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**Jimmy Carter renounces
Southern Baptist ties**

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Former President Jimmy Carter, Southern Baptists' most famous layman, says he feels "excluded" by the Southern Baptist Convention and "can no longer be associated" with the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

As a candidate in 1976 who introduced the term "born again" into the political lexicon, as a president who was criticized for witnessing to world leaders, as a goodwill ambassador through his work with Habitat for Humanity, and as a Sunday school teacher at his small church in Plains, Ga., Carter has been one of the most visible and respected Southern Baptists for 25 years.

But in a letter and press statement released Oct. 19, Carter lamented the new "creedal" direction taken by the SBC. He said the recent changes in the "Baptist Faith and Message" doctrinal statement are "profound and revolutionary" and reflect "an increasingly rigid SBC creed."

"I had never been involved in the political struggle for control of the SBC and have no desire to do so," Carter wrote in the letter, which was mailed to 75,000 Baptists nationwide by the moderate group Texas Baptists Committed. He said he was disappointed that his effort two years ago to promote dialogue between SBC factions failed. "My hope was that, as a traditional Baptist layman, I could find some channel through which I could help fulfill our Christian commitments."

"But since that brief interlude of apparent harmony, I have been disappointed and feel excluded by the adoption of policies and an increasingly rigid SBC creed, including some provisions that violate the basic premises of my Christian faith. I have finally decided that, after 65 years, I can no longer be associated with the Southern Baptist Convention."

"This is a torturous decision to make," Carter added in an interview with Associated Baptist Press. "I do it with anguish and not with any pleasure." Carter, 76, said he could no longer "add my name and my support" to SBC efforts because its leaders "have departed from what I believe."

He decided to go public with his decision after meeting, at his initiation, with moderate Baptist leaders from Texas, Virginia and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

"This is strictly personal for me," he told ABP. "I am not trying to speak for my church. ... I'm not going to mount a crusade against anybody. We've had enough of that."

He said he will remain a deacon and Sunday school teacher at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains and support the church's recent decision to send half of its missions contributions to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

In his press release, Carter said he and his wife, Rosalynn, want to associate with "other traditional Baptists who continue to share such beliefs as separation of church and state, servanthood and not domination of pastors, local church autonomy, a free religious press, and equality of women."

He lamented the SBC's departure from those beliefs and the exclusion of those who disagree from service in the convention.

"Over the years leaders of the convention have adopted an increasingly rigid creed, called a 'Baptist Faith and Message,' including some provisions that violate the basic tenets of my Christian faith. These premises have become mandatory criteria that must be accepted by employees, by members of committees who control the convention's affairs, and by professors who teach in the SBC-owned seminaries. Obviously, this can have a far-reaching and permanent effect."

Carter told ABP that one particular change in the 2000 doctrinal statement "overrides and explains the other concerns I have" -- the SBC's decision to eliminate language that identifies Jesus Christ as "the criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted."

"Most disturbing has been the convention's recent decision to remove Jesus Christ, through his words, deeds and personal inspiration, as the ultimate interpreter of the Holy Scriptures," he explained in his press release. "This leaves open making the pastors or executives of the SBC the ultimate interpreters."

The revisions to the SBC's official doctrinal statement in 1998 and this year have become a line in the sand for many moderates after years of being excluded from denominational leadership. The Baptist General Convention of Texas, the largest SBC affiliate, is considering funding changes that would alter the state's traditional relationship with the denomination.

Among controversial changes is a 1998 amendment on the family that calls for women to submit to their husbands. Additional revisions adopted this year weaken references to "soul competency" and state that women cannot be pastors.

SBC conservatives defended the narrower language as reflecting the views of most Southern Baptists and as necessary to guard the denomination against liberalism, which they claim infiltrated seminaries and agencies during the 1960s and 1970s.

Moderates in Texas and elsewhere, however, say the new "Baptist Faith and Message" turns the Bible into an idol by placing it on an equal plane with Christ. They also say announced plans to use the new statement to ensure "doctrinal accountability" violate Baptists' historic aversion to creeds.

In his letter, Carter said, as a Georgia Baptist, he is "quite concerned by the effort of SBC leaders to impose their newly adopted creed on our state convention."

"Our prayer is that we can avoid this divisive action, and adhere to the traditional beliefs that, for generations, have sustained our ancestors and us in a spirit of unity and cooperation," he wrote.

Lacking formal theological training, Carter said he is unqualified "to explain how profound and revolutionary are the changes in the 'Baptist Faith and Message' that are being proposed to unsuspecting Baptists." However, his letter endorsed a taped message on the topic by Charles Wade, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, which was included in the mass mailing.

On the tape, Wade predicted that neither the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" nor its predecessor, the 1963 version, will be imposed as a creed on Texas Baptists. "We need no creed to define what the Bible says, and we need no confession of faith if it is going to be used as a creed."

