

Associated Baptist Press

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the only ABP issue planned for the week. Merry Christmas.

Southwestern elects music dean with OK of both trustees, faculty

By Greg Warner

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary has chosen Benjamin Harlan to fill the controversial position of dean of its School of Church Music.

Harlan, who holds a doctorate from Southwestern, has been assistant professor of church music at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary since 1989. He was elected dean by Southwestern's trustee executive committee on the recommendation of the seminary's new president, Ken Hemphill, and the trustee academic affairs committee.

Harlan, 40, also won the endorsement of the music faculty he will lead, despite a history of differences between trustees and faculty over the philosophical direction of the music school.

While Harlan was trained at Southwestern in traditional and classical disciplines, he also is an accomplished composer, arranger and performer who is committed to the contemporary music styles and large-scale musical productions popular in conservative SBC churches. Both faculty and trustees found that blend pleasing.

"The trustees and the music faculty are both enthusiastic about him, and I think that is significant," said Scotty Gray, acting dean. The selection of Harlan was "almost miraculous," Gray said. "It could have gone a lot of different directions, (but) all parties feel good about this decision."

T. Bob Davis of Dallas, a member of the trustee executive committee, described Harlan as "an excellent composer-arranger, excellent keyboard artist, with an excellent personality." Davis, a frequent critic of the music school, predicted Harlan's "effervescent, gregarious approach" will be just what the program needs.

Hemphill agreed, saying Harlan brings both the necessary commitment to classical training and an openness to "a little more contemporary fashion of music."

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"At times the music schools were not preparing men and women to be flexible enough for our churches," Hemphill said. "We have an excellent music school here. Benji will just add to that."

Harlan succeeds James McKinney, dean for 37 years, who recently retired.

Harlan promised to build on Southwestern's strong academic tradition while exposing students to a broad range of musical styles. His philosophy of music, he said, is "excellence, regardless of style."

The new dean conceded he will walk into a volatile situation when he assumes his duties in January and will operate "in a fishbowl" for some time. But he told Associated Baptist Press, "I think the future is bright."

Harlan's election could end a long-running dispute over the dean's post -- a dispute that played a major role in the firing of former Southwestern president Russell Dilday last March.

Conservative trustees, who twice blocked the election of Dilday's nominees for dean, had complained that Southwestern's devotion to traditional worship styles neglected the more contemporary music popular in many conservative churches.

Trustees viewed the retirement of McKinney as a good time to make a change. But Dilday's two recommendations for McKinney's successor were "people within the system who had the same bent," trustee Davis said last April. That left trustees and the seminary's administrators at an impasse, which in part prompted Dilday's ouster.

Southwestern's 24-member music faculty insists their approach is already balanced and, according to surveys, matches the desires of Southern Baptist churches. Nonetheless, courses were added in evangelistic music, evangelistic piano playing, instrumental arranging and pageants to address the trustees' concerns.

Acting dean Gray said Dec. 21 Harlan's election will not produce wholesale changes in the school's curriculum but merely broaden its approach to teaching music leaders. "The academic integrity of the school is important, and I think we can address the (different) styles of church music," he said.

Gray said the music faculty unanimously endorsed the selection of Harlan, who earned his doctorate from Southwestern in 1981. "They know him well and respect him. And Harlan understands this school and respects the faculty."

Will it create tension to ask faculty members to accept a 40-year-old dean who not long ago was their student? "In many situations it could," Gray said. "In this, I think it will not."

Born in Winnfield, La., Harlan earned bachelor's and master's degrees in music from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, before being awarded the doctor of musical arts degree from Southwestern. He and his wife, Connie Lynn, have three children.

Harlan has served in music positions in three churches -- Emmanuel Baptist Church in Shreveport, La., First Baptist Church of St. Francisville, La., and Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas, where trustee Davis is active in the music ministry.

Harlan said his immediate priorities as dean will be to get acquainted with faculty and students, get involved in student recruitment and plan Hemphill's May inauguration.

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Virginia leader elected to Fellowship missions post

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Tom Prevost, a missions leader for Virginia Baptists, has been elected associate missions coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Prevost, 48, has been on the missions staff of the Baptist General Association of Virginia in Richmond since 1992, most recently as director of mission ministries and partnerships. He earlier worked nine years for the Southern

Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Richmond.

At the Atlanta-based Fellowship, Prevost will coordinate missions administration and short-term volunteers. He replaces Betty Law, who retired in October. He was elected Dec. 19 by the Fellowship's global missions ministry group and will begin his duties Feb. 1.

