



# Associated Baptist Press

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## IN THIS ISSUE:

- Baptist Seminary of Kentucky to offer inaugural classes this fall**
- Baptists challenged to re-examine SBC ties**
- Rankin expects most missionaries to affirm 'Baptist Faith and Message'**

## **Baptist Seminary of Kentucky to offer inaugural classes this fall**

By Trennis Henderson

LEXINGTON, Ky. (ABP) -- Six years after incorporating, the Baptist Seminary of Kentucky will launch classes this fall at Calvary Baptist Church in Lexington.

Greg Earwood, elected last summer as the school's first president, said plans include offering five to seven courses this fall toward a master of divinity degree.

"We are hoping we can begin with a student body of 25 to 30 students or more," he said. "We have a handful of students already committed to us for the fall even though we haven't formally begun the application process. The curriculum already has its basic shape and the class schedules are being firmed up."

Earwood, former pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Georgetown, Ky., said discussions about an alternative seminary in Kentucky began in the mid-1990s in response to the conservative, Calvinist shift at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville.

"We would not be pulling together Baptist Seminary of Kentucky if it were not for shifts at Southern Seminary toward a narrow Calvinism," he said. "Baptist Seminary of Kentucky is committed to the gospel being for all people. There's no way a narrow Calvinist view allows for the breadth of God's call to missions that Baptists in Kentucky and elsewhere have held."

Southern Seminary President Albert Mohler declined to be interviewed about the new school, according to Southern Seminary spokesman Lawrence Smith, vice president of communications.

"We're not trying to match Southern," said BSK trustee chairman Charles Midkiff, former pastor of First Baptist Church of Greenville. "Southern is who they are now and we are going to seek to be who we understand we should be."

"We think theological education is very important and needs to be done with openness with a commitment to Baptist heritage -- religious freedom, separation of church and state, priesthood of the believer," Midkiff added. "I believe our seminary will be very strong in those areas. We don't want to get into fighting somebody else but to provide an opportunity."

Prior to launching the seminary, Earwood said options explored by leaders included providing scholarships to Kentucky Baptist students attending other seminaries or establishing a program in cooperation with Lexington Theological Seminary or Baptist Theological Seminary of Richmond (Va.).

Participants eventually decided their first choice was to establish a separate seminary in Kentucky for the benefit of students in the region. Leadership includes an 11-member board of trustees responsible for personnel, property and policy matters and an 18-member committee involved in such areas as curriculum development, student recruitment and fund raising.

The primary question faced by supporters was whether a need existed for a new seminary in Kentucky in light of other educational options available, Earwood said.

Earwood said "the vast majority" of Baptist students from Kentucky pursuing theological education are going out of state. "What it means for the future is a vacuum of leadership, a vacuum of student pastors and ministers," he said.

"Many of the students who have been leaving Kentucky to go to other institutions for theological education have indicated a strong desire to stay closer to home," he added. "While we affirm other alternatives, there is a need to do something in this region."

Calvary's decision to provide office and classroom space rent-free is a significant step in making the new seminary a reality, Earwood said. "We can make this much more affordable because Calvary is hosting us. It frees us up to put funds into students and personnel."

Describing the arrangement with Calvary as temporary, he added, "Our intention is to get off to a good start and see where we go for a permanent location. My best guess would be that we would need two to three years to anticipate the prospects for a future location."

Calvary Pastor Bob Baker serves the seminary both as a trustee and committee member. "Our church views this as a ministry opportunity to do our part to help equip men and women who have been called into ministry," Baker said. "We think this also can be a service to Kentucky churches who depend upon seminary students for staff positions. We hope it will be a win-win situation."

Other entities partnering with the Baptist Seminary of Kentucky include the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship, which has donated \$10,000 and pledged another \$40,000, and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which will provide \$15,000 in student scholarships. Lexington Theological Seminary has agreed to make its library available to students and Georgetown College will provide record-keeping services through its registrar's office.

