

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Seminary trustees affirm Mohler, grant him more authority over faculty**

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary affirmed the leadership of President Albert Mohler, adopted a policy discouraging teachers from criticizing the administration and strengthened the president's role in selection of new faculty members in a six-hour executive session April 18.

Trustees also adopted a statement against women serving as pastors during the closed-door session in Louisville, Ky.

Trustees went into executive session to hear Mohler's report on the recent crisis related to the Carver School of Church Social Work and his firing of Dean Diana Garland. Mohler's actions drew intense criticism from faculty, students and alumni and raised speculation that the backlash might even erode trustee support.

Trustee leaders declined to release the vote tally on any of their four actions but characterized the vote as "overwhelmingly positive."

Mohler fired Garland as dean of the Carver School March 20 after she told social work students that hiring restrictions on prospective faculty members imposed by Mohler placed the social work school's future in "serious jeopardy."

Garland's statement followed Mohler's rejection of David Sherwood to a position on the Carver School faculty. Sherwood, a respected conservative evangelical scholar from Gordon College, was rejected because he said, in response to a question by Mohler, that it might be possible for God to call a woman to be a pastor.

Later, Mohler acknowledged he had established a four-part litmus test on current issues which prospective faculty members must pass to get his approval. In addition to doctrinal views stated in official documents, new teachers must also oppose women serving as pastors, consider homosexuality sinful, oppose abortion and affirm the uniqueness of the Christian gospel message, he said.

Trustees adopted a "Statement on the Resignation of Dean Diana Garland," which affirmed Mohler's authority to ask those questions -- and others -- of prospective faculty members. Faculty candidates will be evaluated

based on their views of the Abstract of Principles, the seminary's Covenant Renewal document and "the current pressing issues of concern to evangelicals and Southern Baptists," the trustee statement spells out.

The president may also choose to institute other hiring criteria in addition to the four specific issues mentioned, the statement says.

The statement also expresses the board's "full support for both the process followed and the actions taken by the president" concerning Garland's firing.

Mohler met with trustees during the six-hour session, but the board apparently did not interview Garland or any other faculty member or student.

Another trustee statement calling for faculty loyalty did not mention Garland by name but was viewed as a thinly veiled warning against acts like hers and the outcry among other faculty members the dispute spawned.

It declares that anyone employed by the seminary must "support and relate constructively to the institution, its policies and administration. Faculty members may not use class time (or any forum designated for instructional purposes) for the purpose of undermining or obstructing the policies of this institution. Faculty members and staff of this institution are not to act in ways that are injurious or detrimental to the seminary's relationship with the denomination, donors or other constituencies within and without the seminary community."

The statement will be added to the seminary's Faculty/Staff Manual. It affirms Mohler's view articulated in letters distributed since Garland's firing that students and faculty should not publicly oppose decisions and opinions of his administration.

In a news conference after the executive session, Mohler and trustee chairman Rick White were asked whether this statement meant if seminary employees hold any opinion different from the president's they must not voice those differences publicly.

Trustee parliamentarian Skip Stam intervened to prevent the two from answering the question, citing the privacy of the trustees' executive session. "It says what it says," he asserted.

Over Stam's objection, White did add, however, that "any time there's a disagreement, it should be done in the context of those parties which it involved."

Both White and Mohler said the new policy would not be used to discipline faculty for actions taken prior to April 18.

A question about whether discipline of any faculty member would result from the executive session sent Stam and Mohler out of the room to confer before answering. Upon returning, Mohler replied, "No such action was discussed."

Also during the executive session, trustees revised the seminary's process for faculty hiring.

Although effective immediately, the new policy will be sent to the faculty for "review and input," White said. "The board may choose to revise or revisit this in October."

Major changes in the process include involving the president at an earlier stage and removing the step of a faculty vote on candidates.

Under the new policy, a faculty search committee will identify two to four top candidates for faculty positions. From that list, the president may choose a finalist to present to the trustees. If he desires, however, the president may reject all the nominees and bring his own candidate to the board. The president will be required only to seek the "advice" of the search committee.

After the candidate is chosen, the full faculty will be allowed to interview the candidate and give an evaluation to the president, which he may consider or not.

Under previous hiring policy, candidates had to be approved by a faculty vote before being presented to trustees.

The policy change is designed to head off a possible gridlock in faculty hiring, stemming from deteriorating relations between the president and faculty. Under the old policy, either the faculty or the president had the power

to block any nominee brought by the other. Under the new policy, the president has ultimate authority to hire whomever he desires, with trustee approval.

