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In this issue:

- Bulletin
- Deal to transfer social work school from Southern to Samford hits snag
- Leaders emphasize 'good news' about Southern Seminary
- Mercer theology school hires first three professors

BULLETIN: As this issue was going to press ABP learned that Southern Seminary is releasing a statement announcing that it would enter negotiations with Campbellsville College regarding transfer of the seminary's master of social work degree program. ABP will issue a story Thursday.

Deal to transfer social work school from Southern to Samford hits snag

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- An unexplained snag may have derailed the proposed transfer of the Carver School of Church Social Work from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to Samford University.

Seminary trustees were expected to approve the transfer Oct. 10. Instead, they met behind closed doors for an hour to approve a recommendation granting the administration and trustee executive committee authority to negotiate an agreement which would "allow the continuation of the master of social work program at another appropriate institution."

Trustee and administration officials refused to explain the snag. Officials at Samford also declined to speak to reporters, referring all calls back to the seminary.

President Albert Mohler said the latest trustee action opens the possibility that some institution other than Samford could acquire the Carver School's master of social work degree program. However, he declined to say what the seminary would do if the program cannot be transferred to another school.

Mohler said some report should be made by the executive committee's next meeting, scheduled for Feb. 6, although he did not say whether the issue should be resolved by then.

Under the original proposal, Samford would have acquired the Carver School effective Aug. 1, 1996. Samford would have operated the school through the 1996-97 academic year on the seminary's campus in Louisville, Ky., and then moved the school to Birmingham, Ala.

Current students in the Carver School had expressed mixed feelings about the transfer, but generally had said they were glad some provision would be made to continue the school and to allow them to complete accredited

degrees.

The apparent disruption of that plan, however, renewed anxiety among students.

"As far as our students are concerned, we are back to March," when the crisis arose, said Janet Spressart, acting dean of the Carver School. In the spring, "they didn't know how to plan for this fall. They were made a lot of promises regarding course work and the opportunity to graduate. Now it's just slipping away."

Students on track to graduate in May 1996 should be "safe," Spressart said. They will be able to take their required courses on the Southern Seminary campus in Louisville.

But students who are on track to graduate in 1997 are in jeopardy, she added. "They have no clarity for graduation," she explained. "We hoped they would know something by this trustee meeting. But the board basically said, 'We'll get back to you -- maybe in February, maybe in April.'"

And that's too late, because they cannot make plans for completing their degrees when they don't know where, or if, required courses will be available, she said.

"It's hard to encourage them to stay," Spressart said. "I don't see how I can encourage them to make decisions except to leave this place."

Spressart and Diana Garland, whom Mohler fired as Carver School dean last March, are the only two remaining full-time faculty members in the school. Neither professor has indicated how long she will continue to teach at Southern Seminary.

Nevertheless, Mohler and trustee officials repeatedly pledged to "protect the interest of the students" in their negotiations. Mohler earlier had promised that anyone on track to graduate by the spring of 1997 would have an opportunity to complete the degree program.

In a news conference after the trustee meeting, Mohler and trustee Chairman Rick White refused to say what caused the breakdown in negotiations with Samford.

"We have not formally severed conversations with Samford," Mohler said. He later said "impasse" is not an appropriate word to describe the problem. "There are issues where there was not a mutual understanding" between the seminary and Samford, he said.

Comments made by Mohler and trustees hinted that the problem could involve misunderstandings about what assets of the Carver School would transfer to Samford. In earlier announcements about the proposed transfer, seminary officials talked about moving the Carver School. In public statements the day of the trustee meeting, they carefully avoided that language and instead talked about transferring the seminary's master of social work degree program.

Among the assets that could be in dispute are the Carver School name, its curriculum and endowments which currently benefit Carver School faculty and students. The seminary has one endowed chair and some scholarship funds specifically tied to the Carver School.

Mohler declined to state the value of those endowment funds, saying the seminary "never considered transferring" them to Samford.

The current entity known as the Carver School of Church Social Work is only 11 years old, but it evolved from the Woman's Missionary Training School, which was founded in Louisville in 1907.

The WMU Training School was begun at a time when the seminary did not accept women as students. As that policy changed, the Training School in 1952 was renamed the Carver School of Missions and Social Work. In 1957, WMU transferred ownership of the Carver School to the Southern Baptist Convention. And in 1962, Southern Seminary assumed full responsibility for the Carver School from the SBC.

The seminary began offering a master of divinity degree with emphasis in social work in 1969. In 1984, the Carver School of Church Social Work was formed as a separate school within the seminary, and the master of social work degree was offered, with accreditation by the Council on Social Work Education.

In the news conference, Mohler emphasized that Southern Seminary was interested in transferring to another school only the parts of the Carver School established in 1984, and not anything related to the earlier Carver School of Missions and Social Work.