Keith Parks, the Fellowship's missions coordinator, called Prevost's election "a providential match of Tom's impressive gifts and experience with the tremendous opportunities that God is creating" for Fellowship mission endeavors.

The Fellowship, a three-year-old organization of Baptist moderates, has placed 54 missionaries on the field since launching its missions effort.

Prevost said he has been supportive of the Fellowship's missions program since its beginning in 1991, noting that "my convictions as a Baptist are in tune with the theological distinctives that CBF holds to." He said he has been impressed with the Fellowship's "concept of doing missions in a world without borders and its focus on the unreached peoples of the world."

He credits the Fellowship with "exploring innovative, creative ways for Baptist churches and individuals to work together for the sake of the gospel."

Though challenged to "be a part of a movement that is on the cutting edge of missions," Prevost said the decision to leave Virginia was "one of the hardest things I have ever done."

"Virginia Baptists have modeled some things that have helped prepare me for this new assignment, especially in their appreciation for our Baptist heritage and their emphasis on partnership missions," he said.

Prevost previously was a Southern Baptist home missionary in Arizona and pastor of churches in California and West Virginia.

A native of Mississippi, he graduated from Mississippi College in Clinton and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., where he earned master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees.

Prevost and his wife, Carol, a school teacher and tutor, have two sons.

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-- By Greg Warner

Federal judge denies reprieve to SBC leader in contempt case

By Bob Allen

ORLANDO, Fla. (ABP) -- A federal judge has denied a reprieve to a Southern Baptist Convention leader and his church found in contempt of a Florida court's order that they turn over confidential giving records to a former church clerk who accuses the pastor of wrongdoing.

U.S. District Judge Patricia Fawsett of the Middle District of Florida, Orlando Division, denied a temporary restraining order and injunction sought by Pastor Bob Parker and First Baptist Church of Markham Woods in Lake Mary, Fla.

Parker and the church asked the federal court for relief from a \$500-a-day fine imposed by Seminole County Circuit Judge O.H. Eaton. Eaton, of Sanford, Fla., ruled Dec. 7 that Parker and the church were in contempt of his order the week before to turn over giving records to Ann Haynes. Eaton ordered a fine to begin Dec. 19.

Haynes, a charter member of the 24-year-old church, alleges Parker wrongly usurped control of the congregation, used its non-profit status to avoid paying taxes on his \$285,000 home, and kept jewelry for himself that was left to the church as part of a \$416,000 bequest.

Parker, a member of the powerful SBC Executive Committee, denies any wrongdoing. He has been pastor

of the church since 1983.

Parker and the church argue that rulings by Eaton and his predecessor in the circuit court -- obliging financial disclosure to church members under a state statute governing non-profit, tax-exempt corporations -- violate the free exercise of religion guaranteed in the First Amendment.

An attorney for the Rutherford Institute, a religious-liberty watchdog group in Charlottesville, Va., said holding churches to such financial disclosure requirements creates constitutional problems.

"As applied to churches, we believe this is a fairly substantial burden on the free exercise of religion," said the attorney, Dean Whitford.

"Giving is not just a matter of meeting the budget or paying the bills, it is also an act of worship," Whitford said. "If everyone who comes in and joins a church has a right to see everybody's record of giving, that will very much have a burden on the free exercise of religion," he said.

Whitford predicted the case "will probably have a very substantial effect" on how similar laws in other states are enforced.

Haynes' attorney, Tim Askew of Sanford, said the disclosure statute is fair because it does not single out churches. "If a church chooses to organize itself as a non-profit corporation, it is obviously subject to the laws that govern a non-profit organization," he said.

A church is not required to organize as a non-profit organization, Askew said. When it does so, it is in effect "making a decision to be subject to the laws that govern a non-profit corporation."

But Brent Walker, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, said Parker's argument about the privacy of the records does have some merit. "It is arguable that disclosure of this kind of information could substantially burden the religious-liberty rights of the church members, and it raises the question whether the state's interest ... is sufficient to override this concern," said Walker.

The federal judge's ruling, however, offered no opinion on the religious-liberty argument. Judge Fawsett denied the injunction based on a 1971 Supreme Court ruling which prohibits federal courts from enjoining pending state court proceedings.

She also declined to grant a temporary restraining order on behalf of two members of the church who joined Parker and the congregation in the federal petition. But she scheduled a hearing to consider the two members' request for an injunction.

The members, Jack Diemer and Joanne Woodruff, contend that revealing their individual giving records violates their free-exercise rights and that since they were not named in the original suit they were given no right to appeal.

