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Mohler fires Garland as dean of Southern's Carver School

By Mark Wingfield and Marv Knox

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- The dean of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's school of social work was fired March 20 after telling students that new standards instituted by the seminary's president will make it impossible to hire qualified faculty.

President Albert Mohler asked for the resignation of Diana Garland, dean of the Carver School of Social Work, after Garland told a student forum that the future of the Carver School is "in serious jeopardy" and accreditation by the Council of Social Work Education is threatened.

The dispute arose over the hiring of a professor for Carver, the nation's only accredited, seminary-based social-work school. Mohler said he blocked the election of David Sherwood because of the candidate's position on women pastors. But that's inappropriate, Garland said, since Sherwood meets the school's official criteria for election.

Mohler asked Garland to resign, he said, because she pre-empted "official administrative structures" and released "private and privileged information" in addressing the student forum.

Although fired as dean, Garland remains on the seminary faculty. She joined the faculty in 1983 and became dean in 1993. Her husband, David, teaches New Testament at the Louisville, Ky., seminary.

Garland's firing as dean appears to reinforce the assertion that the Carver School may not survive. Garland told students even Mohler told her the school would not survive her resignation.

Asked why she was fired, Garland said Mohler "cannot work with a dean who brings pressure on the president and on the institution." She said she brought pressure on him by releasing the document she read to students.

Mohler met for about an hour with angry social work students shortly after announcing Garland's dismissal as dean. He told students he does not want to kill the Carver School, but noted "the culture of social work and the culture of theological education are not congruent."

The student forum earlier in the day was sponsored by Southern Seminary's Organization of Student Social Workers, who invited Garland to speak. About 70 of the school's 117 social work students attended the session, with most remaining afterward to plan a means of appealing the school's cause to Mohler, seminary trustees and Carver supporters.

This is the second crisis to rock the Carver School in the past month. In February, professor Timothy Johnson announced his departure amid charges of racism and broken promises regarding tenure.

The current crisis came to a head after Mohler vetoed the nomination of Sherwood to fill a new tenure-track position on the Carver faculty. Sherwood directs the social work program at Gordon College in Wenham, Mass.

Garland and students involved in the interview process described Sherwood as a person committed to conservative, evangelical Christianity. Garland detailed the process by which Sherwood was interviewed and approved by a student panel, the Carver faculty and Vice President David Dockery.

Garland said Sherwood had a favorable interview with Mohler while on campus March 8. However, before proceeding further, Mohler instructed Garland to solicit Sherwood's written responses to a set of questions about the seminary's Abstract of Principles and "some of the social issues of our day."

One day after receiving Sherwood's responses to those questions, Mohler said he could not support Sherwood's nomination.

Garland charged Mohler rejected Sherwood based on some criteria other than what is spelled out in the seminary's Abstract of Principles or faculty-staff manual. Garland would not elaborate on the specific issue Mohler found objectionable in Sherwood's responses.

In a prepared statement, Mohler said he rejected Sherwood "based on the candidate's views on the service of women in the pastorate."

Sherwood could not be reached for comment.

The real issue is "freedom of conscience," Garland said in a later interview. "Even faculty ought to be free to have ideas they [administrators] don't share so long as their teaching is congruent with the Abstract of Principles and they represent the institution well."

In her statement to students, Garland suggested Mohler has established a new set of restrictions for faculty candidates that consider "the private thoughts" of candidates on issues outside the Abstract of Principles.

"We have sought candidates who can clearly represent, support and help further develop the positions of Southern Baptists on current issues of our day," she said. "There are times that a faculty candidate who would bring great gifts to the institution will differ at the level of personal convictions on an issue. The private views of a faculty candidate should not be a matter for personnel consideration."

Garland continued: "Evangelical scholars committed to the full authority of Scripture differ over some issues. When such differences occur, faculty candidates should be expected to respect and work constructively with those whose understandings differ from their own."

Mohler's leadership style has made the work of the dean difficult and embarrassing, Garland said. "I find it tremendously embarrassing to bring one of the leading voices for evangelical social work, believing he could be elected ... only to be turned down by the president for his own criteria."

Based on the criteria Mohler has established, no other candidates can be found for faculty positions in the Carver School, Garland declared. She said she had planned to resign as dean because Mohler's "policies are making it impossible for me to do my job as dean to recruit faculty."