The trustee-adopted statement on "women in the pastorate" codifies trustee support for Mohler's position that the Bible prohibits women from serving as pastors. As evidence, the statement cites I Timothy 2:11-15, which says in part, "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man." Other Scripture cited includes I Thessalonians 5:12, I Timothy 5:17, Hebrews 13:17 and 24, and I Peter 5:2.

The statement says the seminary "exists to serve the autonomous churches of the Southern Baptist Convention, which overwhelmingly reflect this view individually and have expressed this collectively in annual convention by adopted resolutions."

It adds, "The expectation of the board of trustees has been and continues to be that the president will recommend and the board will elect to the faculty only those candidates who reflect the biblical position and the convictional consensus of the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention."

White said the statement does not mean the trustees oppose women serving in ministry roles other than the pastorate. "We do affirm the call of God to women for ministry," he said.

Mohler said the seminary will continue to accept women into all degree programs and all classes. However, he and White said any woman who believes she has been called by God to be a pastor should seriously consider the fact that few Southern Baptist churches are willing to hire a female pastor.

The trustee documents approved in executive session were to be presented to the faculty Wednesday afternoon, April 19. White admitted there might be faculty opposition to the documents but said he hoped the faculty would sense the positive spirit in which trustees had acted.

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## **Carver School's future still undecided**

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- A trustee committee has been appointed to study the future of the Carver School of Church Social Work at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Trustee chairman Rick White appointed the five-member committee April 18, with instructions they should present at least a preliminary report to the board by October.

Students in the social work school had asked for a quicker resolution, saying such a long time period leaves their future in limbo. The seminary has announced it will accept no new students in the master of social work degree program while the study is underway. Some students already in the program lack as much as two years of study before graduation.

Skip Stam, an attorney from Apex, N.C., will chair the committee. Other members will be Dorothy Barker, a homemaker from Morton, Texas; Jerry Rexroat, an educational consultant from Louisville; John Pennington, pastor of First Baptist Church of Douglassville, Ga.; and Morris Denman, pastor of Cook Memorial Baptist Church in Lynn Haven, Fla.

White said the study committee will look at every aspect of the Carver School, including its history and mission, and receive input from all who have something to say.

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-- By Mark Wingfield

## Mohler solidifies power at Southern Seminary

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have responded to growing criticism of President Albert Mohler's leadership by giving him a freer hand in running the Louisville, Ky., school.

Mohler has come under increasing criticism in recent weeks for firing Diana Garland as dean of the Carver School of Church Social Work and for his style in relating to faculty and students.

Students have held a sit-in outside his office for days, and the seminary's most conservative faculty members have accused the president of taking too hard a stance in opposition to women serving as pastors. Other criticism says Mohler has not built relational bridges to the faculty.

However, in a six-hour closed-door meeting April 18, trustees not only affirmed Mohler's leadership but strengthened his authority in hiring faculty and demanding allegiance from both faculty and staff.

Mohler described the session as "one of the most historic meetings of the board" and as one that moved the seminary closer to its historic roots.

"The support for the president is overwhelmingly positive," trustee chairman Rick White said. "The action of the board ... states very clearly the posture of the board and the way they feel about the leadership he is giving this institution."

While the trustees "deeply regret" the current crisis on campus related to the Carver School and Mohler's leadership, they support his actions and will stand by him, White said.

Mohler conceded that against the noise of his critics, the trustees' affirmation "is very helpful, and I believe it will speak loudly to this institution and its constituencies."

The board's strong affirmation of Mohler, without any hint of acknowledgement of concern about his leadership, is expected to speak loudly to some faculty and students in a negative way. In private conversations, some trustees concede they expect the school to lose both students and faculty over the issue but said trustees are resolved to move the seminary toward the right, regardless of short-term consequences.

Some conservative students and faculty members have expressed disappointment that the seminary under Mohler's leadership has not become what they thought it would. They say they came expecting to be part of a "conservative evangelical" movement but have found instead a more restrictive "fundamentalist" approach.

Steve Hills came to Southern from Abingdon, Ill., two years ago primarily because he liked the direction the seminary was said to be heading under Mohler's leadership as a religious conservative.

"There are a lot of us who came in like that and are now discouraged," he said.

Unlike most of conservative Evangelicalism, Mohler's administration is unwilling to tolerate debate on issues about which many evangelical conservatives disagree, such as the role of women in ministry, Hills said.

Conservative faculty members brought in to balance the more liberal-thinking faculty of the previous administration have expressed similar concerns, both in conversations with Mohler and with trustees.

