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Southwestern awaits ATS decision that most expect to be probation

By Greg Warner

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- It won't be official until the end of the January, but most faculty and administrators at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary expect the seminary to be placed on probation by at least one of the school's two accrediting agencies.

Officials of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, who visited the Fort Worth, Texas, campus late last year, recommended the seminary receive probation because of violations stemming from the March 9 firing of President Russell Dilday, seminary sources say.

The accrediting commission of ATS received the recommendation of their visiting committee in a hearing Jan. 6. They also heard from five Southwestern representatives, who tried to convince the accrediting agency that the 3,200-student school is on the mend.

Southwestern will learn the commission's decision in a letter due by the end of January. Ken Hemphill, the seminary's new president, who led the delegation that argued the seminary's case before ATS, said Jan. 9 he did not know the agency's decision. But longtime observers of the accrediting process are already convinced the verdict will be probation.

"It is my opinion that the seriousness of the charges would justify probation," said one administrator familiar with ATS proceedings.

Most faculty members and administrators contacted by Associated Baptist Press said they expect probation.

ATS officials, meanwhile, declined to comment until after the school has been notified and has a chance to appeal.

Probation, while not as serious as withdrawal of accreditation, can hinder a school's ability to attract students and financial support.

Among concerns of ATS is the alleged abuse of power and proper procedures by trustees, who fired Dilday despite giving him glowing job evaluations right up to the end. Conservative trustees said Dilday was sympathetic to moderate Baptist causes and blocking conservative reforms at the school.

In a rare letter of censure immediately after the firing, ATS Executive Director James Waits called the action "a clear violation of accepted governance practices (which) places in jeopardy the vitality and basic integrity of the institution."

That criterion -- the vitality and basic integrity of the institution -- is one of the overarching factors which accreditors consider crucial in evaluating schools. It is one of six problems cited by ATS last May as jeopardizing Southwestern's accredited status.

The others are threats to academic freedom, the financial integrity of the school, violations of the school's governance policies, and the evaluation procedures for the president and faculty.

Southwestern's faculty is deeply troubled over perceived threats to academic freedom, according to a survey conducted for ATS.

Three fourths said they fear the academic freedom of faculty members will be violated in the near future, and that the seminary won't defend them (74.7 percent).

While most faculty members said their own academic freedom is unscathed so far (73.1 percent), two thirds said the freedom of some faculty members has already been violated (67.2).

Seminary leaders say the election of Hemphill last July signals the school is on the road to recovery. Indeed, most faculty members approve of Hemphill's election, even though he lacks the ties to Southwestern they said were important.

The survey, which was repeated twice after Hemphill's July election, showed 64.2 percent of faculty members approve of Hemphill's selection.

But that has not alleviated faculty concerns about the future of the school. In fact, their confidence in academic freedom has weakened between May, when the survey was initially taken, and November, when it was taken a final time.

While most said in May they felt free to teach and investigate truth (58.5 percent), in November a slight majority said that freedom no longer existed (50.7 percent). While 72 percent said in May they felt free to express their conscientious convictions, only 47.7 percent felt that confidence in November.

And 59.6 percent said statements in the faculty manual which are intended to protect academic freedom won't be enough to guarantee freedom at Southwestern.

Most faculty members blame trustees for the instability at the seminary. In the most recent survey, 88.1 percent said trustees are not acting responsibly in guiding the seminary. And 89.6 percent said trustees are not accurately representing the seminary's situation.

The November survey also asked for confidential comments from faculty members regarding the six problems cited by ATS. Several said the only way to restore the school's integrity is for the trustees to resign en masse. Others called for the trustees to apologize to Dilday and the seminaries' constituents.

But a few faculty members said Dilday's firing, though disruptive, was not an abuse of power. "Dr. Dilday's termination was certainly handled poorly but was not outside the trustees' stated authority," one noted.

"Our only protection for academic freedom is gone as of March 9," wrote one teacher. "We have been placed in an academic straitjacket," wrote another. But one said, "There are no evidences that academic freedom and integrity are threatened."

