

Associated Baptist Press

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Buckner no longer seeking to buy Prestonwood site

By Christina Wicker

DALLAS (ABP) -- Buckner Baptist Benevolences is no longer negotiating to buy Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas, but the church still plans to move, Pastor Jack Graham told his congregation Sunday, June 11.

"Let's stay positive, let's stay prayerful and let's stay confident in the will of God," he told the church.

Although no sale is imminent, other churches have expressed an interest in buying the complex in North Dallas, as has an organization involved in retirement-living facilities, Graham said later.

The Buckner purchase would have allowed Prestonwood to pay off its remaining \$6.2 million debt. "This may slow us down. It may speed us up," Graham said when asked about Prestonwood's fund-raising campaign.

Buckner trustees decided June 9 they wanted more time to consider buying or building a new facility, said Buckner president Kenneth Hall. The 116-year-old social-services ministry, which is affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, still plans a major expansion of its non-residential programs.

The expansion, which is part of a five-year effort, would allow Buckner to add 12,000 to 20,000 non-residential clients to its counseling, education and family-support programs, Hall said.

"We just decided not to do anything right now," said Hall, who characterized the vote as a "non-decision."

The 13,000-member Prestonwood church is considering a new 100-acre site in Plano, north of Dallas. Graham said he expects church members to make a decision within weeks.

The church staff already is working with architects on plans for a new \$50 million complex, and Graham said that work is not likely to be delayed.

When the congregation voted in late April to move the church, ministers estimated that the process would take two to three years. The church has struggled for years with parking problems and the need for more nursery space.

Neither Graham nor Hall would rule out the idea that Buckner might eventually purchase Prestonwood.

"We still want to keep all of our options open," Hall said, "At this point we don't have enough clear answers at that site, and we need to give Prestonwood the opportunity to move ahead with another buyer."

A majority of Buckner trustees were in favor of the Prestonwood purchase, Hall said, but he and other staff members wanted an overwhelming majority. "I needed a mandate," he said.

Some trustees were concerned that the 17.5-acre Prestonwood complex, especially the sanctuary, built to hold 4,000 people, was too big for Buckner's needs, Hall said.

Discussions with homeowners near Prestonwood Baptist who were concerned about Buckner's plans did not factor into the ministry's decision, said Hall. He said he was confident Buckner could have been a good neighbor.

Hall said a North Dallas location remains attractive to Buckner because volunteers could be easily recruited in that area of the city. Buckner's East Dallas residential facilities for children and senior citizens would not be affected, he said.

Buckner serves 10,000 people in 17 Texas cities.

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Learning, spirituality go together, gathering of educators told

By Bob Allen

GREENVILLE, S.C. (ABP) -- Learning and spirituality must be connected to produce "passionate people of faith," Christian educator Daniel Aleshire told a recent gathering in Greenville, S.C.

Aleshire, associate director of the Association of Theological Schools, spoke at Gathering '95. Held June 8-10 at First Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C., it was the third annual continuing education event sponsored by Smyth & Helwys Publishing of Macon, Ga.

Christians need both their feelings and intellect to properly respond to God, Aleshire said. "The sense that I must respond affectively to God and not just intellectually is very important. We need passionate people of faith," he said.

Aleshire, who taught Christian education 12 years at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary before going to the Pittsburgh, Pa.,-based accrediting agency in 1990, was the keynote speaker at the Greenville meeting, addressing a theme of "Reuniting Spirituality and Learning."

Many educated Christians are wary of feelings, Aleshire said. "I am worried in American Protestantism we see all the religion on television and its false emotionalism and we want to drain all the emotion out of our worship."

However, it's "not human" to be loved by God "and just sit on your duff," Aleshire said. "It's human to respond."

Worship needs to involve "educated feeling," Aleshire said. "I think we've got a lot of soap opera religion and it's sleazy, abusive and manipulative, but we don't invite true religion in the world by saying it's all the 'McNeil/Lehrer Report,' because it all isn't."

"Ultimately faith comes down to our doing something," he said.

Inactivity plagues American Protestants and "a lot of Southern Baptist life" due in part to "a long tradition of inappropriate use of guilt" in religion, Aleshire said. Overreacting, "they associate doing with inappropriate guilt motivation."

However, he noted, "No congregation will survive if it doesn't do something."

Biblical spirituality involves both the vertical relationship with God and horizontal relationships with others, Aleshire said. During the '60s and '70s, moderate Southern Baptists tended to emphasize the social-justice aspect. "Right now transcendence is in," he observed.

An educated spirituality needs to be versed in the Bible, Aleshire said. "I think we have got to take the Scripture intensely seriously," he said.

While moderates rightly criticize biblical literalists for being too narrow, too individualistic and too preoccupied with theological certainty, moderates sometimes tend toward an opposite extreme, Aleshire said.

"One of the worries I have in moderate Southern Baptist life is we think doctrine is not important. I think it would be better not to judge one another, but spirituality is judged by the kind of stuff that comes as fruits of the spirit -- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control -- the kind of things they don't have laws against."

"I don't think all the world would be fixed if everybody's theology got fixed," Aleshire said. And, he acknowledged, "In various ways and at various times we have felt depressed and frustrated by bad theology."

However, what Christians hold to be "dear and true" has "a forming influence in your life," he said.

Aleshire shared a definition of Christian spirituality he and three other professors at Southern Seminary developed over three years of weekly discussions about their own spirituality: "Christian spirituality involves transforming responsiveness of the whole person, individually and corporately, to God, the 'Beyond our Midst,' and participation in God's continuing creation and redemption in and through Jesus Christ."

The definition "is so packed (and) so sterile, but it leads us in the right direction," he said.

American Protestantism "is in great stress," Aleshire said. "It doesn't mean God doesn't love that community," he said. "There's just something going that is eroding that community."

"I think what's happened is there was a time when you assumed to be a good American was to be a Protestant, and that is changing in our society. The cultural support system is gone. Colonial Protestantism didn't realize how privileged it was."

With that realization, "We've got to be very intentional and faithful," he said.

Worship leaders at the conference included Peggy Haymes, a devotional speaker and author from Greensboro, N.C., and Michael Hawn, associate professor of sacred music at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

The Gathering is the only annual continuing education event sponsored by Smyth & Helwys, said David Cassady, the company's vice president for Christian education. Its primary aims are to provide a place for religious professionals to "reflect" and "feel community" with peers, he said.

Total attendance at the three-day workshop was 169, Cassady said. Last year's convocation, held in Richmond, Va., attracted about 120.

Next year's Gathering will be on "Congregational Growth: Dialogue and Directions," and is scheduled April 25-27 at Providence Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C.

Unmarried couples not 'living in sin,' church says

LONDON (ABP) -- A controversial Church of England report says that couples who live together without marrying should not be viewed as "living in sin."

The report, "Something to Celebrate," published in June by the Church of England's Board for Social Responsibility, studies changing family patterns in Britain, Ecumenical News International reports.

The study affirms marriage as central to the Christian tradition of family life but calls on churches to recognize other ways in which people live together. It urges the church to welcome all people, whether single, married, separated or cohabitating in either heterosexual or homosexual relationships.

Use of the phrase "living in sin" to describe unmarried couples living together, which dates from the 19th century, is "most unhelpful," the study says. Instead, it acknowledges that some relationships are marriage in all but name and could be termed "non-ceremonial marriage."

Presbyterian, Baptist and Roman Catholic groups distanced themselves from the study. "Our church's view is that sexual acts should take place within the marriage bond and nowhere else," said Bill Wallace, a (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland official.

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-- By ABP staff

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