Last week, Mohler prevailed upon Garland not to resign, she said, and offered to let her present her concerns to trustees at their April meeting. She could have asked trustees for an exception to the faculty criteria Mohler has established at the instruction of trustees, she said.

However, Garland said a single exception -- if granted -- would not solve the problem. "There must be a modification in the criteria themselves with regard to all potential candidates," she said. "Otherwise, the same situation will present itself with each faculty vacancy and search process.

Even if an exception were granted, the faculty search process would have been so delayed that a new person probably could not have been in place before the fall of 1996, Garland said. This "seriously jeopardizes" accreditation of the master of social work degree, she said, because the Carver School already has fallen below the minimum faculty requirements of the Council of Social Work Education.

In an interview after the student forum but before Garland's firing, Mohler said he does not share Garland's view that it will be impossible to recruit acceptable faculty members. Nor does he believe the Carver School is destined to close, he said.

Nor does he have an agenda to force the closing of the social work school as some have suggested, he added. "None of these issues can be attributed to the desire of this administration ... to force a defining moment for the Carver School or to take actions which would lead to the resignation of the dean."

Mohler declined to discuss any details of Sherwood's case. However, he said the criteria he uses in faculty selection are the same as he has said he would use from the beginning of his presidency two years ago.

Faculty selection is based on fidelity to the Abstract of Principles and commitment to the "covenant renewal" document brokered between seminary trustees and faculty in 1991 to move the seminary in a more conservative direction.

Faculty selection also is based on "a constellation of issues about which I have been quite candid," he added. These issues include abortion, homosexuality and the role of women in ministry, he said.

Mohler has drawn sharp criticism from some quarters and praise from others for his statements on homosexuality and women in ministry in particular.

In February, Mohler said in a public speech the decline of Western civilization could be linked to homosexuality, which he labeled one of the greatest sins possible.

A source familiar with Sherwood's writings said the professor has written about homosexuality. While he has not advocated homosexuality or the homosexual lifestyle, he has insisted church social workers must minister to homosexuals, the source said.

In their forum, students expressed concerns about the impasse between Mohler and Garland, which they believe could lead to the closure of their school. They also considered options for seeking resolution to the problem.

"The school has made a contract with students to provide an accredited degree which we need to be licensed so that we can get a job at a Baptist hospital or any place," one student said to choruses of approval. "It seems the seminary has reneged on that contract."

"As a student body, we have sat around and watched our faculty leave and haven't really done anything," said Andy Patterson, president of the Organization of Student Social Workers. "This is a matter of life and death for our school."

The students organized committees to protest the situation and to rally support for the Carver School. They proposed appealing to other groups -- churches, alumni, students in Southern's other schools, social-work agencies, seminary benefactors, other social-work schools and Woman's Missionary Union -- for support.

They also planned to contact legal experts to determine if the seminary is in danger of breaking its contract with them. And they planned to contact the school's and seminary's accrediting agencies to determine their standards for retaining accreditation.

They closed by marching through the seminary halls singing "We Shall Overcome" and praying outside Mohler's office while he and Garland discussed the situation.

When Mohler and Garland emerged, the students demanded that Mohler talk with them. He consented, and discussed the situation with students for about an hour.

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Southwestern dean resigns, joins Baylor's seminary faculty

By Greg Warner

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Bruce Corley, dean of the school of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, resigned March 21 to join the faculty of Baylor University's new seminary.

Corley, a Southwestern professor since 1976 and dean since 1990, will become professor of Christian scriptures at George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas, which opened last fall with 50 students. Corley, a New Testament scholar, is expected to play a role in Truett's plans to open a second campus in Dallas, 30 miles from Southwestern.

Corley's resignation was the first by a top Southwestern administrator since the March 1994 firing of President Russell Dilday. That firing, instigated by conservative seminary trustees, prompted Southwestern's lead accrediting agency to place the 3,200-student school on a two-year probation in February.

But Corley, 52, said his decision to leave Southwestern was not primarily a reaction to Dilday's firing or subsequent events. "If that were the case, I would have made the decision a long time ago," he told Associated Baptist Press. "I would not go simply out of reaction, because I'm not that kind of person."

Instead, Corley said, the February election of his long-time friend and Truett dean, Robert Sloan, as Baylor president was at least as influential on his decision to leave Southwestern. Sloan's election indicates that Baylor will remain committed to its Baptist heritage and that theological education will gain a "higher profile" at Baylor and in Texas, Corley predicted.

