

Associated Baptist Press

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Ordained student director asked to leave her position

By Bob Allen

GALVESTON, Texas (ABP) -- A Baptist campus minister and the local association that is divided over her request to be ordained failed to reach a compromise aimed at salvaging her ministry at a University of Texas medical school.

The executive board of Galveston Baptist Association voted Aug. 29 that Raye Nelle Dyer be "removed with haste" from her position as Baptist Student Union director at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas, a job she has held since 1985.

The association sponsors the BSU position jointly with the Baptist General Convention of Texas. While the association lacks power to fire her outright, "when a local association disapproves of a BSU worker, they (state leaders) have to do something," Dyer said.

She said the decision now lies with Jack Greever, state student director, to "relocate me or to get me to resign or to fire me," Dyer said. She said she expected to talk about options with Greever for the first time Aug. 30.

Greever told the Baptist Standard of Texas that he would follow the association's request that Dyer be removed. Any transfer could be recommended only with her permission and must be approved by the association co-sponsoring the work, Greever said. He said he expects to reach some decision within a week.

Dyer, 43, became the focus of a controversy that divided the association when she sought ordination to the gospel ministry in 1991 at First Baptist Church in Galveston. She left the church in a flap that ensued. Eventually she was ordained, in a neighboring association, by South Main Baptist Church in Houston.

A BSU advisory committee of the Galveston Association sought to have Dyer removed from the position in February, blaming her "strong-willed determination" to be ordained for a "chasm" in the association. At a called meeting in July, however, the association's executive board voted instead to appoint a committee to outline steps to seek reconciliation.

The committee's 10 recommendations, presented at the Aug. 29 meeting, included that Dyer agree her handling of her request to be ordained was "divisive and inconsiderate" and that she offer "a sincere apology" to both her former church and the association. They also asked that Dyer and the association "agree that this is a family matter

and that the press is not to be the vehicle that we use to promote our views," a condition she termed a "gag order." Dyer said she considered the guidelines "offensive" and that they seemed to imply "that I haven't been doing my job."

Dyer expressed disappointment with the whole process and said she doubts the committee carried out its assignment in good faith. "At this point it's hard for me to believe most of them sought reconciliation in the first place," she said.

Dyer said she had understood she and the committee would work together on the guidelines, but she had no input until being asked to respond to them near the end of the process in a meeting Thursday, Aug. 25.

Each of the guidelines was "Raye Nelle do, Raye Nelle do, Raye Nelle do," she said, "after they had made the statement to me we would work together and negotiate."

At the end of the meeting, she said, they presented a statement that said Dyer had not been conciliatory and asked she "be removed with haste."

In an executive session lasting an hour, the executive board voted 29-10 to ask that Dyer be removed.

Grayson Glass, director of missions for Galveston Association, told the Baptist Standard the request to relocate Dyer was based on "differences that have been irreconcilable."

"We felt it was best for all concerned that she work somewhere else," he said.

While some members of the executive board saw the vote on Dyer as a referendum on women's ordination, Glass said, for most the main concern was a "series of events" that came about because of the manner in which she pursued her request to be ordained.

"Mostly it was a fellowship thing," he said.

While grieved and concerned for the students in her ministry, Dyer said she is unrepentant. "I continue to feel that I haven't done anything wrong," she said, labeling her dismissal "discrimination."

Dyer said she doesn't know how long she will be permitted to stay in Galveston, but she continues to minister to the campus. "We had a student die yesterday and I am in the middle of dealing with that," she said. "I need some time to wrap things up. I plan on being here this week. I have not been told otherwise."

Phill Martin, administrator at South Main Baptist Church, the church that ordained Dyer, said he is disappointed a compromise could not be reached. "I think the most tragic part of this is from their (the association's) perspective the whole controversy ensued because of something Raye Nelle had done and they expected her to apologize for causing the controversy. In reality the only way she could have avoided causing the controversy was to turn away from something she saw as the call of God. Personally, I respect her for doing what she believes is following the leadership of God in her life."

Dyer said she believes her leaving will not solve problems in the association. "I think the ramifications of this are going to be wide," she said. "I'm real concerned about the kind of signal this gives to people in this part of the world."

People in the community "are just irate," she said. "I think its irreparable, the damage that's being done."

Dyer said if she had it to do over, she would still want to be ordained. "I still feel that I was following the Lord's leadership in my life. I have no regrets. I feel like I am leaving with my integrity intact. I just don't know what's going to happen next."

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-- Toby Druin contributed to this story.

**Southern faculty supports Marshall,
says dismissal policy needs changing**

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- The faculty of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has registered a formal objection to the forced termination of professor Molly Marshall and called on seminary administrators to change the policies that govern faculty dismissal.

These two items were the topics of resolutions passed by the faculty Aug. 26 in their first meeting of the academic year. Marshall, a tenured associate professor of theology, recently agreed to resign rather than be fired by President Albert Mohler.

Mohler claims Marshall holds beliefs beyond the bounds of the seminary's doctrinal statement, the Abstract of Principles. Marshall and most of her colleagues have said Marshall's beliefs are not outside the Abstract.