The seminary will continue to offer courses in social work, just as it did prior to 1984, Mohler said. The

primary' change will be the elimination of the accredited master of social work degree program, he said.

If Southern can't transfer its master of social work degree program to another institution, the degree program apparently will die.

The trustee committee appointed last spring to study the future of the Carver School reported to the full trustee board that it "would not be feasible" to continue offering an accredited master of social work degree program through the seminary. The study committee was appointed after Mohler fired Garland as dean, prompting student protests and inquiries from three accrediting agencies.

Garland was fired after she told a gathering of social work students that Mohler's restrictive hiring policies were prohibiting the Carver School from obtaining an adequate number of qualified faculty members. Mohler vetoed the nomination of a faculty candidate after learning the candidate thought it possible that God could call a woman to be a pastor.

The trustee committee's printed report noted that "considerable differences exist in the structures, processes and issues of social work education and theological studies."

In the news conference, Mohler cited the National Council on Social Work's code of ethics as part of the problem. That code of ethics prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender or sexual orientation -- an issue that has concerned conservatives who adamantly oppose any openness to homosexuality and who believe women's roles in the church should be different from men's.

The study committee also considered concerns about some Carver School students doing field placements in secular social service agencies with no explicit religious mission, Mohler said.

Mohler also repeatedly has stated that his vision for the seminary is to focus on the master of divinity degree and not follow the trend of other seminaries by offering a variety of other degrees as well.

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Leaders emphasize 'good news' about Southern Seminary

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Enrollment and financial contributions are down, but God is blessing Southern Baptist Theological Seminary like never before, trustees were told during their Oct. 9-10 meeting on the campus in Louisville, Ky.

For the first time in several years, seminary trustees conducted business in a harmonious atmosphere. Recent meetings have been marked by student protests, heated debate and intense media scrutiny as the trustees elected a new president, fired faculty and turned the school on a conservative course.

But now trustees are of one mind ideologically and most students and faculty who opposed them are gone.

Trustee committees brought uniformly positive reports to the board, frequently praising President Albert Mohler and the new faculty members who have been hired under his tenure. They also reported affirmation from new students on campus.

"We've got to get the good news out about what's happening at Southern Seminary," trustee chairman Rick White said in a news conference after the meeting.

Mohler told trustees they are "standing against the stream" of most theological seminaries by narrowly defining the school's theological parameters and mission.

He compared the seminary trustees and administration to the Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortes, who sailed to Veracruz, Mexico, in 1519 and conquered the Aztecs. After landing with 11 ships, Cortes sent one ship back to Spain with news of their safe passage to Mexico and had the other ships burned to ensure his men would march forward and not retreat.

Likè thé Spanish conquistadors, the seminary's new leaders are in a position where they must move forward, Mohler said. "There is no turning back."

Mohler noted seven "marks of blessing" on the seminary in his address to trustees: focus, fidelity, fundamentals, family, friends, finances and facilities.

The seminary is making itself a "blessing to the churches," he said, noting the seminary is accountable first to God, second to the churches and third to the Southern Baptist Convention.

"We know where we are going," Mohler declared. And new students coming to the seminary are coming because they know this direction and agree with it, he added.

As the seminary moves forward, Mohler said he will seek to find faculty members who not only love Southern Seminary but who hold the same theological convictions he and the trustees espouse.

While most theological education in the United States has "accommodated itself to a marketplace," Southern Seminary will focus more intently on the basics, specifically the master of divinity degree, Mohler said. He described other degree programs as auxiliary and sometimes detrimental to the seminary's main purpose of training pastors for churches.

Enrollment this fall dropped 13 percent over last year -- the largest one-year decline in recent history -- but Mohler told trustees he considers enrollment to be "exceedingly healthy."

Both Mohler and trustee leaders admitted financial contributions have dropped off under the new administration.

Fred Caffey, chairman of the financial resources and development committee, challenged trustees to increase their personal giving to the seminary and their influence over others to give to the seminary.

"We have lost some areas of giving when we changed ... by conviction," he said. "We've lost a pool for our giving. Our alumni (are) not giving to this seminary. We've been told there's another pool out there waiting to see."

Both Caffey and Chairman White strongly encouraged trustees to do better in their personal contributions to the seminary. Only \$45,000 of a \$100,000 goal for trustees was met in the last fiscal year, Caffey said, and more than half the trustees gave nothing.

"We've made a decision to change this seminary, and now we've got to back up what we've done," Caffey said.

Nevertheless, the seminary recently ended its fiscal year in a "very good position" financially, Mohler said in his report. The current year's budget, however, has been reduced by more than \$900,000 over the previous year's budget, and more than two dozen positions have been eliminated either through layoffs or early retirements.