But Mohler also has supporters in the student body and elsewhere.

In anticipation of this week's meeting, two prominent pastors wrote letters to all seminary trustees praising Mohler's leadership and urging the board to stand behind him. Those letters came from Bill Hancock, Mohler's pastor at Highview Baptist Church in Louisville and former chairman of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, and James Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church of Snellville, Ga., and a member of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

One of Mohler's student supporters, Ron Cooper, stood outside the April 18 trustee meeting wearing a homemade badge that said "I support Pres. Mohler."

"I believe the overwhelming majority of Baptist churches support Dr. Mohler's views, and since the seminary is accountable to the churches I will stand in support of Al Mohler," said Cooper, of Marion, Ohio.

Cooper admitted "a majority of students do not hold my view, but it's catching up."

Despite appearances to the contrary, the seminary "is not falling apart," he said. "We will survive."

And even though students have been forced into opposing camps over Mohler's leadership, "we don't hate one another," he declared.

As a gesture of goodwill during the trustees' closed meeting, Cooper made a run to McDonald's and brought back food and drinks for a group of students who oppose Mohler who also were waiting outside the meeting room.

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## **Southern trustees OK budget with impending \$900,000 cut**

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Nearly \$1 million in expenses will be cut from the budget of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in a largely unexplained "budget reduction" approved by trustees April 19.

Documents approved by trustees say this \$918,497 reduction "will be realized substantially through a program of restructuring, an early retirement incentive program, a change in post-retirement benefit policy and other budget reductions, if necessary."

In a news conference after the trustee meeting, seminary President Albert Mohler and trustee chairman Rick White declined to say how many positions might be eliminated or when news of the staff cuts would be made public. They also declined to say how many faculty members would be eligible for the early-retirement package or what the terms of that package would be.

The trustee-approved budget for the 1995-96 fiscal year assumes that the reductions will have been made by July 31, 1995, the day before the new fiscal year begins. Mohler has authority to make the reductions in consultation with the seminary's financial board, a small group of trustees.

Both Mohler and faculty sources said the early retirement incentive was not an attempt by the administration to get rid of faculty members. The idea was developed by the faculty and presented to the president and trustees before the recent crisis related to the Carver School of Church Social Work, they said.

Although details of the retirement package were not made public, the deal reportedly would be available to any faculty member whose age and number of years with the seminary equal at least 65 when added together. The incentive reportedly would give eligible candidates either one month's salary for every two years served or one month's salary for every year served.

As added incentive, those who accept the deal reportedly would be the last to receive full payment of post-retirement benefits such as supplemental health insurance and life insurance. As part of the seminary's overall budget reduction, trustees approved a change that would cancel payment of those post-retirement benefits for anyone who retires after July 31, 1995.

Speculation about an inevitable staff reduction has circulated on campus for several months. But even though staff members now know it is coming before year end, they have not been told how it will be enacted or who will be impacted.

The budget adopted for 1995-96 totals \$17.3 million, a \$434,131 decrease over the current year's budget. Even with this decrease in the total budget, the \$918,497 "budget adjustment" is needed to balance the budget

because some fixed expenses such as salaries are increasing while some income sources are declining.

Mohler said seminary officials had not speculated on the number of faculty who might take early retirement, the number of administrative positions that might be cut or the possible decrease in enrollment -- all factors that will impact the next budget.

As part of the 1995-96 budget, student matriculation fees will be raised from an average of \$800 per semester to \$900 per semester. Rent for campus housing will increase 5 percent. Faculty and staff will receive a 3 percent salary increase.

Throughout their three days of meetings, trustees heard reports of declining revenue and enrollment at the seminary.

Alumni giving has declined from a peak of \$400,000 per year in 1986 to \$100,000 in 1994, Mohler said. Only 5 percent of alumni gave anything to the seminary in 1994, down from a previous high of 20 percent participation, he added.

While the seminary received a couple of major donations in 1994, overall giving to the school is down, officials said. The budget adopted for 1995-96 anticipates a further reduction of \$400,000 in gift income.

For the first eight months of the current fiscal year, gift income is \$202,000 below budget goals, reported T.J. McGlothlin, seminary treasurer. Also during the same eight-month period, overall income is \$630,000 below budget projections, he said. However, the seminary continues to operate in the black, McGlothlin reported, because expenses have been cut to meet income.

On-campus enrollment in all degree programs this spring is 1,373, down 4.7 percent over last spring and down 13 percent over the year before that.

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