On another topic, 91 percent of faculty members said they are apprehensive about the seminary's financial

stability. A drop in enrollment and the loss of some donors since Dilday's firing have hurt the school.

Last fall administrators projected a drop in income of about \$600,000 this school year, due mostly to falling enrollment. It's too early to know if that projection will prove true, said Hubert Martin, vice president for business affairs. "We are not in any kind of crisis," he said Jan. 12. But administrators have been asked to cut expenses.

Enrollment fell by 204 students last fall. Students are currently enrolling for the spring term and another drop is expected, but final figures won't be available for several weeks.

Enrollment losses can cost the seminary dearly. Southwestern receives about \$2,600 a year from the Southern Baptist Convention for each student, and students pay an average of \$1,800 a year for tuition.

Although Southwestern will find out soon how ATS ruled, the school is under no obligation to disclose the decision. Administrators have one month to file an appeal if they wish. Once all appeals are handled, ATS publishes its findings for all schools -- usually in late March -- said Nancy Merrill, ATS public relations director.

ATS is the professional accrediting agency that evaluates seminaries. But all Southern Baptist seminaries also are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, a more general agency that evaluates virtually all public and private schools in the South.

SACS likewise is investigating Dilday's firing at Southwestern, as well as the seminary's off-campus centers. The agency, which participated in the initial visit to Southwestern with ATS in May, has scheduled another visit to the Fort Worth campus in the spring. When ATS places a school on probation, SACS often follows suit.

The Southwestern team that presented their case to ATS Jan. 6 included Hemphill, Scotty Gray, the seminary's executive vice president; William Tolar, vice president for academic affairs; trustee chairman Ralph Pulley, a Dallas attorney; and James Draper, president of the Baptist Sunday School Board and former trustee chairman.

All five spoke to the ATS commission. Hemphill would not discuss Draper's role. The presence of a former school official was described by longtime ATS observers as unusual. Seminary sources said Draper was invited at Pulley's urging to recount the history of trustees' relationship with Dilday.

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Jan Johnsonius named to seminary PR post

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Former missionary to Argentina Jan Johnsonius has been named director of public relations at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, the school's president, Ken Hemphill, announced Jan. 12.

"Jan's experiences as a missionary will be instrumental in her playing a leadership role in continuing Southwestern's strong heritage of missions and evangelism," Hemphill said. She replaces Scott Collins, who resigned last year.

Johnsonius served two years as a career Southern Baptist missionary with her husband, Jim, who died in an automobile accident in Argentina in August 1993. She was seriously injured in the crash. After recuperating several months, she returned to the United States for a furlough.

A native of Springfield, Ohio, she holds a journalism degree from Murray State University in Kentucky. She has worked as a reporter, copy editor and photographer for the Paris (Tenn.) Post-Intelligencer. While there, she met her husband. She considers First Baptist Church in Paris her home church.

She also worked as public relations director at Cargill Associates, a capital stewardship firm in Fort Worth,

Texas, and as a copy editor for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram while her husband attended Southwestern Seminary. Other experience includes a stint as public relations director for the Virginia Opera in Norfolk and public relations director at Methodist Hospital in Dyersburg, Tenn.

"I see my coming to Southwestern as an opportunity to help Southern Baptists catch the vision that Southwestern has for missions and evangelism and to give them a sense of personal involvement in the seminary," Johnsonius, 37, said. "I also see this as an opportunity to help those men and women who are called by God to ministry to realize that Southwestern can provide training they need to serve the Lord in the United States and around the world."

She will come to her new position in early February after a short special assignment as a writer for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's News and Information Office in Richmond, Va.

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-- ABP staff

Southeastern sells 45 acres, enacting 'land-use master plan'

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (ABP) -- Trustees of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary voted Jan. 4 to sell off 45 acres of wooded property near the seminary campus in Wake Forest, N.C., to an Atlanta-based developer that plans to build a shopping center on the site.

