

Associated Baptist Press

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In this issue:

- Fired seminary president takes job with Baylor
- CORRECTION

Fired seminary president takes job with Baylor

By Bob Allen

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Russell Dilday, out of work since his March 9 firing as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has taken a new job at Baylor University.

Dilday, 63, will join the faculty of the Waco, Texas, school Aug. 1, as distinguished professor of homiletics at the new George W. Truett Theological Seminary and special assistant to the university's president.

The July 29 announcement by Baylor President Herbert Reynolds followed by one day the election of Dilday's successor at Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, Ken Hemphill of Atlanta.

Dilday said the timing of his decision with Hemphill's election is coincidental, but it does help bring closure to a "stormy interlude" in his life.

"I think it's an opportunity for us to put this relationship behind us and move on to a few things," Dilday said.

The timing was dictated, however, by a continuing dispute between Dilday and Southwestern trustee officers about terms of a severance agreement adopted by the board of trustees in March, he said.

Dilday said the trustees refuse to provide the full compensation package they promised in March, including an \$85,000 annual salary he claims he is supposed to receive until his 65th birthday in September 1995.

The board's chairman, Ralph Pulley, however, says the trustees' pledge contained a condition that Dilday's salary would be paid only if he did not take another job. "Once he takes another job we have no obligation to pay him further," said Pulley, a Dallas attorney. "We're not going to be involved in duplicate payment."

After four months of attempting to resolve the conflict, Dilday said it is time to move on.

In a prepared statement, Dilday said "unreasonable and arbitrary conditions enforced by the (trustee) chairman made it impossible to depend on the severance as our income from month to month," leading him to seek employment for at least another three or four years.

Dilday said attempts to resolve the problem with the board's chairman and vice chairman yielded only responses that were "curt, arbitrary and inflexible, giving no indication of good-faith negotiations."

"I am deeply disappointed in their unyielding stance, but now I must give attention to my own future direction," Dilday said.

Pulley was unavailable for further comment.

Dilday said his attorney wrote to trustee leaders setting one last deadline to resolve the dispute, which passed without a response. Asked if he is considering legal action, Dilday said, "I don't have plans for that right now."

In his new job, Dilday's time will be divided roughly two-thirds in classroom and one third in the presidential

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assistant role, said Reynolds.

Dilday said he will teach courses in preaching, interpretation and "biblical leadership" at Truett Seminary, which is scheduled to hold its first classes in temporary facilities at First Baptist Church in Waco this fall.

In his role as special assistant to the president, Dilday said he will participate in official functions, represent the university at the president's request and "interpret Baylor and its program to the various constituencies."

One of Dilday's greatest successes at Southwestern was fund-raising. Some observers believed whoever gained his services might also be able to attract some of the large donors that stopped supporting the seminary after Dilday's firing.

Both Dilday and Reynolds, however, said raising money for Baylor will be only an incidental part of the job. Reynolds said fund-raising is included in the assignment only "to the degree that (it) would be a by-product" of the presidential assistant responsibilities.

Dilday said he received other offers for employment after leaving Southwestern, but was attracted to Baylor by his long affiliation with the school and the program of "professional training in a context of authentic Baptist tradition informed by conservative biblical theology" offered by Truett Seminary.

Dilday and his wife, Betty, met in a Bible class as students at Baylor and all of their three children are graduates of the school. He has been a Baylor trustee and taught on the school's religion faculty in the 1950s.

"Sensing a profound debt of gratitude to Baylor, we feel positive about serving there again after all these years," Dilday said.

In the past, Dilday's name has been mentioned as a potential coordinator for a theological education consortium of Texas Baptist schools, one of several options being considered by a special Baptist General Convention of Texas committee appointed in June to study alternatives for ministerial training in the state.

Reynolds said it is "difficult to know the impact" Dilday's choice of the Baylor job might have on the proposed consortium. With Dilday's reputation and following among Texas Baptists, however, Reynolds predicted "it would give pause for reflection" for leaders weighing the option.

Dilday said he has worked closely with the study committee and will continue to provide the group whatever help he can. While Baylor "is having to move ahead" with its own plans, he said, "I would suspect Baylor would be very much a cooperative, collaborative player in whatever recommendation the Texas committee comes out with."

Another factor that could affect the committee's thinking is what impact Hemphill's election at Southwestern might have on fund-raising and recruiting potential for any new theological education ventures.

Though sympathetic to the same conservative movement in the Southern Baptist Convention that prompted Dilday's firing, Hemphill is reputed to be apolitical and a peacemaker at heart. Observers expect him to ease the tensions that have gripped the seminary's campus in the four months since the firing.

Reynolds said it is "hard to say" if Hemphill's election will diminish support for alternative ventures including Truett. He predicted it will take two to four years to "see the full impact" of changes at Southwestern in recent months. He noted, however, that Baylor was prepared to open the Truett school even before Dilday's firing.

Dilday said he holds Hemphill in "high regard," but noted "the same board of trustees is still in control and determining the future of the seminary."

Dilday said the qualities and abilities that led Southwestern trustees to Hemphill were identical to the criteria used during the search that preceded his election to the post in 1978. "The one difference is then they did not expect loyalty to a political party in the convention," he said.

Dilday was asked if statements he made in the past saying he does not endorse the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate organization protesting changes in the SBC by offering alternative missions programs, contradict his affiliating with Truett, which receives Fellowship money.

"I don't think there's any connection between Truett and Baylor and the CBF," Dilday said. He noted that Southwestern, too, has received money from the Fellowship.

"I still do not see the CBF as the primary alternative for Texas Baptists in these days," Dilday said.

-- Greg Warner contributed to this story.

CORRECTION: Please replace the fourth and fifth paragraphs of the July 28 story, "Southwestern trustees unanimously elect Ken Hemphill as president" with the following:

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."

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