



Associated Baptist Press

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**Gardner-Webb
president resigns**

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By Biblical Recorder staff

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. (ABP) -- Chris White resigned Oct. 11 as president of Gardner-Webb University, effective Oct. 25.

White had been under fire since Sept. 10 when news broke that he had told the school's registrar two years earlier to recalculate a star basketball player's grade point average. The change made Carlos Webb eligible to play on the basketball team, which won the National Christian Collegiate Athletic Association championship that year.

Some faculty members, trustees, alumni and students had called for White's resignation. The school's faculty gave White a 63-39 vote of no confidence the day his action was revealed in a local newspaper. The school's board of trustees, meanwhile, publicly affirmed his leadership while reportedly reprimanding him in private.

In his resignation letter, White called the move "the most wrenching decision" he has ever made.

"For reasons I find hard to understand and even more difficult to articulate, the situation has reached the point where the integrity of the institution and all that it represents is in jeopardy," he said. "I am sorry that what I did two years ago out of fairness to a student has led to such turmoil and controversy. But what causes me even more sorrow is that the harm of the past few weeks has been self-inflicted by men and women of the Gardner-Webb community to the detriment of our students whom we are here to serve, inspire and educate in accordance with Christian values."

White said it has been his privilege to serve the Baptist-affiliated university in Boiling Springs, N.C..

"All that we have built and all that is possible in the future is at risk unless we quickly come together and put the past behind us," he said. "I regret to say that doing so will be quicker and easier under new leadership."

Trustee chairman Tommy Hardin announced the resignation at about 1:30 p.m. Oct. 11. The trustees' executive committee accepted White's resignation while meeting for about three hours at First Baptist Church in Shelby, N.C..

"Let me emphasize that Dr White's decision was his own," Hardin said in a written statement. "This decision was not requested by the board."

Hardin said White chose to step aside so the "unrest" on campus would end.

"Although the recent controversy began on campus, it has mushroomed into a statewide issue and beyond that has harmed the reputation of both Dr. White and Gardner-Webb University," Hardin said. "Everyone associated with the university has been tainted by the unfortunate events that, quite frankly, have gotten out of hand."

Hardin said White was acting in what he believes is the best interest of the school.

"Dr. White's vision and leadership have been instrumental in bringing Gardner-Webb to university status, strengthening our faculty, putting us on solid financial footing, adding new programs such as the

school of business and the divinity school, and expanding our reach to other communities so more people can experience a Gardner-Webb education," Hardin said.

White has been president of GWU since June 1986. He had previously served as vice president for student and academic affairs at Elon College and as pastor of churches in North Carolina, Georgia and Kentucky.

In a 1999 interview with the Biblical Recorder, White said GWU wanted to become a "nationally recognized regional university."

"We think we are well on the way of doing that," he said at the time. "But we want to do that without changing the sense of who we are."

White was the unanimous choice of the school's trustees to become university's 10th president in December 1985.

White led the school's transition from a four-year college to a university in 1993. GWU started a divinity school that same year. In October 1998, the university's trustees renamed the school the M. Christopher White School of Divinity in his honor.

Enrollment has increased from 1,830 to more than 3,500 and the size of the school's faculty has grown from 94 to more than 130 during White's tenure.

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