Earwood said budget needs for the coming year total \$500,000, including \$175,000 for faculty, \$125,000 for administrative personnel and \$125,000 for student scholarships.

With just over \$130,000 pledged toward that amount, he said, "We're looking for gifts and pledges between now and December to cover basic operational expenses for the 2002-2003 academic year. We can do what we intend to do with that budget level, but we'd love to do more and we need to do more to secure the seminary's future."

Earwood currently is the school's only paid staff member. "Our plans are to hire at least one full-time permanent faculty person who will teach in the biblical areas," he said. "If student enrollment demands and funding permits, we will hire two full-time faculty members."

Glenn Hinson, a former professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, will serve as a visiting professor in spirituality and church history, Earwood noted. He said Bill Ellis, a retired professor of history at Eastern Kentucky University, will teach a history course and other adjunct faculty members will be enlisted to teach additional courses.

"I'm pleased the pieces are coming together," Earwood said. "We want to assure that the best in theological education in the Kentucky tradition continues."

## Baptists challenged to re-examine SBC ties

By Robert O'Brien

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Southern Baptist churches should consider "whether their decisions about missions dollars are outdated and unexamined" in light of recent decisions by SBC leaders, says the leader of a dissident group.

Richard Clore, executive director of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Virginia, attacked recent leadership decisions requiring Southern Baptist missionaries to affirm the "Baptist Faith and Message," against endorsing ordained women as chaplains, seeking increased control in the affairs of a Baptist state convention in Washington, D.C., and refusing to recognize an alternative moderate state convention in Missouri.

"Surely, this is the time to examine your church's, and your own, commitment to the International Mission Board's and the North American Mission Board's approaches to missions," Clore said at the Virginia CBF's general assembly, held March 15-16 in Richmond.

"It's time to re-examine whether it is faithful stewardship to continue giving millions of dollars to offerings that support them," Clore said.

"Does your continued giving to Lottie Moon [Christmas offering for international missions] help the IMB carry out their agenda to remove Jesus as the criterion by which we interpret Scripture and substitute for Jesus with a man-made document?" he asked, referring to one controversial revision to the "Baptist Faith and Message" adopted by the SBC in 2000.

"And, by your contributions to Annie Armstrong, are you helping NAMB in the devaluation of women in the work of God's kingdom, and in their brash power move on the District of Columbia Baptist Convention."

Clore also criticized SBC Executive Committee President Morris Chapman for refusing to accept funds from a new state group in Missouri that broke away from the conservative-dominated Missouri Baptist Convention. The SBC recognizes conservative conventions, however, that formed in reaction to moderate leadership in Virginia and Texas.

"That's an obvious double standard," Clore said. "Does it mean the SBC eventually will stop cooperating with the original state conventions -- the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Baptist General Association of Virginia?"

Clore criticized the Alpharetta, Ga., - based NAMB for requesting direct control of Southern Baptist dollars earmarked for the triply aligned District of Columbia Baptist Convention.

While the D.C. convention is small and depends heavily on NAMB funding, it has the same rights to local autonomy as other state conventions, Clore said. "If they get away with it in D.C., when and where will they try it again with another state convention?"

Another speaker at the meeting agreed. "Are state conventions farm clubs of the 'parent' organization?" asked former CBF national Coordinator Cecil Sherman, who now lives in Richmond.

Sherman said it's time for Baptists who are upset with the Southern Baptist Convention "to begin talking to each other."

Sherman outlined four responsibilities for Baptists: (1) quality churchmanship that builds effective, thriving churches, (2) church polity in which Baptists allow churches to be autonomous and even have differing opinions in moderate ranks, (3) communications that inform Baptists truthfully and effectively, (4) willingness to seize chances now available in the swirl of Baptist strife.

"You are at this meeting because in your head there is an alarm clock," Sherman said. "What's happening in Southern Baptist life has troubled you. Words and deeds of the 'party' that has come to control the SBC have made you uneasy, disturbed, angry."