Neither seminary officials nor the developer would disclose the purchase price. The Raleigh News & Observer newspaper quoted sources familiar with the transaction as saying it will total about \$7 million.

Seminary spokesman Greg Kingry said it "would be inappropriate" for the seminary to reveal the sale price because doing so might affect negotiations with potential buyers of other seminary-owned parcels.

The sale grew out of a "land-use master plan" approved by trustees last October. The plan calls for developing retail, office, industrial and residential parcels on sections of the 300 undeveloped acres owned by the seminary.

The land-use study grew out of a long-range planning process, said Kingry. The plan calls for selling off about 200 acres of land, leaving a buffer around the 25-acre campus.

Several trustees were reluctant to support the plan, but the 26 trustees summoned to a called executive session unanimously approved the sale, Paul Fletcher, the seminary's vice president for internal affairs, told the News & Observer.

The buyer was Baita International, Inc., a fast-growing shopping center developer that plans to develop a 200,000-square-foot shopping center on the land, which sits adjacent to U.S. Highway 1, about a mile from the seminary's campus. It would be one of the largest shopping centers in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill "Triangle" area.

Kingry said a report in the News & Observer that proceeds of the sale will go either into endowment funds or "to pay for a \$20 million expansion of the school" is inaccurate. While an expansion project was one suggestion offered for possible uses of proceeds in a "visionary plan" discussed by trustees, "there is no plan on the books for us to do a \$20 million expansion," he said.

Kingry said "nothing has been determined" about where proceeds from the sale will go. "The sale has not been completed. We think it would be inappropriate for us to designate funds when we have not received any proceeds," he said.

-- By Bob Allen

Texas conservative leader hints at discussions with SBC

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- A leader of a group of "conservative" Baptists organized recently in Texas offered no definite answer about whether the group intends to form a new state convention but hinted he has discussed the possibility with Southern Baptist Convention leaders.

At a Jan. 10 rally in Fort Worth, Texas, Miles Seaborn of Fort Worth told about 300 people he had spoken to a "national leader" who urged the group "to make sure your heart is for missions and evangelism" and told him that the "Southern Baptist organization is open to you."

Seaborn also said the organization received permission from SBC Executive Committee President Morris Chapman to use the SBC logo in its promotional materials. Chapman told the Baptist Standard of Texas that guidelines give "wide latitude" for use of the logo by organizations "in friendly cooperation with" the SBC.

For most of the 90-minute meeting, Seaborn described internal restructuring by the organization he leads and encouraged churches to reconsider their missions giving in light of action in November by the moderate-controlled Baptist General Convention of Texas broadening its definition of denominational support.

Seaborn, pastor of Birchman Baptist Church, announced that the group now wants to be called "Southern Baptists of Texas." The organization's original name was the "Conservative Baptist Fellowship of Texas."

The group is "in the process of reorganizing and restating our name and redefining our board of directors," Seaborn said.

Four to six regional meetings will be held this year, a newsletter will be distributed and "we are talking to people about being candidates" for office at the state convention in San Antonio next fall, Seaborn said.

A brochure distributed at the meeting described the organization as "a network of biblical conservatives who believe the Southern Baptist Convention has a bright future" and gives churches a "powerful way to reach our world for Christ."

Its purposes, the brochure states, are to support Southern Baptist work in Texas and around the world with strengthened Cooperative Program funding; to encourage churches and individuals with positive responsible distribution of denominational information; to give churches options on how to financially respond to the BGCT until the "Amarillo Act" is rescinded; and to "network with pastorless Southern Baptist churches to help them find godly, biblically sound pastoral leadership."

Members of the network oppose a change adopted at last year's state convention in Amarillo redefining what gifts will be counted by the state as "Cooperative Program" contributions. Traditionally, only gifts offered undesignated for a unified budget divided between the state and national conventions were described as Cooperative Program.

The November action allowed churches to designate that their Cooperative Program gifts be restricted for use within Texas only or to approved national non-SBC entities, including the upstart Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an alternative missions organization to the conservative-controlled SBC.

