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Editor: Greg Warner
Associate Editor: Bob Allen
Phone: (904) 262-6626
Fax: (904) 262-7745

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Richard Jackson protests actions at Southern Seminary

BROWNWOOD, Texas (ABP) -- One-time Southern Baptist Convention presidential hopeful Richard Jackson has pulled out of a teaching commitment at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in protest of recent actions on the Louisville, Ky., campus.

Jackson, president of the Richard Jackson Center for Evangelism and Encouragement at Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas, informed a seminary official of his decision in a letter dated April 24. A copy of the letter was obtained by Associated Baptist Press.

In the letter to David Dockery, vice president for academic administration, Jackson said he was withdrawing his intention to teach a course this summer at Boyce Bible School, a division of Southern Seminary.

Jackson said recent actions at the seminary "have stirred within me a personal conviction that simply will not allow me to fill" the teaching position. He cited decisions "to terminate faculty members who will not adhere to a specified creed followed by the public reprimand of adult students who took action against such anti-Baptist decisions."

Jackson alluded to recent events involving the seminary's Carver School of Church Social Work. In interviewing a prospective faculty member in March, Mohler asked for the candidate's views on a short list of social issues, and then blocked the nomination because of the professor's view that women should be allowed to serve as pastors.

Afterward, the dean of the Carver School reported to students that by adding hiring criteria in addition to formal written doctrinal guidelines, Mohler undermined the school's ability to hire qualified faculty. Mohler fired the dean, Diana Garland, for insubordination. She remains on the faculty in a tenured teaching position.

The firing unleashed a torrent of criticism, including a sit-in protest by some students. In an April 5 forum, Mohler advised students their proper role is not to seek to influence administration of the school. "Your responsibility as a student is to study," he said.

Seminary trustees met April 17-18 and backed the president, giving him more power in the faculty selection

process and adopting a policy restricting faculty from using classrooms "for the purpose of undermining or obstructing the policies of this institution" or acting 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."

Jackson said in his letter he is "sincerely sorry for the inconvenience my cancellation might cause, but for the impression to be created that I am in any way aligned with those who insist that one Baptist can tell another Baptist what to believe would be to desecrate everything I have ever preached, taught or lived."

Jackson is former pastor of North Phoenix (Ariz.) Baptist Church. He retired from the active pastorate in 1993 after 25 years at the Arizona church.

In the formative years of the inerrancy movement in the Southern Baptist Convention, Jackson was regarded a rising star in the conservative group. He broke ranks with the movement, however, and ran unsuccessfully for SBC president with moderate support in 1987 and 1988.

A seminary spokesman called shortly before ABP's deadline said neither Mohler nor Dockery was available for comment.

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-- By Bob Allen

Stewardship Commission trustees raise concerns about agency's demise

By Shari Schubert

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- An official statement by trustees of one of the agencies eliminated in a proposed restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention stopped short of directly opposing the proposal, but affirmed the SBC Stewardship Commission's desire to continue to minister "into the 21st century."

The commission's president, meanwhile, expressed without reservation his conviction that dissolving the commission "is not in the best interest of the Southern Baptist Convention."

The restructuring proposal would divide work now done by the Stewardship Commission between two existing agencies. Promotion of the Cooperative Program, the SBC's unified budget, would become the responsibility of the SBC Executive Committee, while responsibilities for stewardship education and assisting churches in capital fund-raising would be assigned to the Baptist Sunday School Board, the convention's publishing arm.

The Nashville, Tenn.,-based commission is one of five agencies on the chopping block in an SBC restructuring proposed by a blue-ribbon Program and Structure Study Committee, chaired by Louisiana pastor Mark Brister. Three other agencies would be consolidated into a North American Mission Board, which would take over functions now performed by the SBC's Home Mission Board, Radio-TV Commission and Brotherhood Commission. Overall, the proposal reduces the number of SBC entities from 19 to 12.

The proposal has received endorsement of the SBC Executive Committee and will be presented for the first of two annual votes at this year's SBC annual meeting, scheduled June 20-22 in Atlanta. A timeline prepared by the restructure committee estimates the plan would be fully implemented in the year 2000.