"It's a painful thing when people try to dismiss you because you don't 'believe the Bible,'" he added. "I challenge anybody to make that charge stick against Texas Baptists. But I want you to understand we do not worship the Bible. We worship God revealed in Jesus Christ, recorded in Scripture so that we might know him."

Texas Baptists are locked in a dispute with SBC leaders over a proposed budget cut of \$5.3 million to SBC seminaries and selected other entities. A vote on the proposal is scheduled at the BGCT's annual meeting Oct. 30-31 in Corpus Christi.

Carter initiated a meeting in Plains Sept. 28 with David Currie, director of Texas Baptist Committed, and Becky Matheny, director of the moderate Georgia Baptist Heritage Council, during which he shared his convictions about the SBC.

"We said, 'It would be great for Baptists to know how you felt,'" Currie recalled. "He said he was thinking about sending a letter to folks. That's where the idea of linking the [letter and tape] came together."

Carter's letter and Wade's 45-minute tape were mailed beginning Oct. 18 to Texas Baptist Committed's national mailing list at a cost of more than \$75,000, said Currie. Donations were received from the Georgia Baptist Heritage Council and a few individuals -- including \$2,000 from the Carters -- to cover about half the cost, he said. The rest will be borrowed and repaid with future donations.

Currie said the mailing was not intended to influence the Texas vote, but that might be a welcome byproduct. It may also motivate people in other states, he said. "We just want as many people as possible to listen to this tape and realize that the SBC has deserted every historic Baptist principle that Baptists have been committed to," he said.

Carter told ABP the recent decision by directors of the Christian Index, the Georgia Baptist newspaper, to restrict articles and ads promoting the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship "is improper and a violation of freedom of press."

"The fact is that almost every one in Georgia who gives money to CBF is also giving to the Georgia Baptist Convention. And the Christian Index is supposed to represent all Georgia Baptists."

"I don't like that at all," he continued. "That's just a forerunner of things that are pending and just a further imposition of the creed...."

Carter, who in office and since has distinguished himself as a negotiator and reconciler among troubled nations, told ABP he was disappointed that his 1997-98 attempt to bring reconciliation among Southern Baptists failed.

While parties seeking peace can make progress if they are flexible and mutually respectful, he said, "sometimes there is a total recalcitrance that prohibits progress," like the Arab-Israeli disagreement over control of East Jerusalem.

Such an impediment to peace now exists in the SBC, he suggested. The new strictures adopted by Southern Baptists mean that "if you don't accept these premises, then you cannot be a part of the Southern Baptist Convention," he said.

He said he hopes someday Baptists of different stripes can work together in cooperation, humility and service. "I would like to find a home somewhere, in addition to the CBF, where more Baptists can come together."

Southern Baptist Convention spokesman Will Hall did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

'Dr. Laura' blasts, then lauds Baylor disciplinary policy

By George Henson

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Only days after directing scathing remarks at Baylor University, radio and television talk show host Laura Schlessinger gave the Baptist-affiliated school a pat on the back for its policy on student pregnancies.

On the Oct. 16 radio program, "Dr. Laura" read the first two paragraphs of a story from Baylor's student newspaper, The Lariat. The story was about how the university treats students who become pregnant out of wedlock.

The second paragraph of the Lariat story quoted Jimmy McCluskey, dean of student development and services, as saying: "There was a time when to be pregnant [outside of marriage] would have been wrong. But with the changing of time and changing of culture, we have adjusted our policies accordingly."

After reading that brief excerpt on the air, Schlessinger berated the university in Waco, Texas. "When the religious schools start collapsing, it all just gets depressing," she said.

"Does that mean that Jesus just got zapped at Baylor?" she continued, adding sarcastically: "That was a long time ago and the things he said were for a time and place a long time ago. None of it matters anymore. Values, they are a changing. Values are not eternal, they are redesigned decade by decade."

She concluded that the Baylor statement was one more example of religions pandering to society's values: "That's the liberal way most religions are going that makes them useless, totally useless. They were supposed to be a fortification, preserving the values, now they're just a club that adjusts to the membership."

What Schlessinger apparently did not know, since she reportedly received only the two-paragraph excerpt at the start of the story, was that the remainder of the Lariat article explained how Baylor has updated its policy to treat students in a more redemptive manner. The article did not say Baylor condones student pregnancies.

Steven Moore, Baylor's vice president for student life, told the Baptist Standard that regardless of what policy is broken by a student, discipline is guided by four principles.

The university's first priority, he said, is to be redemptive -- to let the person know that while what they have done is wrong, they are still of value.

Second, Baylor seeks to be educational in its discipline of students; the university wants the student to learn from the experience so that it is not repeated, he said.

Third, the university's discipline also seeks to be contextual -- to fit the nature and severity of the violation.

