

years.

Similarly, the vice-presidential candidate receiving the most votes would have been first vice-president, with the candidate coming in second being named second vice-president, both serving a two-year term.

The four officers together would have appointed members of a key nominating committee.

Proponents said the plan would have avoided deepening the division among the state's Baptists. Opponents said conservatives and moderates have different visions for the convention, making true cooperation impossible. In the end, the proposal, though receiving 55 percent of the vote, was defeated when it failed to get the two-thirds majority necessary to change the convention's constitution.

For the past eight years, conservatives have dominated the state convention elections with moderates gaining some ground briefly in 2000. But last year's formation of a committee authorized to study "Plan C," one of four giving tracks available to the state's churches and the only one that includes funding for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, has North Carolina's Mainstream group asking if churches affiliated with the CBF can be full partners in the BSC and if loyalty to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is going to be a litmus test in the state.

Speaking to a group of about 70 at the MBNC meeting at First Baptist Church, Greensboro, where Hughes was announced, Ken Massey, pastor of First Baptist and a member of the MBNC steering committee, said MBNC wants to know if the BSC is going to be as rigid and exclusionary as the SBC.

"It's not a mandate; it's not a threat," he said. "We simply want to know, 'Is there room for churches that are no longer loyal to the SBC?' In November, we aim to have an answer."

If the battles can be stopped, Mainstream churches are willing to partner with all N.C. Baptists, Massey said. "If not, our congregations have some difficult choices to make."

Raymond Earp a layman from Beaufort will be nominated by MBNC for BSC first vice-president. CSB officials will offer Brian Davis, pastor of First Baptist Church, East Flat Rock, as second vice-president.
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Church removed from association
for baptizing gay men

By Steve DeVane

CONCORD, N.C. (ABP) – Cabarrus Baptist Association withdrew fellowship from McGill Baptist Church in Concord during the association's bi-annual meeting April 28 for baptizing two men believed to be gay.

Voting 250-11 with seven abstentions messengers removed the congregation saying the issue was "lifestyle" not "fundamentalism," according to Randy Wadford, the association's director of missions.

"This association has spent the last 10 years that I've been here in a positive light, moving ahead," Wadford said, noting the association has grown from 69 to 81 churches in that time.

"Our outreach is to everyone. No one in this building had a problem with homosexuals who would have come and joined any of our churches if the lifestyle had changed. The issue was lifestyle."

Wadford said the association would have taken similar action if a church

baptized someone who continued to be an alcoholic.

"Sin is sin, if it's alcoholic, if it's adultery, if it's any other sin," he said.

Wadford said a homosexual person is welcome to attend association churches, but not join.

"Joining a Baptist church means a person has repented of their sin, accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord," he said.

But McGill pastor Steve Ayers disagreed.

"The kingdom of God is about love. It's about God's grace. It's about showing that grace," he said. "When any church becomes so judgmental that they cannot accept people into the fellowship, it's sad."

Ayers said repentance is turning toward Christ. "I'm not their judge, but I can tell you the people who joined our church are living a very Christ-like life," he said, adding the church would not ask people their sexual preference before allowing them to join the church.

"If we throw the sinners out, there's not a church that's going to be open next week," he said.

In a prepared statement, Wadford said the New Testament teaches the homosexual lifestyle is contrary to God's will and plan for mankind.

"Therefore, Cabarrus Baptist Association must take a stand against any of our churches supporting or condoning this lifestyle," he said. "To allow individuals into the membership of a local church without evidence or testimony of true repentance (a turning away from the old way of living) is to condone the old lifestyle."

The sanctuary at Southside Baptist Church in Concord was filled to overflowing for the meeting. Concord fire officials limited the number of people inside the church sanctuary to 290. About 30 others had to watch the proceedings by video in the church fellowship hall.

The entire meeting was closed to the press. It is believed to be the first time a N.C. Baptist association has met behind closed doors. Wadford, said Roberts Rules of Order called for the meeting to be closed because it was dealing with membership issues.

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Candidate for Mars Hill president
faces opposition

By Tony Cartledge and Steve DeVane

Faculty, students and some alumni at Mars Hill College have expressed strong opposition to a prime candidate for school president.

Rick Brewer, vice president for planning and student affairs at Charleston Southern University (CSU) was brought to the campus April 22-23 for meetings with faculty, staff and students.

Brewer referred questions to Fred Pittillo, chairman of the Mars Hill trustees. Pittillo had earlier declined to comment on specifics of the search.

The meetings on campus, by several accounts, did not go well for Brewer.

Afterward, the faculty voted 72 to 0, with two abstentions, in favor of a resolution opposing his candidacy, according to faculty chair George Peery. "We believe Dr. Brewer is not a good fit for the position of

president of Mars Hill College, and we recommend the search committee not proceed with his candidacy," the statement said.

The faculty requested the opportunity to interview other qualified candidates and said the current administration is operating effectively, so there is no need to rush.