Fawsett will consider granting an injunction for Diemer and Woodruff at a hearing scheduled Jan. 9. She ordered that when the church obeys the state court's order and opens contribution records, it do so in a way that does not identify the names of the two plaintiffs with any contributions they have made.

The Rutherford Institute confused the situation by issuing a news release Dec. 20 which contained several errors, including an assertion that the judge had granted a temporary restraining order for Parker and the church. Askew called the report "an outright lie."

A temporary restraining order may be granted in cases of dire emergency, for a limited time, based on testimony from only one side in a dispute, Askew explained. An injunction remains in effect throughout the course of litigation but can be issued only after both parties have presented evidence, Askew said.

The original plaintiff, Ann Haynes, won the right to look at church records in a trial before then-Circuit Judge Newman Brock last January.

In August 1993, following a church split, Haynes made a written request to view the church records. She was informed the deacons had voted to remove her from fellowship and denied her access to the books.

She sued, claiming her dismissal violated due process outlined in church documents and the refusal to show her the documents broke a state law requiring non-profit corporations to disclose financial records to members.

Brock ruled in Haynes' favor, reinstating her as a member and ordering the church to turn over all records to her.

In February 1994, the church asked the court to modify its order to reduce the scope of its order, exempting certain records. The court denied the request in March.

In April, the church and pastor asked Florida's 5th District Court of Appeals to issue a stay of the Circuit Court order pending an appeal. The appeals court denied the stay May 3.

On May 18, the church and Parker petitioned Florida's Supreme Court to reverse the lower rulings. The court refused to accept jurisdiction on May 23.

Subsequently, the church opened some of its records but refused to turn over records of individual gifts.

On Dec. 13, Judge Eaton ruled that Parker and the church would be in contempt of court unless they turned over the records within 10 days and would be fined \$500 daily until they comply with his order.

Haynes' agent, John King of DeBary, an accountant and former member at the church, said the records turned over so far by the church are not specific enough to demonstrate that all contributions to the church were distributed properly. To complete his investigation, he must see giving records, he said.

Eaton's order permits only King to view the records, and requires him to keep them confidential.

In addition to the Rutherford Institute, which only recently entered the case, Parker and the church are represented by Florida attorneys John Campbell of Goldenrod and Thomas Ranew of Ocala. Until recently, Ranew served with Parker on the Florida Baptist Witness commission, which oversees work for the Baptist state paper. Parker was bumped from serving a second term on the commission at November's state convention because of low levels of financial support for the denomination and because the church is not involved in a local association.

Neither Ranew nor Campbell returned a reporter's phone calls.

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American pastor finds ministry challenging in troubled Bulgaria

By Trennis Henderson

SOFIA, Bulgaria (ABP) -- James Duke doesn't just live on the edge. He thrives on it.

It's not that he goes out of his way searching for adventure. But as an American pastor of an English-speaking Baptist congregation in Bulgaria, Duke and his wife, Audrey, face constant pressures.

High on their list of challenges is the Bulgarian government's refusal to grant them one-year business visas. That limitation greatly hampers their work since they are able to stay in the country only 30 days at a time. Each month, they must leave Bulgaria and reapply for a 30-day tourist visa, never knowing whether they will be allowed back into the country.

"I don't believe we could stay here if it wasn't for so many people praying for us," Duke acknowledged. "We're fighting the fight that nobody else wants to fight because they are afraid of the consequences.

"There are hardships here but we sense the mighty hand of God again and again," he added. "I've come to peace with being where God wants me to be."

Describing the current political climate in Bulgaria, a country of 9 million people southeastern Europe, Duke explained: "There was a shuffle rather than a change in ideas when communism collapsed. The wall came down but the wall was never their problem. They have a fatal heart condition because they don't know Jesus Christ.

"The authorities are not really against me; they're against the God I serve," he pointed out. "Christianity is a threat to national security because Christianity, as we understand it, impacts people's lives.

"We're accused of believing the Bible too much," he explained. "In that sense, we are a threat to national security. We teach brotherly love. We teach Christian values. We teach to discern for yourself what is true and what is right."

· In addition to the political hurdles, the Dukes have their share of day-to-day challenges as well. Describing the frustration of having their car stolen or the hassle of spending hours in a visa renewal line, Duke noted, "Not only do we pray for things like a visa. We pray for hot water. We pray for our phone to work. ... We wouldn't make it through the day without prayer."

Despite such challenges, Duke insisted, "I'm going to work here as long as the government will allow me and as long as God wants me to stay. I know I can do no other than what he has called me to do."