Fourth, discipline is to be given in a timely manner.

In the past, the university's policy was that unmarried female students who became pregnant were automatically expelled. But administrators feared that might cause some young students, fearing expulsion, to have abortions.

"The thing we didn't want was for the student to get pregnant and feel the school had turned their backs on them," Moore said.

When the university explained its position to Schlessinger in a letter, she responded with a hearty endorsement.

"God knows it's a rare university these days that cares about the morality of its students," she said on her Oct. 18 broadcast. "Obviously Baylor University does consider these issues important, and I thank them for bringing this to my attention."

Popular 'Hell Houses' draw praise, criticism

By Bob Allen

(ABP) -- Halloween for most Americans conjures up images of jack-o'-lanterns, scary costumes and trick or treat. A growing number of conservative churches, however, are viewing the holiday as an outreach opportunity.

Troubled by images of the occult in Halloween, hundreds of churches are instead staging evangelistic dramas that go by names like "Hell" and "Judgement" houses.

Promoted as an alternative to Halloween haunted houses, the dramas typically contrast the eternal destiny of those who accept and reject Christ.

Elaborate staging re-creates scenes such as abortion, suicide, drunk driving, heaven and hell and of a homosexual teenager dying from AIDS. A more recent popular scene depicts the murder of Columbine High School teenager Cassie Bernall.

The programs appear to be gaining popularity. At least 450 churches were thought to have put on some form of the play in 1998.

Satisfied customers report good attendance and a high percentage of professions of faith.

"This is our best evangelistic tool by far," Jamie Maxey, youth pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in London, Ky., told the Kentucky Baptist newspaper Western Recorder. "This outranks a revival and it's more effective, because more people come."

Maxey said the church reported about 300 conversions during the ministry's first two years. More than 2,100 visitors reportedly passed through the church's Hell House in 1998.

Yarelis Mora, 17, accepted Christ after attending this year's Judgement House at Parkwood Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla. She said she never before understood the Bible or what a relationship with Jesus was about.

"As I said the salvation prayer, I felt so overwhelmed," she told the Florida Times-Union newspaper. "I started to cry. I felt relieved. I came out of Judgement House feeling like a new person."

The idea borrows from Jerry Falwell, who put on a similar display at Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Va., in the late 1970s.

Pastor Keenan Roberts of Abundant Life Church in Arvada, Colo., staged his first Hell House in 1993. The church markets "Hell House Outreach" kits on the Internet, costing \$199 plus shipping. Each kit includes a 263-page manual, video of the Arvada Hell House and a sound-effects CD that includes the voices of a suicide, God and a "bone-chilling demon declaration of Hell House" in the opening scene.

In his first three years of business, Roberts sold 300 kits. His own Hell House had 20,000 guests and reported about 7,000 professions of faith.

The idea received national publicity in 1995 when Roberts appeared as a guest on the "Phil Donahue Show." Other media, including the New York Times, Newsweek and Ms. Magazine followed with stories on the Arvada Hell House.

Others have more recently gotten into the act. New Creation Evangelism, Inc., of Clearwater, Fla., packages its eight-scene "Judgement House" for \$250. While it costs more than Hell House, the participating congregation becomes a "covenant" church and receives a new script and training each year.

Tom Hudgins, youth pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Clearwater, created the first Judgement House in 1983 ago as a Christian alternative when his youth group wanted to put on a haunted house. He says more than 350,000 people have been through Judgement Houses at 200 churches in 19 states.

A couple dozen teenagers are enough to cast a Halloween drama, but some do it on a larger scale.

Eden Westside Baptist Church in Pell City, Ala., involves 180 church members in construction and operation of its outdoor drama "Revelation Walk." It consists of 12 scenes detailing the end times and what will happen to those who are left behind when Christ raptures the church.

Hell Houses and similar dramas have come under criticism from gay-rights groups that say they perpetuate stereotypes like homosexuals can change. The gay-lesbian Human Rights Campaign labeled them "pornography for the soul."

Others criticize their graphic nature. The Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance quoted from a 1997 Hell House Outreach Manual on how to depict an aborted fetus. "Pieces of meat placed in a glass bowl to look like pieces of a baby: ... purchase a meat product that closely resembles pieces of a baby. Theatrical blood: because a large amount of blood is used in this scene and in others, someone should be responsible for mixing a vat of it each evening.

Others say they use distortion. The graphic portrayal of a late-term abortion, for example, ignores the fact that most abortions are performed early in pregnancy. Another popular scene recreates the legendary account of Cassie Bernall confessing, "Yes [I believe in God]," before Columbine killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold shot her dead. An official report of the police investigation said the event probably never happened.

Roberts, however, is unabashed in defending the method.

"We're not doing this to win a popularity contest," he told National Public Radio. We're saying look, sin is hurting our nation and Jesus Christ is the answer to what you're going through."