Corley follows Dilday to Baylor. Fired by trustees for blocking conservative reforms at Southwestern, Dilday became professor of preaching at Truett and special assistant to retiring Baylor President Herbert Reynolds. He was named interim dean of Truett March 17 in place of Sloan.

The addition of Corley to the Truett faculty, effective June 1, positions the upstart seminary to benefit from turmoil at Southwestern, the world's largest theological school and one of six Southern Baptist seminaries. A Dallas satellite campus, which could open as early as this fall, is expected to attract many disgruntled Southwestern students.

"It's not our intent to cannibalize another institution, and we are not trying to be retributive," said Dilday. But the need for "traditional Baptist training and authentic preparation for ministry" is increasing, he said, and Dallas is "a key location."

Although Corley's appointment is not tied to the Dallas center, Corley said, "My going is a clear commitment to the expansion of Truett. ... There's no doubt that Truett has an open-ended future."

Dilday, who said he is willing to remain interim dean for up to a year, acknowledged Corley is likely to become the top candidate when a permanent dean is picked. "There would certainly be no one better qualified for that than Bruce."

Corley is credited with keeping Southwestern's theology faculty intact during the past year, when the election of a conservative president and scrutiny from trustees and accrediting agencies kept tensions high on the Fort Worth, Texas, campus.

Several faculty members told ABP he has served as a "buffer" and mediator between faculty and new President Ken Hemphill, elected by trustees last July.

"He was a perfect bridge between the two and kept the channels of communication open," said James Spivey, assistant professor of church history, who described Corley as fair and candid. "He has been a friend of the faculty in a way that is uncommon."

Hemphill was out of town March 21 and unavailable for comment.

Corley reportedly was under no pressure to resign. In fact, in a prepared statement he read to faculty members March 21, he said, "President Hemphill, the administration and faculty have affirmed me in remarkable fashion, and it makes leaving more difficult."

After Dilday's firing, many Southwesterners predicted a mass exodus of faculty. To date that has not materialized, a fact most credit to Corley's stability and Hemphill's openness.

But Corley's departure leaves some faculty members worried about the school's stability and their own vulnerability to outside pressure.

"Anything that adds to the uncertainty is going to make things more difficult on everybody -- faculty, students and administrators," said Dan Kent, professor of Old Testament. "My worry all along was that when the first olive comes out of the bottle, there would be others that would follow."

Sloan's election as Baylor president Feb. 24 sparked widespread speculation among Southwestern faculty that Corley would replace him at Truett. In an unusual called meeting March 1, the theology faculty pleaded with Corley to stay, with many expressing concern about who Hemphill and trustees might pick to replace him.

Few people are predicting a sudden upheaval at Southwestern, however. "Whenever there's a change, you always feel vulnerable," Spivey explained. "... It is going to be a significant change. But walking out of that meeting [March 1], I had a strong sense of peace."

Corley said his close relationship with the faculty during troubled times has been his "most personally enriching experience" at Southwestern. "I've tried to keep the faculty together and the seminary on course during this period," he said.

"There's still a lot of stability here," he added. "Southwestern is like God's giant aircraft carrier. It's not easily deflected in the water." He said the seminary will continue in its distinctive role "if it keeps both hands on plow and does not turn to the right or the left." That means, he said, that the seminary must not abandon either of its key commitments to missions/evangelism or academic excellence.

"The most difficult thing for me is breaking the circle of friends here," he continued. "But I really feel the Lord has in mind for me a relationship with Truett and Baylor. ... I really feel bound in my will."

Corley said he and Sloan "have shared the same vision of theological education" since they met on Southwestern's faculty 15 years ago. That vision -- and the distinctive they will pursue for Truett, is based on historic Baptist principles "but also a global appeal" that will take the new seminary beyond the provincialism some people associate with Texas schools.

Reynolds, Baylor's outgoing president, called Corley "a pre-eminent scholar of New Testament Scripture and a leader among Baptist theologians. He will be a wonderful complement to our already-strong seminary faculty."

A native of Oklahoma, Corley graduated from Northeastern Oklahoma State University before enrolling in Southwestern, where he earned a master's degree (1967) and doctorate (1975). He also studied at the University of Cambridge in England.

He is the author of several scholarly articles and books, including the forthcoming volume on Hebrews in the New American Commentary series. He is a member of the Society of Biblical Literature and the Institute for Biblical Research.

Corley has three grown children by his first wife, Lois Margaret, who died in 1978, and a fourth child by his wife, Elizabeth, whom he married in 1986.