During a lengthy discussion at a trustee meeting March 23-24 in Nashville, Missouri trustee Kenneth Hull made -- and subsequently withdrew -- a motion that trustees go on record as opposing reassignment of the

commission's duties and requesting that the Stewardship Commission remain intact.

Instead, trustees approved a motion by trustee Charles Sullivan of Indiana that a four-member committee be appointed to draft an official response to the Program and Structure Study Committee report.

The committee worked late the evening of March 23 and through much of the next morning to draft the statement. It was approved that afternoon.

Jason Mori, a layman from Alexandria, Va., said trustees drafting the statement sought wording that was not "blatantly negative" or that might be perceived as "sour grapes or protectionism" but calls attention to a need to "think this thing through" and make sure that services currently being rendered to the convention not be lost in the name of efficiency.

"I'm in the private sector," Mori explained, "and I've been through several major reorganization-type activities. The hardest thing is not to plan the event; it's to carry it out --because work doesn't go away." When the number of people doing the work is reduced, he observed, some things generally "fall into the crack."

Mori said trustees also are concerned that dividing the responsibilities of the Stewardship Commission between two other agencies would result in "breaking up the longstanding expertise and a great deal of synergy that currently exists."

The trustees' statement stressed the importance of stewardship development for Southern Baptists in contemporary American society. The trustees cited "a gross materialistic mindset" that exists among Americans -- including Southern Baptists -- coupled with the "greatest intergenerational transfer of wealth in history" predicted between 1998 and 2002. "Without a strong, dynamic ministry in stewardship development with direct linkage to the Cooperative Program and its promotion, for all practical purposes that generation may be lost to the support of missions," the statement warned.

The statement cited a study sponsored by the Lilly Foundation, which found that in 11 denominations, including Southern Baptists, per-member giving as a percentage of income was lower in 1992 than in 1921, and also lower than in 1933 at the depth of the Great Depression.

The trustees said they are "vitaly concerned" that the convention's decision regarding the restructure recommendation "strengthen the ministry of stewardship education and Cooperative Program promotion resulting in personal spiritual growth and the spread of world missions."

Similar concerns were shared by Stewardship Commission President Ronald Chandler in a report to trustees that preceded the drafting of their official statement. "Twentieth-century Christianity has been captured by the culture of our day. The consumer-dominated, materialistic mindset of American society has received an 'acceptable' evaluation in Christian living," he said.

"More is said in the Bible about material possessions than about other media-popular issues of our day, i.e., abortion, church and state, who should or should not be ordained, etc.," Chandler continued.

The Bible calls greed "idolatry," Chandler said, adding: "We live in a nation of idol worshipers. Now is not the time to lower or dilute the message so needed in our day. Stewardship must be a major emphasis, not just for raising money, ... but because of what poor stewardship is doing in our hearts and to our values, loyalties and commitments."

The SBC spends only 0.35 percent of its budget for promotion of stewardship and the Cooperative Program, the statement said. In contrast, Chandler said, similar non-profit organizations typically spend 8-12 percent of their budgets on fund-raising.

Despite the limited funding, Chandler noted, overall per capita giving by Southern Baptists increased 68 percent from 1985 to 1993.

Considering the giving statistics in light of the small amount spent on promotion, Chandler remarked, "If effectiveness is the goal (of the reorganization), we already have it!"

While the Stewardship Commission trustees' statement did not specifically call for Southern Baptists to

reject the recommendation to dissolve the agency, Chandler expressed his personal conviction that the commission should remain intact.

"My stance is not taken with political overtones nor personal considerations," Chandler told trustees. "I do not desire to add fuel to any convention fires. Neither do I wish to attack anyone's motives, wisdom or character. Christians can come to different conclusions in matters such as these and resolve their differences in a Christ-like manner."

If the proposal is adopted, Chandler added, "I will work with those to whom our program assignments are transferred to assure a smooth and orderly transition."

Recalling that most SBC agency heads did not express immediate opposition to the recommendations when they were unveiled in February, Chandler explained, "An immediate negative reaction would have been inappropriate at the time. We were asked to give prayerful consideration to the recommendations. This request was reasonable and fair.