Some criticism also comes from those in the religious community, however, who say scare tactics are inappropriate in evangelism.

"I detest those things," an Internet article by B.A. Robinson quoted J.T. Tucker, director of youth ministries at Northway Christian Church in Dallas. "Trying to scare people into a decision is very wrong.

"If you consider all the money, along with ministry hours ... if they would refocus those areas on missions in urban Dallas, I think they would have a lot bigger return."

Pastor Dave McPherson of West Bowles Community Church in Littleton, Colo., told the Dallas Morning News that staging the Columbine tragedy hit "too close to home" for his tastes.

"It's simplistic theology," Russell Baker, associate pastor of Arvada United Methodist Church, told U.S. News and World Report.

Others criticize the psychological tactics used in the productions.

"After I saw two children praying through tears at the end of a performance, I realized just how powerful the fear tactics used by Judgement Houses really are," wrote Adam Butler after visiting Westwood Baptist Church's Judgement House in Birmingham, Ala. "The mentality of churches to produce such an atrocity is simple -- scare children early in their lives and they'll fear it until they die."

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-- EDITOR'S NOTE: The spelling of "Judgement Houses" in the above story is correct. It is a trademarked title, using an older spelling variation.

'Mainstream' group gets underway in North Carolina

By Tony Cartledge

RALEIGH, N.C. (ABP) -- A group of pastors who say they want to preserve historic Baptist principles and protect the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina and its institutions has taken steps toward the formation of a "Mainstream Baptists" group.

North Carolina is the ninth state to form a centrist/moderate network patterned loosely after Texas Baptists Committed, an organization led by David Currie.

Organizers have planned six regional laity conferences to talk about changes in the newly revised "Baptist Faith and Message" statement and other issues. They will also promote a Laity Conference to be held on Monday, Nov. 13, at College Park Baptist Church in Winston-Salem. Speakers for the 2-4 p.m. gathering have not yet been confirmed.

None of the pastors involved wanted to start another movement, said David Hughes, pastor of Winston-Salem's First Baptist Church. Hughes strongly supported the shared-leadership effort that failed to win a two-thirds majority at the state convention's annual meeting last year. He appeared in a promotional video shown at the convention meeting, saying that he didn't want to spend another five minutes on political maneuvering.

"And I still don't," he said, "but the truth is worth standing for."

Hughes said he had no regrets about his deep involvement in promoting shared leadership and described the decision to get involved in the mainstream movement as "gut-wrenching."

"I saw we would either have to give up and give in, and have a hard time living with ourselves, or try a new tack," he said. "We had hoped this would not be necessary."

Don Gordon, pastor of First Baptist Church in Mt. Olive, sees the movement as an analogue to the Separatist Baptist movement of the 18th century. Gordon, author of a history of North Carolina Baptists, said "The Particular Baptists and the General Baptists were in competition with one another about doctrinal issues, while the Separatist Baptists were less dogmatic about non-essential doctrine and more focused on missions and evangelism."

"The Separate Baptists prevailed, and there is more Separatist Baptist instinct among North Carolina Baptists than any other," Gordon said.

"I think this mainstream movement parallels the Separatist movement," he added. "Since shared leadership failed to win constitutional approval, a centrist group needed to arise lest extremists from either side come to dominate the state convention. This movement can incorporate both conservatives and moderates working together for the good of the state."

David Crocker, who is pastor of Snyder Memorial Baptist Church in Fayetteville and currently serving as first vice president of the BSC, also said he faced a struggle in making the transition from promoting shared leadership to assisting in the development of an advocacy group.

Crocker said seeing the shared-leadership proposal break down convinced him that there were extremists who wanted to control the state convention. "Some leaders in Southern Baptist life have made statements suggesting that they think of the state conventions as franchises of the SBC," Crocker said, "and I could not disagree more."

"I came to the conviction that it is not only appropriate but wise that a mainstream movement that truly represents the vast majority of North Carolina Baptists be put in place in order to protect the North Carolina Baptist way," he said.

Ken Massey, pastor of First Baptist Church in Greensboro, agreed.

"We believe there is a vast middle in North Carolina Baptist life who may be conservative or moderate but who are cooperative. They are the real strength of the convention, and they need to be informed."

The mainstream group got underway through the efforts of "about a dozen" pastors, according to Hughes. But organizers hope the pastors' initial efforts will soon give way to lay leadership as the organization becomes more established.

Leaders plan to debut a newsletter prior to the Nov. 13-14 state convention. Noting that the Conservative Carolina Baptist organization publishes the Conservative Record to advocate its positions, Hughes said: "It is imperative that people around North Carolina get another perspective about what is happening and why. A large part of what this group is about is education, providing information in a responsible way. We believe that, with good information, Baptists will make good decisions. And we believe most North Carolina Baptists would agree with the principles we're espousing -- they just need information and the time to process it."