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Gay pastor 'outed' by fellow clergy, resigns Baptist church in Ohio

By Bob Allen

DAYTON, Ohio (ABP) -- A Baptist pastor in Dayton, Ohio, says he has resigned his church because fellow ministers threatened to reveal to his congregation that he is gay.

"I feel like I've been outed, if you want to put it that way," Mike Castle, the founding pastor of the three-year-old Miami Valley Community Church, told Associated Baptist Press.

Castle, 32, said he considers himself "a homosexual person" but he has chosen to lead a celibate lifestyle and has never made his sexuality an issue for the church.

But recently, Castle said he was confronted and informed that a number of Ohio Baptist ministers were aware of his sexual orientation. He was advised to resign, he said, or the church would be disfellowshipped for condoning homosexuality -- a position at odds with stated positions of both the Southern Baptist Convention and the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio.

Castle resigned his pastorate March 12 because, he said, "I just don't want to drag our church through a mess."

Castle said he has been sexually active in the past. And he recently revealed he is HIV positive. But in 1990 he made a decision to minister as a "single and celibate" pastor, he said. "As a pastor in the area I serve and in the calling I serve, I just chose to remain single and celibate."

Castle said the fact he is gay is "not widely known" among parishioners. A local pastor found out, he said, two years ago through a family connection. While counseling a woman and her husband about the woman's brother -- who was dying of AIDS -- Castle told the couple he is gay. They told the husband's father, a local pastor.

"I broke a No. 1 counseling rule and became too self-revealing. I did it for the right reasons but wish I'd never done it," Castle said. The couple, who were members of his church at the time, no longer attend, he said.

The revelation created something of a stir, but no action was taken against the church by its association at the time because information was "inconclusive," said Don McMurry, director of missions of the Greater Dayton Association of Baptists.

McMurry came to the missions director post in 1994 but said he agreed with his predecessor's assessment that unless homosexuality became an issue in the church or Castle began practicing homosexual acts, "there was nothing the association could or should do."

The issue resurfaced recently, Castle charged, because of Baptist politics. His church had been in a process of studying its denominational affiliation and was prepared to cut ties with the conservative-dominated Southern Baptist Convention and identify with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an alternative moderate organization.

That, more than his sexuality, prompted the dispute, Castle alleged.

"Baptists in Ohio tend to be very much on the fundamentalist side and in agreement with recent events in the (Southern Baptist) Convention." The church was not considering altering its relationship with the state Baptist convention or local association, Castle added.

Castle's allegation is part of a "martyr complex," McMurry said. "It is his perception and his perception only that this is about the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship."

McMurry also said it is his understanding that Castle's admission two years ago came in a "conversation" with the two church members, rather than a confidential counseling setting, and that more people were aware of his position on homosexuality than he knew. "I think Mike misjudges a good bit," McMurry said.

McMurry said he recently heard a report from a woman in the association that, in a teaching setting, Castle had discussed homosexuality as "an alternative lifestyle." Castle said the comment was made in a class on human sexuality he taught to about 15 single adults. "As a teacher I presented all the views," he said, but did not advocate homosexuality.

McMurry said at that point he determined to seek a meeting with Castle to discuss his views but did not manage to do so before the president of the Ohio state convention intervened.

The president, John Hays, pastor of Jersey Baptist Church in Pataskala and Castle's former pastor, did not return phone calls to ABP.

Castle said Hays described himself as "torn" between their friendship and his convictions about homosexuality. Hays suggested that the only ways for the church to avoid reprisal would be for Castle to resign or lead the church to drop all affiliations with the SBC, state convention and the association.

If Castle were to talk with the church's leaders and they determined to affirm his leadership, there would be an effort in the state convention to "take punitive action," Castle said Hays told him.

Later McMurry met with Castle and three leaders of the church. "We concluded we differed theologically," McMurry said, and that any action by the church to affirm Castle as a gay minister would likely result in censure by the association.

Last year, the Ohio convention considered amending its constitution and bylaws to forbid churches from affirming homosexuality, but instead opted for a non-binding resolution against homosexuality. In Castle's meeting with Hays, a copy of the resolution was given to him and the accusation leveled that he had "violated" the statement, Castle said.

The Southern Baptist Convention amended its constitution in 1992 to disfellowship congregations which "act to affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior."