"Now, several weeks later, I have had time to pray and seek the will of God," he said. "It is out of this conviction that I have come to believe that dissolving the Stewardship Commission is not in the best interest of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Contacted by Associated Baptist Press, Brister, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport, La., said, "The Program and Structure Study Committee has presented an opportunity for Southern Baptists to streamline and focus our attention on missions and evangelism."

"We will still have stewardship education and promotion in the proposed structure. What is being eliminated is a commission, not the function of stewardship education and promotion," Brister said.

Brister said the committee "understands the concerns of the Stewardship Commission" and appreciates the "typically gracious manner" in which Chandler "indicated that Christians can come to different conclusions in matters such as these."

"We appreciate Brother Chandler, but feel that the structure that we have proposed best comes from the mission statement," Brister said.

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-- Bob Allen contributed to this story

Supreme court reviews order to allow KKK cross at statehouse

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Ah, Christmas. Along with holly, mistletoe and good cheer, the season nowadays also means headaches for state governments grappling with requests to permit private religious displays on public property.

The most recent such dispute making its way to the U.S. Supreme Court was argued before justices April 26.

At issue is a federal appeals court ruling that private religious speech in a public forum does not violate the First Amendment's requirement of church-state separation.

Officials previously permitted a holiday display with a 20-foot Christmas tree and 14-foot menorah in front of the Ohio statehouse, but barred a 10-foot Latin cross the Ku Klux Klan wanted to erect. Klan officials filed suit

after their application was denied.

Lower courts sided with the Klan, ruling that while a state-sponsored religious message would be unconstitutional, private religious speech on public grounds is not.

Michael Renner, arguing for Ohio officials, said that unattended religious displays located near the seat of government could lead the reasonable observer to infer state endorsement of a particular religion.

The display in question was accompanied by a small sign identifying the KKK as its sponsor, a distinction which elicited harsh questioning from Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and, perhaps, tipped her hand on how she might vote.

"I think your argument is so far fetched it is hard to bring it to the real world," she told the attorney at one point. She criticized the state for exceeding reasonable concerns of time, place and manner of displays, instead choosing to engage in "suppression of speech."

Justice David Souter pointed to the lower court's decision that "as long as the forum is public and the speech is private" then no establishment-clause violation occurs.

"Why should we find a legal error in that court's opinion?" he asked

Renner argued that religious speech is treated differently by the First Amendment and therefore should be treated differently by the state to avoid breaching the wall separating the two.

Justice Antonin Scalia asked Renner if state officials would not be equally concerned about the Nazi Party erecting a display that could be misconstrued as being supported by the government. Renner acknowledged state officials would be concerned about such association, but they would not have to concern themselves with establishment-clause violations.

Pressed by justices, Renner acknowledged that a menorah display would be perceived as a religious symbol by reasonable observers, but he said that Ohio officials were operating under precedent established by the high court. He pointed to a 1989 ruling that a display of a menorah next to a Christmas tree in front of a city-county building did not convey endorsement because of how the display was set up.

Benson Wolman of Columbus, Ohio, argued the Klan's case. What is before the court, Wolman said, is a "quintessential public forum" that the state chose to confine because it did not like the speakers' views. He added that there was substantial evidence that the state simply did not want the KKK to participate.

Justice Clarence Thomas, who rarely speaks from the bench, asked whether the KKK cross had political rather than religious overtones. Even though the cross was not burning, Thomas suggested that figuratively speaking, many reasonable observers might see it afire.

If a burning cross related to the KKK carries more of a political message, how then could the religion clauses come into play? Thomas queried.

A church-state specialist who observed the arguments predicted that the court will rule against the state.

"Where you have private speech in a traditional public forum and a sign disclaiming any state involvement, it's hard to see how that could be mistaken as state speech or state endorsement," said Brent Walker, general counsel of the Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee. "It's unfortunate that the Klan is involved here, but the First Amendment applies to abhorrent messages as well as to the ones we like."

The case is *Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board v. Pinette*.

AIDS patient wins his job back at North Carolina Baptist school

By Susan Sturgis

BUIES CREEK, N.C. (ABP) -- Two years ago, Campbell University received a bill for the medical care of one of its teachers -- a \$20,000 charge for treating an AIDS-related illness.