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SBC news service criticizes ABP report on agency assets

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Baptist Press has issued a story labeling an Associated Baptist Press story reporting Southern Baptist Convention assets in excess of \$1 billion as "misleading."

An Oct. 10 ABP story cited totals compiled from the SBC Annual by the Nashville, Tenn., -based Baptist Center for Ethics.

"BCE Bytes," the ethics agency's e-mail newsletter reported investments, cash, property and equipment at the SBC's two mission boards and six seminaries as totaling more than \$1,016,000,000. ABP used the figure in a story detailing a series of recent developments in a funding dispute between the SBC and the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

In response, Jerry Rankin, president of the SBC International Mission Board, told Baptist Press that reserve funds were started by his predecessors to continue to expand growth in the missionary force that other funding sources could not provide.

Reserve funds are built mainly through wills and other designated gifts from individual donors, Rankin said, adding that no funds from the Cooperative Program unified budget or Lottie Moon Christmas Offering go into reserves.

Rankin said reserve funds also can be tapped for emergencies, such as relocating missionaries during unrest or natural disasters, or for specific work, such as Bible distribution or medical missions.

"The problem with the report," Rankin said, "is that it does not discuss the reserves in the context of the scale of our missionary work." He also criticized efforts to "persuade churches to diminish their support" to Southern Baptist programs.

A spokesman for the North American Mission Board also weighed in. Spokesman Martin King said the agency is required "to maintain sufficient reserves to manage cash flow and to provide for unanticipated economic downturns." He also said the agency took \$5 million out of reserves last year for "front-line missions."

"To imply that the North American Mission Board has some secret wealth is simply misrepresenting the truth," King told Baptist Press.

The BP article also said that using the same figures, the BGCT's assets would total more than \$3.2 billion.

Baptist Center for Ethics head Robert Parham defended the figures. "Neither Rankin nor King disputed the veracity of BCE's figures," Parham said. "Instead they chose to defend their agency's significant reserves."

The Baptist Press story also disputed quotes attributed to Parham that SBC leaders had downplayed the value of denominational assets for fear of losing financial support from churches. The two leaders pointed out that the figures compiled by Parham were widely distributed for public inspection in the SBC Annual.

"While asset information is a matter of public information," Parham replied, "SBC agencies have not sought to share this information through news releases and in fund-raising letters. Moreover, BP has failed to report on the SBC assets, another strong indication of its lack of autonomy as a news service."

ABP Executive Editor Greg Warner said in criticizing the independent news service for running the story, Baptist Press and SBC leaders "confuse the message with the messenger."

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-- By ABP staff

Southwestern Seminary trustees urge defeat of Texas funding proposal

By Marv Knox

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary have voted to ask Texas Baptists to reject a proposal that would reduce Texas funding to the Southern Baptist Convention's six seminaries, including Southwestern, and to two other agencies by more than \$5 million.

At the close of the trustees' Oct. 16-18 meeting in Fort Worth, they unanimously approved the funding resolution, aimed at messengers to the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual session Oct. 30-31 in Corpus Christi.

A BGCT seminary-study committee report recommends capping 2001 Texas Baptist contributions to the six SBC seminaries at \$1 million, down from the current \$5.3 million. The balance would be allocated to three BGCT-affiliated schools -- Logsdon School of Theology at Hardin-Simmons University, Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University and Hispanic Baptist Theological School.

A proposal from the BGCT administrative committee similarly recommends providing \$10,000 to the SBC Executive Committee, down from \$706,000, and eliminating the \$364,582 allocation for the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

Southwestern Seminary would get the largest share of the \$1 million earmarked for SBC seminaries, since the money would be distributed according to the numbers of Texas students at the six schools. Southwestern trains 1,368 of the 1,600 Texans enrolled in the schools. Still, Southwestern's Texas funding could be reduced from \$1.5 million to about \$875,000.

The budget proposal is the most dramatic event that characterizes strained relationships between the BGCT and the SBC. The state convention consistently has resisted the increasingly conservative direction taken by the national convention.

The seminary trustees' resolution notes 44 percent of Southwestern's student body comes from Texas. But in supporting the entire student body, including 225 international students, Texas Baptists have been "blessed to be able to participate in preparing students for service around the world," the resolution states.

Participation in funding such a joint venture reflects "the genius of the Cooperative Program of the SBC," the convention's unified budget, the resolution claims.

The resolution expresses gratitude to Texas Baptists "for their long and loyal support of the SBC Cooperative Program and the SBC seminaries to touch the world and impact eternity."

The trustees urge Texas Baptists to reject the BGCT funding recommendation and "to the contrary, instruct BGCT leadership to restore the historic pattern of Cooperative Program funding followed until recent years."