But Castle said his church has done nothing to violate such denominational pronouncements. "The thing that disturbs me most is the church never took a stand on this issue," he said.

"I've never preached about this. We've simply had a different focus and a different purpose," he said. Castle said he started the church from scratch three years ago, using "seeker-oriented" methods targeted at baby boomers.

"It disturbs me very much they have made this an issue for our church. My whole premise on this thing is it's another indication that fundamentalism has gone amok. I find myself another casualty in that movement," he said.

Castle said the dispute focused on his sexual orientation and not any allegation of immorality. "There was no conduct accusation. There is nothing to accuse me of," he said.

It was suggested he get counseling, and there was even an offer to help pay the costs, Castle said. When he asked what the desired outcome of counseling should be, the response was "to say I had been healed of homosexuality."

"If I maintained that I understand this is the reality of who I am, they would not accept me," Castle said.

McMurry agreed with Castle's assessment at that point. "He did make the statement in my presence that people should accept him as he is, with which I disagree," McMurry said.

"I believe homosexuality is an abomination," McMurry continued. "I believe that someone who embraces the homosexual lifestyle has gone through the process of reprobation according to Romans 1 and therefore is in a state of sin outside the grace of God."

Castle would be welcomed as a minister in the association, McMurry said, "with open arms if there was a genuine repentance and a change and renunciation of homosexuality as sin."

"It is the prayer of the men who are aware of this situation in the association that Mike will have an experience of salvation, be healed of this aberration and be delivered from the clutches of this abomination," McMurry said.

McMurry and other ministers who are concerned about Castle "hate the sin of homosexuality, but we always are open to the sinner," he said. "I hope that comes across in whatever is written."

McMurry said another recent revelation that Castle is HIV-positive raises another issue. "Unfortunate as it is, I think it's reaping the whirlwind," McMurry said.

"He has told me he is HIV-positive. I feel like that is just as endangering as [Olympic diver] Greg Louganis. I think the possibility that there might be an accident and someone infected accidentally because of his infection is unconscionable," McMurry said.

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Associational leaders apologize for public rebuke of SBC leader

HOUMA, La. (ABP) -- A Louisiana Baptist association has issued a formal apology to Larry Lewis because a missions rally it sponsored turned into a public rebuke of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board president.

The executive committee of Adolphe Stagg Baptist Association in Houma, La., apologized for any embarrassment or harm caused to Lewis at an associational missions rally held Feb. 10.

At the missions rally, the pastor of the church at which the meeting was held says he took control of the meeting to discipline Lewis for endorsing the controversial "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" document, which he charged hurts mission efforts among Catholics.

The pastor, Jerry Moser of Bayou du Large Baptist Mission Church in Theriot, La., was fired for his conduct by the missions committee of the mission's sponsor, Christ Baptist Church in Houma.

The executive committee's apology notes that the association opposes the evangelical/Catholic accord, but also opposed "the way our missions rally was used as a forum by some to publicly confront you." It thanked Lewis "for being willing to travel to our association and share with us about missions."

Lewis recently sent a four-page memorandum to Home Mission Board directors describing the confrontation at the missions rally. Lewis remarked it is "disheartening that some are championing the cause of this pastor who, even after years of support from the Home Mission Board, was guilty of such recalcitrance and insubordination."

"I wish this could have been simply an unfortunate, embarrassing event in a small town on the Louisiana bayou," Lewis said. "Unfortunately, Rev. Moser and others have determined to escalate it into a media event of national importance."

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-- By Bob Allen

Oklahoma pastor nominated as Fellowship's moderator-elect

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Oklahoma pastor Lavonn Brown has been nominated as moderator-elect of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. If elected, he will lead the Atlanta-based alternative missions agency in 1996-1997.

Brown, pastor of First Baptist Church of Norman, Okla., since 1970, would succeed 1995-96 moderator Pat Anderson, a college criminology professor in Lakeland, Fla. The current moderator is Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, a retired executive of Woman's Missionary Union, who now lives in Kenwood, Ohio.

Brown was selected by a nominating committee of the Fellowship's Coordinating Council. His nomination, along with others for vacancies on the 79-member council, will be presented at the Fellowship's 1995 general assembly July 20-23 in Fort Worth, Texas.

The Fellowship was formed in 1990 to offer alternative missions programs and related ministries after conservatives wrested control of the 15 million-member Southern Baptist Convention from moderates in a theological-political struggle which spanned several years, beginning in 1979.

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-- By ABP staff

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