School officials waited for the teacher to return from medical leave, then they fired him as a threat to the safety of students.

Now, the North Carolina Baptist-affiliated school has received another bill. It must pay \$325,000 to the teacher for wrongful dismissal. And it has to give him his job back.

The award is part of a settlement reached on the eve of a federal trial that was to open April 3 in Raleigh, N.C. The suit filed last year was the first in the Carolinas -- and one of the first in the country -- to apply the Americans with Disabilities Act to people with AIDS. The 1991 law protects workers from discrimination in hiring or employment due to physical impairments that do not impede their ability to do their jobs.

"The message is that if you discriminate against people with AIDS, you're not going to be successful," said Adele Rapport, an attorney with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the federal agency which filed the suit on the teacher's behalf. "The point is, people with AIDS can do virtually anything."

Under the settlement filed March 29 by Judge Terrence Boyle, Campbell University agreed to pay the damages and court costs and provide training on AIDS awareness and federal anti-discrimination law for employees who make personnel decisions.

The school also agreed to let the teacher write his own job description. The man -- who has chosen to remain anonymous and goes by "John Doe" in court documents -- will now coordinate student internships in the school's department of exercise science.

Doe looked for other jobs in North Carolina after he was fired but found none, said Mark Ash, one of Doe's personal attorneys. And because his family lives there, he did not want to leave the state.

"I'm extremely pleased that our client will be able to continue his employment at Campbell," Ash said. "I think that's most important to him for his sense of self-worth and self-esteem."

Key to reaching the settlement was testimony from infectious-disease experts, Rapport said. One of the experts who testified was Dr. John Bartlett, the director of the AIDS clinic at Duke University and Doe's personal physician.

"This gentleman posed no risk to his students," Bartlett said. "We know clearly how HIV is transmitted - through sexual contact or blood and other bodily fluids. These things are not going to occur in the course of teaching physical education."

Students stopped at random on the 5,000-student campus in rural Harnett County said they were unaware of the case, but student leaders familiar with it said the issue was not about protecting students. Rather, they said, it was about the rights of a religious school to restrict hiring to people who share its views on morality.

"If someone's heterosexual and they contract the AIDS virus and they're terminated, that's blatant discrimination," said Dan Chappell, president-elect of the junior class. "But I do know that if a man is gay and working for this university, terminating him is fine.

"It's a Southern Baptist university. It should stand by its beliefs."

The lawsuit did not address Doe's sexual orientation or how he contracted the disease.

The school hired him in August 1990 to teach lecture courses and tennis, aerobics and weight-training classes. His contract was renewed for each of the next three school years and his salary raised from \$22,500 to

\$26,100.

In the spring of 1993, Doe contracted pneumocystis carinii pneumonia and missed five weeks of work. Several weeks after he returned, he was summoned to a meeting with school officials and told to clear out his office and not to return to campus because of his illness.

Doe filed a complaint with the Raleigh EEOC office, which investigated the charges and found reasonable cause to believe the school fired the teacher in violation of the ADA. Last April, after the school refused to settle the case informally, the commission filed the suit. It asserted that Doe could perform all the essential functions of his job and that keeping him from doing so was discriminatory. But the school disagreed, arguing Doe posed a threat to students and to himself if he remained employed.

Doe's private attorneys -- Ash and Robert Glasener of the Raleigh firm of Smith, Anderson, Blount, Dorsett, Mitchell & Jernigan -- added claims to the suit under two other federal employment anti-discrimination laws which allowed the damages requested to surpass the ADA's \$300,000 cap.

Last summer the judge ordered the school to continue paying Doe's salary and medical benefits through the trial, which was scheduled for April 3.

But on March 10, after several months of listening to witnesses for both sides, the school's attorneys offered to settle.

"The settlement saves a lot of expense and a lot of time for all involved," said William Johnson, a Lillington attorney who represented the school. "That was the primary motivation."

The settlement did not include an admission by Campbell of any wrongdoing.

Doe, who is at present in good health, looks forward to returning to work in several weeks, Ash said.

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