In other action, Southwestern trustees joined seminary faculty in signing their names to affirm the 2000 version of the "Baptist Faith and Message" statement.

Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention last summer approved a significantly revised version of the convention's confession of faith.

That action heightened tensions between the SBC and the BGCT. Texas leaders took exception to the revised statement's removal of references to Jesus as the criterion by which Scripture is to be interpreted and an addition that declared the document to be an instrument of doctrinal accountability.

The SBC action marked just the second major revision and the third revision overall of the "Baptist Faith and Message," first adopted by the SBC in 1925.

Subsequently, the trustee boards of the SBC's 12 institutions, including Southwestern Seminary, received a referred motion from the convention concerning whether to require employees to sign the new "Baptist Faith and Message."

Southwestern's bylaws already require faculty to sign the confessional statement "as amended from time to time," seminary President Ken Hemphill said in an interview.

When the "Baptist Faith and Message" last was amended in 1998, two faculty members resigned rather than sign the new article on the family. But Hemphill has said he does not anticipate losing any faculty over the 2000 revisions. He said the current faculty signing is "in process" with the seminary's deans and is expected to be completed soon.

Seminary trustees completed their signing process in a matter of minutes. As the roll was called during the trustees' first general session, they rose individually and walked to a table where copies of the document awaited them. All trustees present signed the statement.

"We've signed this in good faith and good conscience before the Lord," said trustee Chairman Miles Seaborn, retired pastor of Birchman Baptist Church in Fort Worth.

In other action, the board:

- Affirmed a 200-page master plan for seminary buildings and facilities in the coming years.

The plan is designed to help administrators and trustees set priorities for campus improvements, said Hubert Martin, the seminary's vice president for financial affairs.

The master plan cites projects totaling about \$40 million. It includes such projects as fencing around the campus perimeter, two new small dorms, renovations to existing buildings, "student village" housing, outdoor lighting, faculty housing, a water tower to support campus irrigation from seminary-owned wells, improvements for handicap accessibility, deferred maintenance and campus infrastructure.

- Approved a newly revised set of grievance procedures for the seminary.

Up to now, grievance policies have been "scattered among three or four documents," Hemphill noted. "We wanted to make sure they were consistent from school to school throughout the seminary."

- Passed a resolution of appreciation for Lawrence Klempnauer, the seminary's vice president for student services, who will retire Dec. 31 after 20 years in pioneering ministry to students.

- Approved the seminary's proposal to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to offer a baccalaureate degree in ministry for students age 25 and older.

Scotty Gray, vice president for academic affairs, explained the seminary is proposing the age 25 limit for two reasons. "First, we feel younger students would benefit by going to a liberal-arts college for a baccalaureate degree," he said. "And second, we are not wanting to compete with Baptist colleges and universities for traditional students. This would be for older students with families" who need to receive ministerial training.

-- Affirmed offering master's-level and doctoral courses at an extension center in Hawaii. A council comprised of the six SBC seminaries recently determined that Southwestern should be given the responsibility for offering regional theological education to Hawaii.

-- Heard a report that the last three years have comprised three of the seminary's best four years in fund-raising efforts. Jack Terry, vice president for institutional advancement, said the seminary should receive more than \$7 million in gifts this year.

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Trustees elect four to faculty, two administrators at meeting

FORT WORTH--Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary elected four faculty members and two administrators at the fall meeting of its board of directors.

New faculty and administrators are:

-- Gordon Borrer, who will be a professor of church music. A pastor and professional musician, he currently is pastor and worship leader of Milwaukee First Baptist Church in Gladstone, Ore. He has been a music and worship professor, schoolteacher and minister of music and worship. He is a graduate of Biola University and California State University in Los Angeles.

-- Douglas Jones, the seminary's director of enrollment services and registrar. Previously, he worked in the seminary registrar's office while also serving as a staff counselor and marriage and family therapist in the Fort Worth/Arlington area. He is a retired officer in the U.S. Air Force and a graduate of San Diego State University, Vanderbilt University and Southwestern Seminary. He is a member of Cedar Ridge Baptist Church in Burleson.

-- Caia Kent McCullar, a professor of church music education. She is a professor of music at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor and previously taught at Wayland Baptist University and Texas Tech University, as well as in public schools. She is a graduate of Baylor University, the University of Texas at Austin and Texas Tech. She is a member of Memorial Baptist Church in Temple.

-- Bob Overton, pastor of Rice Temple Baptist Church in Houston since 1970, who will be director of the seminary's Southeast Texas extension in Houston. He also has been pastor of four other churches in Texas, Minnesota and Mississippi and associate pastor of another Texas church. He is a graduate of Mississippi College and Southwestern Seminary.