The Student Government Association (SGA) also convened after Brewer met with students. After concerns were expressed, SGA president Chris Alley asked if the student senators would like to take an informal vote on whether they would like to have Brewer as president. Students expressed opposition to Brewer by a ratio of about ten to one, according to Derek Hodges, editor of The Hilltop, the campus newspaper.

Campus administrators and other staff members did not take a vote after their meeting with Brewer, but seemed to be more equally divided in their opinions, according to several accounts.

A group of 25 retired faculty and staff, college alumni and friends also met with Brewer and endorsed a statement that concludes, "We are strongly disappointed in the candidate and unanimously feel that he is not the best person for the position!" The statement cites Brewer's limited educational or leadership experience beyond Charleston Southern, and adds "We question whether a person whose training and experience have been almost totally associated with an institution as deeply conservative as CSU could provide strong leadership at an institution with a history of freedom and openness such as Mars Hill."

Many concerns seemed to center around the fact that Charleston Southern appears to be more conservative than Mars Hill, according to The Hilltop. Brewer was asked specifically about women in pastoral roles or other leadership and whether or not he would require faculty to affirm the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message.

When asked if he would support a woman pastor, Brewer said that was a local church issue. When asked if he would support a woman as campus minister, Brewer said he would if she was the best candidate for the position.

Mars Hill fired Paula Clayton Dempsey as campus minister last year in what school officials said was a budget-cutting move. The school is currently interviewing candidates for campus chaplain, a similar position.

Brewer also told students he would not ask faculty members to sign a faith statement unless directed to do so by the board. Mars Hill trustees decided in January that faculty and staff will not have to sign the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message or any other such statement.

"I would not be in favor of signing some statement," Brewer said. "...That sounds creedalistic, and Baptists have historically not been creedal people."

But the larger concern seemed to be the fact that an agreed-upon process had been violated, according to George Peery, faculty chair and member of the search committee.

Before any candidate was named, he said, the committee agreed on a process that ensured an opportunity for feedback. "The search committee agreed that it would meet following campus visits to receive feedback from the various constituencies on campus when Brewer came on campus. We stipulated that before the nomination would go before the executive committee, that we would meet and then send the nomination on to the executive committee. The search committee has not as of this morning (April 28) been called back into session."

That is significant, because an "informal meeting" of the trustees'

executive committee had been called for 4 p.m. on Thursday, May 1. The executive committee has a regular meeting scheduled for May 8, and the full trustee board is scheduled to meet May 9.

Trustee Henry Crouch said he had been contacted and told other trustees were invited to come and observe the meeting May 1, which was to be held at Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute.

"It is peculiar that they are meeting, and that they are meeting at Fruitland," Peery said. "Do they fear coming on campus? ... Do they find this place inhospitable? It leads people to suspect strange things are going on."

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Judge issues split decision
in Shorter reorganization

By ABP staff

ROME, Ga. (ABP) -- A judge ruled April 23 that Shorter College can proceed with its plan to dissolve and transfer its assets to a newly formed foundation, but the Georgia Baptist Convention still has the right to elect the college's board of trustees.

DeKalb County Superior Court Judge Daniel Coursey Jr. lifted a temporary restraining order, allowing the college's plan for reorganization to move forward.

But the judge also ruled that the Georgia Baptist Convention, though not an 'owner' of the college, has the right to elect the college's board of trustees. Under the reorganization plan, however, it appears that elected trustees of the college will have little power.

Shorter College, located in Rome, Ga., has 2,100 students and has been affiliated with the Georgia Baptist Convention since 1959.

Late last year, the Shorter College board of trustees voted to sever ties with the GBC and transfer the assets of the college, estimated at \$50 million, to the Shorter College Foundation. This action was taken in response to a March 2002 report by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools that claimed "undue pressure is being placed on the board of trustees by an outside agency, namely the Georgia Baptist Convention" and recommended the school change its bylaws.

The convention, however, said the reorganization was an attempt to "steal" the college from Georgia Baptists.

The April 23 ruling left both sides claiming victory but several key issues unclear. Judge Coursey earlier noted the ruling is likely to be reviewed by the Georgia Supreme Court.

"We won the case," Shorter president Ed Schrader told the Rome News-Tribune. "The judge saw we had the right to reincorporate the college."

But the Georgia Baptist Convention issued a statement saying the convention is "gratified" that the convention still has the right to elect trustees. "The convention believes it would be a mistake for Shorter to continue with its dissolution in that it is not in the best interest of the college, its students or its financial viability."

It is unclear if the college will have to seat trustees nominated by the convention last November but rejected by Shorter. Those trustees did not participate in the vote to dissolve and reconstitute the college.

"We intend for the properly constituted board to reconsider this

dissolution plan," said Richard Robbins, an attorney representing a group of trustees opposed to the Shorter reorganization.

However, Shorter officials immediately filed the school's new articles of incorporation April 23, which create a new, separate board. "The ruling ensures Shorter will remain fully accredited and allows us to take the prudent steps to reorganize under new articles of incorporation, which include a self-perpetuating board of trustees," said Shorter president Shrader.

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