Three prominent Texas pastors told the audience their churches are considering restructuring their missions giving by either reducing amounts sent to the state convention or bypassing it altogether and sending their money directly to the SBC.

Pastor O.S. Hawkins said the 28,000-member First Baptist Church of Dallas, has been escrowing its

Cooperative Program gifts since October. Hawkins said he is sure there will be a change in the percentage of the church's gifts going to the state convention but suggested the state will not be cut out of the church budget entirely. "There are a lot of good things going on in Texas," he said.

San Antonio pastor George Harris said his congregation, First Baptist Church of Castle Hills, is selecting a committee to decide how to designate the church's missions gifts. "We will not debate it on the floor" at a business meeting, he said, cautioning others not to disturb their churches over the matter.

Claude Thomas, pastor of First Baptist Church of Eules, also urged pastors to be careful how they approach their churches about altering denominational support. "The last thing we need is a local church in turmoil with its pastor," he said.

Seaborn said that about 750-800 churches and individuals have asked the organization for advice about how to respond to the vote in Amarillo.

The rally, at the Radisson Plaza Hotel, followed a session of the Texas Baptist Evangelism Conference. It was not sanctioned by planners of the state convention-sponsored evangelism meeting.

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-- By Toby Druin and Bob Allen

Bill introduced to study effects of gambling

By Shannon Harton

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A Congressman has called for a commission to study the harmful effects of gambling in the United States.

Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., introduced legislation Jan. 11 to establish a commission to study the impact of gambling on American society.

The National Gambling Impact and Policy Commission would conduct a comprehensive study of the effects of gambling in the United States, focusing on the relationship between gambling, economics and crime.

Wolf said increases in crime, delinquency and law enforcement expenditures are attributed to legalized gambling in certain states. He also cited statistics that indicate gambling cannibalizes other industries such as recreation services and restaurants. The number of restaurants in Atlantic City, N.J., fell by more than one-third in the decade following the legalization of gambling there, he said.

Wolf said he hopes the commission's scope will include other "social costs" of gambling, such as suicide, family disintegration and addictions.

While admitting personal opposition to gambling, Wolf denied his bill is intended to recommend congressional action against the gambling industry.

"The purpose of this legislation," he said, "is to bring together all the relevant data so that governors, legislators and citizens can have the facts they need to make informed decisions."

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Shannon Harton, a recent graduate of the University of Kentucky, is communications intern at the Baptist Joint Committee.

EDITORS' NOTE: Following is a four-part series on counseling.

Finding counselor requires asking right questions

By Mark Wingfield

(ABP) -- Having problems? Finding the right kind of help can be a problem in itself unless you know what to look for in a counselor, say experts in the field.

Not everyone who hangs out a shingle as a counselor is trained and certified to be a counselor, and not everyone trained and certified may be gifted to help an individual's particular need, agreed a number of counselors interviewed for this story.

The experts offered tips for finding the right counselor: ask questions and check for credentials.

"Talk with friends and family and ask if any of them have had counseling and if so, with whom and what kind of experience they had," suggested Rick Underwood, a Baptist counselor and executive director of Personal Counseling Service, which has offices in Louisville, Ky., and Jeffersonville, Ind. "That's the way most folks end up getting to me."

But whether picking a counselor out of the Yellow Pages or by word of mouth, be sure to ask several important questions first, warned Underwood.

"Get a recommendation or two or three," Underwood said, "and then call and ask about credentials."

"It is always appropriate for the potential counselee to ask to see a disclosure statement that would delineate the counselor's training and credentials," said Leigh Conner, associate professor of pastoral counseling at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Any counselor not willing to disclose such information probably has something to hide, Conner warned.

If doubts arise about the authenticity of a counselor's credentials, a call to the academic institution or accrediting agency may quickly verify the counselor's status.

The experts warn that many practitioners who describe themselves as "Christian counselors" may lack the professional training and expertise needed for reputable pastoral care.

"Many people get into counseling because of the pain in their own lives," said John Lepper, family ministry director with the Kentucky Baptist Convention. "Unless you have dealt with that pain, you get in the way of the counselee."

