disadvantage that surrounds them."

The report said churches and other institutions must make a sustained commitment to make a difference in troubled communities and families.

"There are some 4 million children growing up in communities that cannot assure them the childhood and the hope to which all American kids are entitled," it said. "The most obvious way -- and perhaps the only way -- to change the odds and outcomes that these kids face is to help change and empower the communities in which they face them."

"Community institutions ... must become more powerful resources for the neighborhoods and people they serve," the report said.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: State-by-state statistics from the study are available on request from the Louisiana Baptist Message.

Senate amends education bill to protect legal school prayer

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Senate attached an amendment to a major education bill that threatens the loss of federal funds to schools which ban constitutionally protected prayer after rejecting a more stringent approach July 27.

The Senate adopted an amendment offered by Sen. Nancy Kassebaum, R-Kan., to the Improving America's Schools Act (S. 1513), which would authorize \$12.5 billion in spending next year and set learning standards for local schools.

The Kassebaum amendment warns that a school district can lose federal education funds if a federal court decides it violates constitutional rights with respect to prayer and then refuses to correct its policy or practice.

The Senate rejected, 53-47, a more general amendment offered by Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., that would deny funds to local school districts that fail to safeguard constitutionally protected prayer.

Neither amendment was necessary, said one church-state specialist, because they deal with rights that are already protected. But Brent Walker, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee said he preferred Kassebaum's because it clarifies the issue for school officials and protects both the right to pray and not to pray.

Walker said the Helms amendment would have forced school administrators and teachers "to make exceedingly complex and technical judgments about an unsettled area of constitutional law" on which even the U.S. Supreme Court is often divided.

Helms' remedy was excessively harsh and would have increased federal meddling in decisions made by local school boards, Walker said.

"The holy act of prayer should be left to its proper place -- the hearts and minds of students," Walker said. "It ought not be turned into a political football. We would all do well to spend more time in prayer and less time trying to pass laws about it."

But James Smith, director of government relations for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, said the Southern Baptist Convention's moral concerns agency supported the Helms amendment because it would have shifted the burden for exercising rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and statutes from students to school districts.

Even though the Equal Access Act is on the books, Smith said, cases occur where school officials "thumb their nose" at students who attempt to exercise rights guaranteed in the law. In those cases, only those students willing to sue are protected.

The Kassebaum amendment "takes the teeth out" of the Helms proposal, Smith said. "We felt like the Helms amendment would be a way to put a burden on the side of those who attempt to withhold rights of students."

Still, Smith said, he is "not terribly surprised at the outcome" and expects the Kassebaum language to appear in the bill's final form.

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-- By Pam Parry and Bob Allen

Missouri Baptist College to have Mormon neighbors

ST. LOUIS (ABP) -- Missouri Baptist College would have preferred other uses than a Mormon temple for adjoining property the college formerly owned. But at this point about all the St. Louis college can do is try to be a good neighbor.

The 14-acre temple site, located on U.S. 40 near a major intersection with Interstate 270 in suburban St. Louis, was part of 35 acres the college -- to avert a financial crisis -- sold in 1985 to a development company for an undisclosed amount. Four years later the company, itself on the verge of bankruptcy, resold part of the parcel to the Mormons.

"The basic fact is that we didn't sell to the Mormons," said the college's interim president Tom Field. "Our hands are tied in the whole situation."

College officials attempted to exercise a clause in the original sale contract permitting them to block the June 1990 sale to the Mormon Church, which the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board classifies as a cult. Convinced, however, that without the sale the developer would file bankruptcy and the Baptist college would lose all control over use of the property, the college instead negotiated the right to repurchase 16 acres of the site for a buffer between the school and the temple. A neighboring homeowner bought the remaining five acres.

An alternative plan, to raise the approximately \$3 million the college would need to buy the entire 35 acres, also failed. An area pastor sent a last-minute appeal to the Home Mission Board for financial help, to which board President Larry Lewis responded he understood the sale was a done deal.

Ground was broken for the temple in late 1993. The building, which will have a white granite exterior and a 150-foot spire and will cost around \$8 million, is scheduled for completion in 1995.

It will be the 50th Mormon temple in the world and will serve 84,000 Mormons in several Midwest states.

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Episcopal bishops bless unions, but not ordination, of gays

NEW YORK (ABP) -- The nation's Episcopal bishops have issued a statement that blesses lifelong, committed and faithful relationships between homosexuals but disapproves of ordaining gays to the ministry, Associated Press reported July 27.

A final draft of a pastoral letter from leaders of the 2.5-million-member denomination said sexual relationships "reach their fullest potential for good and minimize their capacity for evil when in the context of chaste, faithful and committed lifelong unions between mature adults."

"There are those who believe," the letter continued, "this is as true for homosexual as for heterosexual relationships and that such relationships need and should receive the pastoral care of the church."

Ordination, however, is a different matter, the bishops said, recommending that the church ordain only "persons we believe to be a wholesome example to their people, according to the standards and norms set forth by

the church's teaching."

The bishops had decided to keep their work confidential to avoid controversy until they presented their final draft to the denomination's General Convention Aug. 24 in Indianapolis, but a copy of the letter's fourth and fifth draft was leaked to AP, the wire service reported.

Several Episcopal bishops have ordained homosexuals in recent years despite the denomination's official stance discouraging the practice.

Several religious groups have grappled with the issue, but only one major denomination, the United Church of Christ, officially allows the ordination of homosexuals.

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