-- Siegfried Schatzmann, a professor of New Testament. He has been a guest professor of New Testament at the seminary since January 1999. He previously taught at Regents Theological College in England, Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Okla., and two Bible institutes in Lesotho, Africa. He has been a missionary and a pastor. He is a graduate of Bethany Bible College and Southwestern Seminary. He is a member of Alsbury Baptist Church in Burleson.

-- Benjamin Paul Wolfe, an associate professor of New Testament. He is an associate professor of New Testament at Criswell College in Dallas and has taught at Dallas Baptist University and Evangelical University in San Salvador, El Salvador. He has served on church staffs in Texas, Scotland and Arkansas. He is a graduate of Southern Baptist College, Dallas Baptist University and the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. He is a member of Midway Road Baptist Church in Dallas.

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-- Baptist Standard

Seminary responds to Texas committee report

By Mark Wingfield

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary has issued a six-page written response to the Baptist General Convention of Texas seminary-study committee declaring the seminary's intention to be "open and responsive to our Texas Baptist supporters."

"No words can adequately express how much Southwestern Seminary treasures the relationship it enjoys with Texas Baptist churches," the unsigned document begins.

The document is posted on the seminary's Web site at www.swbts.edu.

It addresses six areas of concern cited by the Texas committee, which has recommended a dramatic reduction in BGCT funding for the six SBC seminaries.

In presenting their report, study-committee members said despite changes at Southwestern they perceive as troublesome, they considered making funding recommendations that would treat Southwestern more favorably than the other five seminaries. However, Southwestern President Ken Hemphill and his five colleagues took a firm position with the committee that the BGCT must treat all six seminaries equally, the committee reported.

That point is not mentioned in the Southwestern response.

The seminary document does address some of the most controversial charges against Southwestern, though, including the 1994 firing of President Russell Dilday, who was at odds with some conservative trustees.

"We can only respond by saying that Southwestern's president and trustees had a tragic divorce that wounded many," the document says. "As is the case with most divorces, fault can be found with both parties."

The BGCT committee had noted Dilday's firing created a "chasm" between the seminary and the BGCT.

"To this date, there has been little substantive attempt by current administration and trustees to mend the relationship or establish a new basis of cooperation," the study committee wrote.

The seminary document contends this is not true.

"Any query of our faculty would have discovered the open door to work in partnership with the BGCT," it states. "We have consistently invited members from the BGCT to speak in chapel. We have encouraged church planters to work in accord with the BGCT strategy. Faculty members have been encouraged to speak for and participate in BGCT-sponsored events."

The document also responds to concerns cited by the BGCT committee about distribution in seminary classes of materials highly critical of the BGCT produced by the Missouri Baptist Laymen's Association and promoted by Bill Streich, a member of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls. The materials have been criticized for leveling charges against BGCT leaders based on guilt by association.

"No one was pressured to hand out materials," the seminary response states. "Materials were made available because of concern expressed by students that the actions of a Texas Baptist church had been presented in a negative light. We agree that we could have handled the matter better."

Second, the seminary response addresses concerns about trustee mismanagement and trustee antagonism toward the BGCT. The study committee report specifically had cited trustee intrusion into the faculty hiring process as a problem, giving as an illustration the case of Steve Harmon, who was recommended for a faculty position by the president but whose nomination was derailed by a small group of trustees.

According to testimony given to the study committee, Harmon was interviewed privately by two trustees, who asked his positions on biblical inerrancy, the current direction of the BGCT, the "conservative resurgence" in the SBC and on women in ministry. All four areas of questioning fall outside the stated doctrinal guidelines for seminary faculty.

"The president takes full responsibility for the decision to withdraw the candidate's name," the seminary response says. "It was an administrative decision, not a trustee decision."

Both the Harmon nomination and the Dilday firing are illustrative of deep-seated problems at Southwestern based in the trustee board elected by the Southern Baptist Convention, said Ron Cook, pastor of First Baptist Church of Brownwood and chairman of the BGCT subcommittee that visited Southwestern.

"The antipathy toward the BGCT and our Texas Baptist leaders runs very deep with key trustees who have control over every major decision and all policies and procedures at the seminary," Cook said. "A few key trustees, in sync with the few key people who control the Southern Baptist Convention, have established a strategy to change the nature of Southwestern Seminary and distance her from the Baptist General Convention of Texas."

Further, the president and current administration "do not relate effectively to the BGCT and our leadership, and they are not allowed to," Cook countered. "Those in control have instituted not only creedalism, but political tests for employees of the seminary directly scrutinizing and keeping score of any positive feelings about the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and every employee at Southwestern knows the consequences."

For the last two years, Southwestern trustees have elected as their board chairman Miles Seaborn, a retired Fort Worth pastor who was instrumental in forming the new Southern Baptists of Texas Convention and has been a leading critic of the BGCT over the last two decades.