"The Christian counseling movement is a rapidly growing movement in our culture," Conner added. Someone who claims to be a Christian counselor may be "a highly trained, highly skilled, fully licensed and credentialed professional who respects and integrates a Christian world view," he said, or "a person who has a Christian perspective but no training."

"There are a lot of people who sincerely believe they have the spiritual gifts necessary to do Christian counseling. But without some baseline level of training and understanding, they can say and do things that complicate a counselee's life," Conner warned.

Doug Dickens, assistant professor of pastoral ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, said he is somewhat suspicious of counselors who advertise their Christianity. "I have found that some Christian counselors, particularly those that advertise that way, have an agenda and often it's their agenda -- the patient comes out with values like the counselor thinks they ought to come out with," he said.

Roy Woodruff, executive director of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, said certified

pastoral counselors are trained not only in faith and spirituality but also in psychology and understanding people's problems.

"This is what differentiates certified pastoral counselors from Christian counselors," Woodruff said. "Christian counseling has no training requirements, whereas a certified pastoral counselor is someone whose training has been toward a depth of integration of theology and psychology."

Qualified counselors may come through several educational tracks, Lepper said. These most commonly include theology, psychology and social work programs.

The normal course for a pastoral counselor's training begins with the master of divinity degree, the basic theology degree offered by most seminaries.

But not everyone with the master of divinity degree has received training in pastoral counseling, Conner said. In most seminaries, students may complete this degree either with or without courses in pastoral counseling.

"As a professional (counselor), I learned there is a distinction to be made between a counseling pastor and a pastoral counselor," said Dickens.

Many seminary graduates who hold positions in churches "may meet a lot of conditions that go for making good care givers," but there are cases when they should refer counselees to someone with more professional training," Dickens added.

A seminary degree alone does not indicate a person's competency as a counselor, Lepper warned. "A pastoral counselor needs specific clinical training beyond a seminary degree or concurrent with seminary training."

Other degrees that normally lead to training and certification in counseling include the master of social work, the master of arts in marriage and family counseling, and master's degrees in psychology or psychiatry.

This clinical training often includes clinical pastoral education, commonly known as CPE, as well as a certain number of hours of supervised counseling experiences.

Most organizations that accredit counselors require these supervised counseling experiences, through which a counselor must demonstrate his or her abilities to the approval of an experienced counselor.

Good counselors will continue this practice even after receiving minimal certification, Lepper said. Counseling centers often require counselors who work with them to participate in ongoing supervised practice in order to make them more accountable for their actions.

Beyond academic training and counseling experience, anyone seeking counseling should inquire about the counselor's accreditation, the experts said. Most often, pastoral counselors are accredited by the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, a 3,000-member organization based in Fairfax, Va.

To receive minimum certification by this organization, a person must hold the master of divinity degree or an equivalent, must have completed prescribed hours of supervised counseling, must be interviewed by a membership committee and must be endorsed by a religious body.

Similarly, qualified counselors also may be accredited by the Academy of Certified Social Workers, the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists or the American Psychological Association.

Underwood noted that many counseling centers maintain strict requirements for their counselors. Some are designated as accredited service centers by national bodies.

Beyond the technical considerations of degrees and certification, effective counselors should meet one other important test, Lepper suggested.

"Determine whether the style and personality of the counselor matches your needs," he said. "Look for a counselor who can provide support and nurture as well as challenge."

Both Conner and Lepper acknowledged that friends and caring family members often provide as much help as trained counselors. But the role of the counselor is more than that, they said.

"A good friend can provide support," Lepper explained. "Competent counselors are able to balance nurture with guidance and challenge."

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-- Bob Allen contributed to this story.

Counseling degrees, credentials

-- M.Div. The master of divinity degree is the basic seminary degree and generally is considered the foundation for training as a pastoral counselor. In many cases, students may earn the M.Div. with an emphasis in pastoral counseling. But it is possible to complete the M.Div. without courses in counseling.