Jerry Johnson, chairman of both the trustees' academic personnel committee and faculty liaison committee, reported mixed sentiments from trustee conversations with faculty. Faculty members have been pleased with changes in the chapel format and with the new students on campus, he said, but remain concerned about changes in the faculty hiring process approved by trustees last spring.

The faculty had been given a six-month period to respond formally to the changes, but never did so, Johnson reported.

If the faculty really want the "shared governance" they have requested, they should respond to trustee actions with which they disagree, Johnson said. "This is our idea of shared governance: We listen. We respond."

During the news conference, reporters asked Mohler and White if the resolution on racial reconciliation adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in June would prompt any change in the composition of the trustee board, which currently includes 59 white males and one white female.

"We would gladly welcome minority representation," Mohler responded. But ultimately, "our concern is about the conviction and commitment of those who come to the board."

While he is committed to the ideals of the resolution on racial reconciliation, Mohler said it would be "inappropriate" for him to make any special requests of the SBC's committee on nominations, which recommends new trustees.

During the Oct. 9-10 meeting, two new trustees were elected to the board -- both white males -- to fill unexpired terms of members who moved between states and therefore lost their seats. The seminary administration

and trustee leadership are able to fill such positions on their own, and individuals thus elected usually are nominated for full terms in the next cycle.

In other business during the October meeting, trustees:

- Elected one new faculty member, Brian Richardson, who has been teaching at Bryan College in Dayton, Tenn., and will be a professor of Christian education with tenure at Southern.
- Approved a \$750,000 study of energy efficiency on campus.
- Learned that last spring's early retirement offer was extended to 29 faculty members, with 10 ultimately accepting the offer at a total cost of \$662,000.
- Named five faculty members to endowed chairs, including Mark Terry, who is the first professor to occupy the new A.R. and Fay Stone Chair of Christian Missions and Evangelism.
- Approved a new master of arts in missiology degree, designed primarily for foreign missionaries who are not pastors.

-30-

Mercer theology school hires first three professors

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The first three faculty members for a new Baptist theology school scheduled to begin next fall in Atlanta were announced Oct. 11.

Loyd Allen, Paul Duke and Nancy deClaisse-Walford are the first faculty appointments in Mercer University's new school of theology, which is scheduled to begin classes next fall on Mercer's Atlanta campus.

The appointments "ensure that students at the Mercer School of Theology will have the opportunity to study with professors who are gifted teachers, outstanding scholars and Baptist leaders who are committed to preparing ministers for local churches," said Alan Culpepper, dean of the school.

Allen will be associate dean and professor of church history in the new school. Currently he is head of the department of Christian studies and philosophy at Mississippi College in Clinton, Miss. He previously taught church history at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and at Brewton-Parker College in Mount Vernon, Ga.

Duke, currently pastor of Kirkwood Baptist Church in St. Louis, Mo., has been named professor of New Testament and preaching. He previously was pastor of Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky.

deClaisse-Walford, who is completing a doctor of philosophy degree in biblical studies at Baylor University this fall, will become assistant professor of Old Testament and biblical languages at the Mercer theology school. She is currently a lecturer in biblical languages at Baylor's George W. Truett Theological Seminary. She has also been a graduate assistant at Baylor and was an adjunct faculty member at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., where she earned a master's degree in Semitic languages and literatures.

In addition to the full-time faculty appointments, Ann White Morton, a graduate of Emory University's Candler School of Theology, has been named public services/theology librarian for the school. She will also serve as an adjunct faculty member.

One additional faculty appointment will be made later this fall, Culpepper said.

Culpepper, a former New Testament professor at Southern Seminary, also plans to teach some classes in addition to his administrative duties.

The Mercer school will recruit students primarily from moderate Southern Baptist churches. It is among a growing number of theological education alternatives to the six seminaries owned by the Southern Baptist Convention, which are controlled by conservatives.

Recently, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate organization also based in Atlanta, signed a lease agreement to move its offices to the Mercer campus. Beginning in 1997, the Fellowship will share space in a new

building to be constructed for offices and classrooms for the new theology school.

The Fellowship agreed to spend \$750,000 for five-years' rent and to buy \$1.25 million worth of property from Mercer in part to help the theology school get off the ground, leaders of the Fellowship's Coordinating Council said.

Mercer has raised about \$1 million in endowment for the new school. In addition, a fund-raising goal of \$4.5 million is earmarked for the new building and other capital needs for the new school, according to Larry Brumley, assistant vice president for university relations at Mercer.

Mercer, a Georgia Baptist university, owns the Atlanta campus in addition to its main campus in Macon.

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-- By Bob Allen

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