"In our opinion, her theology is in accordance with and not contrary to the Abstract of Principles," the faculty said in the resolution, which passed on a vote of 44 to eight, with six abstentions. "As best as we can discern, we affirm Dr. Marshall's deeply experienced call of God on her life to serve the Kingdom of God at this institution."

The faculty resolution praised Marshall as "a consummate classroom teacher and an admired academician" and noted deep grief over "the loss by resignation of yet another valued colleague."

Although Marshall's departure is the most controversial of recent years, she joins a stream of scholars who have left Southern Baptists' oldest theological school under pressure or protest as conservative trustees have changed the environment there.

The resolution on Marshall says: "We respectfully implore the president to begin the process of moving our community beyond the environment of fear and to restore both the letter and the spirit of the Covenant. The current atmosphere is detrimental to sound theological education, scholarly inquiry and Christian fellowship."

The "Covenant" is a reference to the 1991 Covenant Renewal, a sort of peace treaty between trustees and faculty.

The second faculty resolution called for changes in the procedures by which faculty discipline is administered. It passed by a vote of 44 to two, with 11 abstentions.

Specifically, the resolution asks that:

- The president alone deal directly with a faculty member whose teachings are under scrutiny.
- That no charges be filed or intimated on the basis of standards that have not been clearly communicated to all concerned.
 - That prior to presenting official charges of dismissal to trustees, the president give, in a confidential format, written specifications of the charges to the faculty member.
 - That the "overriding purpose" of the president will be to guide the faculty member to reconcile his or her teaching with the Abstract of Principles, "and that these procedures will not be conducted in a spirit of inquisition, but rather in a spirit of mutual respect and mutual commitment to the life of this institution."
- That only after the president has failed in efforts at reconciliation will formal charges of dismissal be brought.

Since faculty meetings are private, no press representatives were in attendance when the two resolutions were passed. However, a news release from the seminary quoted some of Mohler's comments to the faculty in response to the resolutions.

"Insofar as members of this faculty wish to suggest ways we can learn from this experience, I will give full consideration to such suggestions," Mohler is quoted as saying in response to the resolution on faculty discipline. "Nevertheless, the purpose of the disciplinary process stands, and it is a necessary and unavoidable responsibility of the institution."

Mohler reportedly told the faculty he had faced a difficult decision but ultimately did what he believed was correct. "We all face moments when we have to say, 'This is what I believe is fundamentally right,' and even if a price must be paid, we pay it."

Billy sticks and Bibles -- Kentucky pastor uses both

By Melanie Childers

MURRAY, Ky. (ABP) -- Scott Bivins believes billy sticks and Bibles don't have to be mutually exclusive. As both a pastor and a police officer, Bivins carefully uses tools of both trades, he said, each in its appropriate context, of course.

Balancing his role as pastor of Northside Baptist Church in Almo Heights with his third-shift responsibility of patrolling Murray, Ky., streets demands a lot of discretion but also provides an abundance of opportunities, he said.

"Pastors are often accused of not being aware of community needs," the bivocational pastor said. But through his role as a police officer, he thinks he has overcome that criticism.

Another benefit of serving bivocationally is an expanded circle of influence, Bivins noted. "There are about 25 sworn officers (on the force). They're like another congregation."

Bivins also considers people on the street -- many of whom likely never would attend church -- as part of his ministry. "Being bivocational has given me a chance to build relationships with people who wouldn't want to get to know a pastor," he said.

Bivins always has enjoyed being around police work, he said. He formerly served as a volunteer chaplain to the police department in Greenville, Ky., his hometown.

So it seemed natural for him to volunteer the same services when he moved to Murray with his wife, Dana, and their young son, Joshua, in 1990 to serve at Northside Baptist. Murray's police force had never had a chaplain before, he said.

"I tried to minister to the officers and their families in times of need," he explained. "I wanted to be available for any crisis situation in the community."

However, Bivins admitted, breaking into the tightknit police circle was difficult at first. "Police officers are unique people. ... They don't open up to a lot of people. It takes a while to build trust with them."

Eventually, though, as Bivins would ride with officers on duty and lead the Sunday morning devotional services, they began to warm up to him.

Bivins' volunteer work led to more opportunities with the Murray Police Department. In February 1991, he was hired as a communications officer, a position which later was expanded to citation officer.

In January 1994, Bivins was offered a full-time position as patrol officer. At first, he was hesitant to accept the position out of fear it might take too much time away from his congregation. But with the support of his family and the church, he said, "I realized a key point in ministry is being with people."

"I prayed that if this job ever conflicts with or hinders my ministry, I would have the wisdom to walk away from it," he explained. Instead, the Lord used the police work to strengthen his ministry, he said.

Bivins credited Northside members with much of his success in balancing the two jobs. Besides church members' willingness to pitch in and help with extra visitation and other responsibilities, Bivins said, he appreciates their understanding.

"They have confidence in their pastor, that what he's doing is what he considers God's will," he said. "And they're supportive. This wouldn't work with just any church."

Out of a total membership of 110, the church averages about 50 people on Sunday mornings, Bivins said.

Since he works third shift, from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., Bivins said he usually sleeps until early afternoon, then makes pastoral visits and prepares his sermons during the afternoons.

"The joy is knowing I'm in God's will," Bivins concluded. "The greatest thrill in all I do is preaching. That means more than anything outside my personal family."

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