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Editor: Bob Allen
Executive editor: Greg Warner

Phone: 800.340.6626
Fax: 904.262.7745
E-mail: bob@abpnews.com

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Midwestern Seminary removes funds from Missouri foundation

By Vicki Brown

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary is removing \$877,000 in seminary funds invested with the Missouri Baptist Foundation, one of five entities embroiled in a leadership dispute with the Missouri Baptist Convention.

Seminary trustees voted unanimously to remove the funds from the foundation at their regular fall board meeting, Oct. 21-22, in Kansas City, Mo.

Trustee David Tolliver, pastor of Pisgah Baptist Church in Excelsior Springs, Mo., said the seminary took the action because of controversy over recent decisions by the foundation and four other Missouri Baptist agencies to move to self-perpetuating trustee boards.

The Missouri Baptist Convention has filed a lawsuit against those institutions -- which also include The Baptist Home, Missouri Baptist University, Windermere Baptist Conference Center and Word and Way -- in an attempt to regain power to elect their trustees.

"Midwestern's bylaws require us to invest in a Southern Baptist institution," Tolliver said. "Now, the Missouri Baptist Foundation is not connected to the Southern Baptist Convention, and in my opinion, we have no business doing business with the Missouri Baptist Foundation."

Foundation President James Smith said in a statement Oct. 25 that he was "grieved" by the trustee action and disagreed with charges that the agency is no longer Southern Baptist.

"The Missouri Baptist Foundation is a Southern Baptist institution," he said. "Our mission has not changed. We stand on our record. We have recruited and employed Southern Baptists on our staff and nominated Southern Baptists to our board."

Smith said the Missouri foundation has distributed about \$6 million this year to ministries supported by the Cooperative Program unified budget. "That is more than some entire state conventions have given in Southern Baptist Cooperative Program support," he said.

"Our history is a testimony of working with Southern Baptists for the benefit of Southern Baptist ministry," Smith said in an earlier letter to seminary trustees. "That is our intention for the future. In recent years, the foundation has focused on starting new funds and participating in partnership missions projects with Southern Baptists in Wyoming and Belarus."

Midwestern trustee Jay Scribner, pastor of First Baptist Church of Branson, Mo, said the current controversy surrounding the foundation was the primary reason for the board's action.

"The foundation has made a wrong choice as an institution," Scribner said Oct. 25. "As an institution, we must make the choice to do what is in the best interest of our institution and what is in the best interest of the kingdom.

"We regret the decisions the foundation's trustees and Dr. Smith have made, and we believe these to be wrong decisions."

Despite MBTS trustees' decision, foundation officials said they plan to continue to promote gifts to the seminary. "Since the mid-1960s, we have served Midwestern Seminary and will continue to promote gifts to Midwestern and other Southern Baptist causes," said foundation vice president Kim Quinn.

Trustees directed President Phil Roberts and chairman Dan Eddington of Carson City, Nev., to explore other investment options. Board members did not set a deadline by which to remove the funds. Other investment options could include neighboring state foundations or the Southern Baptist Foundation.

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Baylor conference examines diversity in Christian music

By Greg Warner

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Christian music often divides churches, but it also has the power to unite, according to speakers from diverse musical backgrounds at a recent symposium at Baylor University.

"Once you've sung someone else's song with them, you can't be strangers anymore," said Carl Daw of Boston, executive director of the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada.

Speakers sounded a recurring theme urging mutual understanding for people who approach their music ministries in vastly different ways.

"Worship holds the highest promise for embracing the unity of the church," said Pentecostal pastor Jack Hayford of Los Angeles.

Two worship services on consecutive evenings illustrated the diversity that exists within Christian music. The first blended classical organ and choral music with African-American and indigenous global sounds. The second night brought together rock-based worship music, soft piano ballads and contemporary liturgy.

Foremost on the minds of many participants was the day-to-day struggle of planning and leading worship for congregations amid growing musical diversity.

Researcher George Barna told participants about a new study that suggests most churches are not seriously conflicted over worship. Many church ministers who attended the symposium, however, said it's too soon to declare the so-called "worship wars" are over.

"We would like to ignore that we are in a mess," said Randall Bradley, professor and director of the church music program at Baylor. He voiced a hope expressed by many, "that music would cease to be the weapon of choice on the battleground of the worship wars."

Comparing the battle over worship to a tug of war, Terry York said the music minister feels like "the flag in the middle of the rope."

"I think the worship wars will be settled in individual churches when we refuse to fight," said York, associate professor of Christian ministry and church music at Baylor. "If we find peace there, it will spread."

The three-day symposium, planned and hosted by Baylor University, was funded by an endowed gift from Billy Ray Hearn, who also attended the meeting. A Baylor graduate and former church music minister, Hearn was a pioneer in the Christian music industry. While working for the Southern Baptist Sunday School

Board, he spearheaded the youth musical "Good News" in 1968, which spawned a youth music movement among Southern Baptists and other denominations. Hearn later worked for Word Records, founded the Myrrh and Sparrow record companies, and later sold Sparrow to EMI, a secular music conglomerate.

Charlie Peacock, a singer, composer and frequent critic of the industry, offered an "apologetic" from Christian music to the church.

The Christian music industry has grown remarkably, selling 50 million units in 2001 and accounting for 5 percent to 10 percent of all music sales, Peacock said. More than half of Christian music is sold through mainstream retail outlets rather than Christian stores.

The industry grew out of the Jesus movement of the 1970s, led by pioneers like Billy Ray Hearn who "wanted to give the kids their own music," Peacock recounted. Though imperfect, the industry remains faithful to that original calling, he said.

Peacock said the Christian music industry creates popular music that reflects current music styles and is relevant to young Christians. Secular distribution allows many more people to hear Christian music.

But Peacock said an "overriding" need for music companies to make money leaves little room for innovative artists. The result is "a very narrow bandwidth" of Christian music styles. "Whatever works is proclaimed as good," Peacock said.

Bill Hearn, president of EMI Christian Music Group and son of the symposium's founder, said his company -- which like most is owned by a secular music conglomerate -- has never been pressured to contradict its Christian mission. "I contend the greatest pressure is within ourselves."

Peter York, president of Sparrow Label Group, acknowledged that Christian music "far too often has been following the model of the world." That tendency, he said, is driven by Christians with tastes shaped by popular music.

York said he and others have tried to break the mold by promoting artists "outside the norm," but "with very few exceptions they've been largely ignored."

Also during the meeting, Emily Brink, research fellow at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in Grand Rapids, Mich., traced recent developments in hymnody, including new attention to global music and justice issues like the environment, urbanization, children and the elderly.

Michael Hawn, a professor at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, urged participants to think globally about Christian music in order to get "a bigger picture of God." He called for a "reverse missions" approach. "Is it time for us to receive from others, even as they received from us?"

Robert Webber, a worship author and teacher, told participants that leading worship is the most demanding Christian discipline, because it must be informed by 20 centuries of Christian practice. Yet most ministers receive little training in worship, he lamented.

"I don't see any interest in most seminaries in teaching worship to pastors," said Webber, a professor at Northern Baptist Seminary in Chicago. "It's still sort of in the practical department -- how you wave your hand."

Webber said in worship, God's presence is found in "the gathered people," in the minister, in the Word and in the elements of communion.

Yet many churches, Webber said, "adhere to the doctrine of real absence -- 'God's never going to show up in this church. Nothing supernatural will ever happen here.'"

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