Sherman noted that most people in the pew, "who attend church alongside us, do not have that alarm clock in their heads. Time and time again these people express confusion over these events. Did you take the time to explain to these people why?"

Sherman said moderate Baptists have to be better communicators and seize what he called an "Aha moment...that will not linger."

Now is a time, he said, when even the "people who have no alarm clock in their heads are aware that something is happening."

"We have the duty to tell the bad news, until we can make good on good news," he said.

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## **Rankin expects most missionaries to affirm 'Baptist Faith and Message'**

By Bob Allen

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- International Mission Board President Jerry Rankin says he doesn't expect to lose large numbers of Southern Baptist missionaries, despite controversy over his request that all 5,100 affirm recent revisions to the "Baptist Faith and Message."

Veteran missionaries have previously affirmed general agreement with a version of the confession of faith adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963. Revisions in 1998 and 2000 narrowed doctrines in several areas, however, including a ban on woman pastors and new language that critics say turns it from a voluntary confession to a creed, violating Baptist tradition.

Despite widespread criticism of his request and talk of defections, the response among most missionaries has "been overwhelming understanding and cooperation," Rankin said in an interview March 15.

During a business session the same day in Kansas City, Mo., IMB trustees accepted resignations from 31 missionaries and moved 62 retiring missionaries to "emeritus" status. Asked about the transition, Rankin said just one resignation appeared to be directly related to his request that missionaries affirm the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message."

Rankin said a number of missionaries are still "sorting things out" about the new requirement, but he believes most will comply.

"It's going to take time to work through it," Rankin said. He noted there is no deadline for missionaries to reply and disputed critics who say an ultimatum of "sign or else" is implied. "That's not the purpose of this," he said.

In earlier comments to IMB trustees meeting in Kansas City, Mo., Rankin said many of his critics reflect a "predisposition" against the SBC and IMB and inaccurately assume that trustees and staff are suspicious of missionaries.

"To the contrary, it was due to our confidence in the missionaries that we have given them the opportunity to take a stand with us in dispelling unfounded suspicions and mistrust that could erode confidence and support," he said.

Rankin said he believes it is appropriate for missionaries to affirm what they believe. He said he doesn't argue with critics who say Baptists have no creed but the Bible. As a pastor and missionary, however, he said he encountered people from the Church of Christ, Pentecostals and charismatics who said the same thing.

"It is especially alarming that so many seem to think the primary thing that distinguishes Baptists is the priesthood of the believer and autonomy of the local church, forgetting that our soul competency to come to God without any mediator other than Jesus Christ is based on the authority of God's inerrant word," he said.

"The Holy Spirit never leads an individual contrary to the teaching and truths of God's word," Rankin said.

Critics who attack the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message," Rankin said, deny priesthood of the believer to drafters of the faith statement and autonomy to the SBC "and its authority to govern its institutions and expect accountability on the part of those who serve convention entities."

Rankin said the controversy has "reflected once again the necessity of the conservative resurgence and the need to hold firmly to the fundamentals of our faith lest we succumb to theological relativism, social compromise, postmodern influence, and be cast about by every wind of doctrine in the name of freedom."

IMB trustees approved -- with one dissenting vote -- a motion affirming Rankin for asking missionary personnel to endorse the faith statement.

"We stand firmly and 100 percent committed behind our president," said Bob Pearle, chairman of the IMB's overseas committee.

Bob Claytor, the IMB chairman who lives in Fair Play, S.C., added: "Our president has led us. That is what leaders do. They lead."

Last summer's SBC annual meeting in New Orleans referred a motion asking IMB trustees to reconsider an earlier decision not to require all missionaries and staff to sign the current "Baptist Faith and Message."

In response, trustees voted March 15 to report back to the SBC that trustees, administrators and regional leaders have all endorsed the statement, new missionaries affirm it, and that administrators have asked all current missionaries to sign affirmation and support for the 2000 edition.

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