Cook recounted that in the meeting between the BGCT committee and Southwestern representatives, Seaborn reiterated his concern that the BGCT is going one direction and seminary trustees are intent on going the other direction.

"This tragic misperception of where Texas Baptists are going, and the actions taken, are evidence of what I consider a malignant ideology operating among the few who have total control of the seminary," Cook said. "Yes, the fine new dean at Southwestern Seminary, David Crutchley, made an impassioned plea to mend the relationship. But it sounded more like a 'what ought to be' speech to me than a defense. Crutchley is very likeable, but he is in the impossible situation of working against the will of those in control, and he has come to the scene after those in control have distanced the seminary beyond the reach of Texas Baptists."

Third, the seminary response addresses allegations of employees being mistreated, leading to faculty resignations and a sense of "oppression."

"Termination and resignation are sadly a part of any institution or church," the seminary response states. "We can only say that anyone terminated by Southwestern during the tenure of our present president has been terminated for cause and has been dealt with according to the seminary's adopted guidelines. Further, we can assure Texas Baptists that the dismissed faculty members have been treated with fairness and kindness out of Christian concern for the individual and the family."

The seminary response addresses concerns about narrowing requirements for faculty and an altered atmosphere and quality of education.

Hiring requirements such as affirming the revised "Baptist Faith and Message" and expressing distaste for the BGCT are narrowing the field of candidates employable as faculty, the study committee charged. "Present and potential faculty who are fully acceptable to the vast majority of Texas Baptists are excluded by these requirements from teaching at Southwestern Seminary, even at a time when the seminary is having difficulty filling faculty positions."

The seminary response explains that Southwestern "unapologetically" requires faculty adherence to the SBC faith statement "as amended from time to time."

However, complaints against faculty are handled appropriately, and due process is given, the response adds. "Both our Christian values and our accreditation standing mandate a fair and impartial procedure."

Seminary officials also refute claims by the BGCT committee that the quality of faculty, morale of

faculty and students and the atmosphere on campus have declined. "We would invite any and all Texas Baptists to visit Southwestern to sense the spirit and morale on campus," they say.

In reply, Cook reasserted the committee's claim that Southwestern is a changed institution.

"If you take the once-great faculties in biblical studies, church history, ethics, theology, pastoral ministries and lay them name-by-name alongside current faculty, you see a shocking reality," he said. "Some fine people continue to teach at the seminary, to be sure. But the number and overall quality of the faculty in key departments has so diminished on balance that the word 'decimated' was the only word that could come to our minds."

"The diminishing of that once-great faculty is appalling. Along with this, those trustees who have forced some of the finest young professors out and have derailed the candidacy of some of our finest young scholars have done so as a deliberate strategy to purge the seminary of people most Texas Baptists would treasure as faculty members," Cook asserted. "Yes, President Hemphill did have to withdraw the name of his nominee, Steve Harmon, at the last moment as trustees garnered the votes to kill the candidacy of this outstanding young scholar. The key decisions concerning the seminary come from somewhere else, not from faculty and administration.

"Employees in all categories -- current, retired and former -- gave us the same picture in bold relief. Supporting documents of a significant variety, including Ombudsman Committee minutes that we do have, all revealed the same strategy. Trustees with deep-seated antipathy toward rank-and-file Texas Baptists and our leaders have taken over the seminary, changed her very nature and created a chasm between Southwestern Seminary and Texas Baptists, implemented an internal defense system, and have joined in the propaganda to keep the BGCT apart from what we once considered our seminary."

The Southwestern document also responds to committee concerns about stewardship. The study committee said enrollment has been declining as money given to the seminary has increased.

Southwestern officials counter that enrollment has held steady, with a non-duplicating headcount between 3,751 and 4,190 over the last seven years. According to figures cited by the seminary, enrollment took a drop of nearly 10 percent the year after Dilday was fired but has rebuilt to about the level it was before.

In its report, the study committee said Southwestern's enrollment has dropped from 3,504 in 1989 to 2,720 in 1999.

The official enrollment report given to the SBC and published in the 2000 SBC Book of Reports shows a relatively steady non-duplicating headcount over the past five years, with about 3,300 students enrolled in graduate-level courses. That data does indicate a decline in enrollment in basic master's level degrees such as the master of divinity, but those losses are offset by increasing enrollment in the doctor of ministry degree.

Yet another perspective on enrollment is given by the Association of Theological Schools member directory, which shows a total enrollment of 3,220 students at Southwestern, with a full-time equivalent enrollment of 2,178.

The BGCT committee also said graduation levels have dropped over a five-year period beginning in the 1994-95 academic year. Master's level graduates in the seminary's School of Theology have dropped from 314 to 250, and master's level graduates in the School of Educational Ministry have dropped from 364 to 262, the report said.

No comparative data on graduation levels was offered by the seminary, and graduation data is not reported by Southwestern in the SBC Book of Reports.

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