Other sources readily confirm Duke's assessment of life in Bulgaria. Rogers Capps, a Southern Baptist foreign missionary who recently accepted an assignment there, describes Bulgaria as "the most closed country in Eastern Europe" in response to religious freedom. Explaining that numerous cults and sects invaded the country following the collapse of communism, he added, "We understand the reasons for their suspicion. They don't know who we are."

Capps and his wife, Janice, who formerly were missionaries to Malaysia and Singapore, now serve at the Bulgarian Baptist Bible Institute in the capital city of Sofia. They also have faced delays in gaining business visas.

"This is a tough place," Capps noted, "but it's obvious people are hungry for something. Pray that somehow there will be a way for us to stay."

Frank Munsey is president of the American English Academy in Sofia where Audrey Duke teaches. Noting that the nation is in political "upheaval," Munsey said, "It is a difficult place, there's no question. ... We have to trust it's going to get better."

According to Theodor Angelov, pastor of Sofia Baptist Church and president of the Bulgarian Baptist Union, "Bulgaria is in a deep economical, political, religious crisis.

"The moral, religious crisis is maybe the main crisis," he added. "The Orthodox Church and communists are trying to stop evangelical churches because they are growing. But we have decided, in spite of all difficulties, to go on."

Even Bulgarian President Zhelyu Zhelev, who recently dissolved the Bulgarian Parliament and ordered new elections, was quoted in the Reuters Daily News as saying his nation faces "economy and social crisis, corruption in state authorities and beginnings of a mafia."

The new elections were held Dec. 18, and initial projections indicate former communist leaders were gaining the most new seats in Parliament but remained short of achieving a majority. Political observers said that means Bulgaria's new government will remain too weak to enact needed economic reform.

Amid such chaos, Duke is prepared to pursue legal means to gain a business visa. And he is not alone. Both the Bulgarian Baptist Union and the European Baptist Convention, a network of English-speaking congregations throughout Europe, have pledged support for the Dukes' visa battle.

The basis of the legal challenge, Duke explained, is the Bulgarian constitution's guarantee of religious freedom. The loophole, he added, is the government's "official position that only Bulgarians can pastor a church."

Duke insists, however, that "if people have a right to worship, a church should have the right to call and hire its own pastor."

Emphasizing the need to "allow an English-speaking church for the English-speaking community," he said, "If they make me leave, it's going to be have to be for religious reasons. I want to keep the fight where the fight belongs."

"There's a good chance along the way I may be arrested or even beaten over this," Duke mused. "I don't like to talk about it or dwell on it, but it's reality. We're praying that the prayers of the saints will keep us out of harm. But what can I do if this is what God has called us to do?"

At first glance, Duke appears an unlikely candidate to be sitting in a communist-built apartment in the heart of Sofia, Bulgaria, outlining a legal battle that may reach the Bulgarian Supreme Court or even the European High Court.

A high-school dropout who later earned a seminary degree, Duke was the pastor of small congregations in rural Arkansas and Kansas before sensing God's call to become a church planter in Europe. But despite the rigors of life in an East European city of 1.5 million people, Duke's ministry efforts have flourished.

. International Baptist Church was established in Sofia about a year before the Dukes arrived on the field from Kansas. "When we got here, the church was running in the low 20s," Duke said. "A year and a half later, we're averaging in the low 70s."

The congregation currently meets in Sofia's World Trade Center, a modern office complex where organizations from dozens of countries cultivate international trade. Duke said the congregation, which includes students, businessmen, missionaries and Bulgarian nationals, has attracted worshipers from as many as 15 different countries.

"God is blessing us in so many ways," Duke affirmed. "The church is growing; people's lives are being impacted. ... It's a unique situation here. If the persecution were not so strong, I don't believe the people would work together so good."

James Murphy, a Peace Corps volunteer who is coordinating trade and investment efforts on behalf of the American Business Incubator, began attending International Baptist Church earlier this year. He said the English-language congregation "is a blessing that can't be counted in dollars. It's been really great. I'm very excited about it."

Assessing the ministry efforts of his pastor, Murphy added, "Pastor Duke has a tough row to hoe. I greatly admire him for that. Not many people would take the kind of abuse you have to take to do a job like that."

Why would anyone stay amid such challenging conditions? For Duke, the answer is clear. "God has only one will -- that mankind be saved," he declared. "I know this is what God has called me to do, and he is there to empower me and enable me to stand in the gap. ... As long as the truth gets out, I can live with the consequences."

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