-- M.S.W. The master of social work degree also may lead to training as a counselor and is offered both by seminaries and universities.

-- M.A. The master of arts degree may be awarded by seminaries or universities in a variety of disciplines. Only master's degrees in certain programs, such as marriage and family counseling or clinical psychology, are considered normal training for counselors.

-- D.Min. The doctor of ministry degree is awarded by seminaries in a number of disciplines, including pastoral counseling. As with the master of divinity degree, it does not naturally signify training in counseling.

-- Ph.D. The doctor of philosophy degree is awarded by seminaries and universities in a number of disciplines, ranging from aeronautics to zoology. As with other degrees, the Ph.D. indicates competency in counseling only if completed with an emphasis in counseling or psychology.

-- CPE. Clinical pastoral education is a rigorous program of hands-on experience in pastoral care, accompanied by strict supervision and guided self-review. Many qualified counselors have completed several "units" of CPE, but the CPE designation alone does not attest to a person's academic background or certification as a counselor.

-- LCSW. Licensed clinical social worker is a designation given by state governments to approved social workers. Although requirements vary by state, it generally indicates education and certification as a qualified counselor.

-- AAPC. The American Association of Pastoral Counselors is a national organization which accredits pastoral counselors who meet certain requirements of education, experience and supervision. AAPC admits members at several levels, including member, fellow and diplomate, with diplomate being the highest level.

-- AAMFT. The American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists is a national organization which accredits marriage and family counselors who meet standard requirements. Theological training is not required for this certification.

-- ACSW. The Academy of Certified Social Workers is a national organization providing credential for counselors trained as social workers.

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Many ministers overlooking pastoral care role, professor says

By Bob Allen

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- When someone is looking for a counselor, a logical first step is to go to his or her pastor. Often, however, pastors are too preoccupied with other matters to give parishioners the individual care they need, says a professor of pastoral care.

"There are a lot of things pastors can do that they should deal with," said Doug Dickens, assistant professor of pastoral ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. However, based on experience both as a pastor and now as a seminary professor teaching pastoral care, "my hunch is ..., with the emphasis we Baptists have on growing churches, there are a lot of pastors that are not very faithful to this pastoral task."

While some pastors devote most of their ministries to pastoral care, Dickens said many others permit concerns about attracting new members, administration and involvement in denominational affairs to leave them with too little time for listening to the hurts and needs of individual church members.

Dickens admits that all those priorities "are pastoral tasks," but he added that he believes "there are a lot of ministers who could be a lot more sensitive and helpful to people if they would, but they don't. Frankly I am troubled by that. I would like to see pastors be more caring."

Dickens said he hears over and over from church members the lament, "I wish our pastor took more time" to listen to personal struggles.

"There are a lot of things pastors could do in the way of listening and caring if they would just be quiet and listen," Dickens said.

Most pastors, he said, are equipped to deal with counseling in matters dealing with a normal grief process, family problems "that are fairly normal and not exaggerated," vocational issues and crises related to spiritual growth and doubt.

"On the other hand," Dickens warned, "there are lots of problems the average pastor is probably not prepared to deal with," such as psychiatric problems, acute grief, suicidal tendencies and extreme depression. "I think when those happen, we ought to refer," he said.

Beside those arbitrary boundaries, there are other "good reasons to refer," Dickens advised.

Sometimes a parish pastor, being "a generalist," really may not be able to spare the time a hurting church member needs. "That's a good reason to refer" to a professional counselor or a fellow pastor in the community, said Dickens.

Also, when pastors risk "getting in over our heads" because of lack of counseling skill, "that's a good time to refer," he said.

Dickens recalls one period when because of a personal crisis in his own life, "I did not have the emotional energy to be a caregiver."

"Sometimes," Dickens said, "church members will tell their pastor more in a crisis than they wish they had later," leading them to eventually "look for ways to break that relationship." Pastors need to be aware in counseling that there are certain boundaries that once crossed may "pollute" the relationship with a church member.

Dickens warned against pastors taking on problems they are not equipped to handle, saying he expects to see more lawsuits stemming from botched counseling sessions in the next decade.

"I think we're going to see more and more ministers being challenged because they do not have the skill and they continue to take things on," he said.

Especially vulnerable are pastors that are strongly authoritarian -- the need "to have the right answer and be the last word, for some pastors, does create problems," he said -- and those who just "desire to take care of people."

"Ministry is one of the only professions I know where people will allow enthusiasm to be a sorry substitute for competence," Dickens said.

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Professor offers pastors guidelines on referring members for counseling

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Doug Dickens, assistant professor of pastoral ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, offers the following guidelines for pastors referring parishioners to a professional counselor or therapist:

-- Confidence. "Do I know enough about this person to have confidence in their professional ability?" Dickens asks.

Dickens recommends looking for "not only affirmations of other people who have been helped by them." He encourages pastors to get personally acquainted with the professionals to whom they expect to refer members.

"One of the first things any pastor or minister ought to do when they move to a new place is find out who the referral sources are and get out to meet them," he said.

Good "community relations" work is basic to being able to locate and evaluate available resources, he said.

-- Christian. Should a counselor be a Christian? Not necessarily, said Dickens, adding his students often challenge him at this point.

In fact, he said he is somewhat suspicious of counselors who advertise their Christianity. "I have found that some Christian counselors, particularly those that advertise that way, have an agenda and often it's their agenda -- the patient comes out with values like the counselor thinks they ought to come out with."

"The question I ask is not first 'is this counselor a Christian?' My question is 'will this counselor respect and work with the spiritual values of my church member?'"

For example, if a therapist tells Dickens, "I don't get into religion issues at all," he questions whether he or she can help a patient in a spiritual crisis.

"I don't expect a therapist to do witnessing to a patient, but I do expect if they do significant therapy, they are going to try to be aware of this person's religious values, and how they use them, best as they can."

"Any good therapist, regardless of their religious orientation, is going to want to try to understand the client's values and try to work with them," Dickens said.

Still, Dickens said, he is "interested in the lifestyle" of a therapist or counselor. "If someone's reputation was pretty bad, I probably wouldn't refer."

-- Complementary. Dickens asks, "What do I know about this therapist's or this counselor's therapeutic approach" that might influence whether or not to refer a particular parishioner?

For example, if a therapist is oriented toward an analytical approach, that might suggest care that is "long term and expensive," he said. He would be reluctant to commit a patient without access to funds to such a long-term commitment.

Also, if a psychiatrist is known to rely on medication without "talk therapy," Dickens said he is reluctant to refer patients suffering acute grief because they may be more prone to drug abuse or suicide.

If dealing with family issues, he would prefer "someone who deals with family systems" to "someone who wants to look at your past," he said.

"Does the need of the person I'm referring match the skills of the person and the approach of who I'm referring to?" he asks. "It means I may have to know several people and be sensitive to what (the patient's) needs are when I connect them," he added.

-- Connections. "Will this professional be willing for me to maintain a pastoral relationship with my parishioner as long as I respect the professional boundaries?" Dickens asks.

Some therapists, he said, might advise a patient dealing with problems related to the church or his or her faith to avoid the pastor during therapy. Dickens said he does not make a practice of second-guessing or trying to undermine therapists, but that doesn't mean he might not want to visit a church member in the hospital.

"If I'm going to be a pastor, I'm likely not going to get into therapeutic issues," he said. "I'm asking, 'Can I stay connected as a pastor and can this person recognize my professional need while I recognize their therapeutic boundary?'"

-- Competence. "Is the professional appropriately educated and trained?"

"Credentials are not all I look at here," said Dickens. For drug and alcohol problems, for example, Dickens said Alcoholics Anonymous, because of their experience, might be more helpful than a private counselor.

If psychiatric problems are a factor, indicating a need for medication, he asks "Is a psychiatrist board-certified? What approach do they use?"

"I'm not real interested in knowing this person went to seminary and got a master's degree and then licensure," Dickens said.

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-- By Bob Allen

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