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Georgia Baptist Convention sells headquarters to Mercer

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Georgia Baptist Convention has sold its building and property in northeast Atlanta to Mercer University for \$12 million.

Sources at both the convention and Mercer confirmed the sale Aug. 22, although no formal announcement was made.

The five-story building is on a 25-acre site adjoining the Atlanta campus of Mercer, which has its main campus in Macon. The 200,000-square-foot building is about 40 years old.

The Georgia Baptist Convention plans to move to a new facility in Gwinnett County. Terms of the sale allow the convention to use the current building for up to three years while the new facility is built.

A Georgia Baptist Convention spokesperson said information about the sale would be available Aug. 22. But a power outage Aug. 22 closed the building down. Mercer officials said a formal announcement will be made Monday, Aug. 25.

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Baylor president vows to stay; school hires basketball coach

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By Jenny Hartgraves

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Robert Sloan told reporters Aug. 21 he has no intention of resigning as Baylor University's president, even though some members of the faculty senate are seeking a vote of "no-confidence" in his leadership.

Meanwhile, the university announced Aug. 22 that Scott Drew has been hired as men's basketball coach to replace Dave Bliss, who resigned Aug. 8 after an internal university investigation linked him to violations of NCAA rules.

Some critics, including the Houston Chronicle, have called for Sloan himself to resign because of the basketball scandal and other perceived missteps in leadership at the Baptist university.

Even if the faculty senate passes the "no confidence" vote at its Sept. 9 meeting, the decision ultimately rests with the university's board of regents.

At a media conference scheduled before an event where Sloan welcomed new students to the Baylor campus, more than 100 faculty members attended to show support of the president and his policies. "I've heard and felt the overwhelming support of the majority," Sloan said. He added the call for a vote of no confidence is "only representative of a small group."

Sloan announced the beginnings of an online alumni-support network, www.friendsofbaylor.net, founded by an independent group that wants to highlight the positive aspects of "Vision 2012," the Sloan administration's long-range plan for the university.

After Sloan addressed the media, he met with new students and their families at the President's Picnic on the campus quadrangle. "These have been difficult days for our nation and campus," he told the incoming students. "But today we're celebrating what I think is the first of the greatest years of your life."

Sloan praised the faculty and pledged his commitment to make Baylor the "finest possible education you can receive." He encouraged students to grow both personally and spiritually. "Think about your faith," Sloan said, "and discover God's calling on your life."

Julie Naugher, 18, said she was thankful to arrive at Baylor despite the controversy. "People in the dorms were talking about Dr. Sloan and everything that's happened," Naugher said. "But for the most part, everyone's excited to be here and ready for school to start."

The next day, university officials announced Drew's hiring at a press conference. The 32-year-old Drew is the former coach at Valparaiso University, a 3,600-student Lutheran-affiliated school in Valparaiso, Ind. Drew had a 20-11 winning record last season. He is one of the youngest Division I basketball coaches in the nation and has a reputation for overseas recruitment.

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In sports and life, Christians should compete with world's best, Baylor's Sloan says

By Mark Wingfield

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WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Revelations of extensive improprieties within Baylor University's men's basketball program should not cause the Baptist school to leave the Big 12 Conference but should prompt repentance and re-examination, President Robert Sloan insists.

In an interview Aug. 18, as further evidence of wrongdoing by former coach Dave Bliss and perhaps others continued to roll out almost by the hour, Sloan defended Baylor's place in the most competitive ranks of college sports.

Faced with recent dismal records in football and now the meltdown of the men's basketball program, some Baylor supporters have questioned anew the wisdom of a Baptist university competing amid the powerhouses of the Big 12, including Texas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Oklahoma State and Texas A&M.

"The question is penetrating because I think the Christian faces that question some ways in every day of his or her life," Sloan said. "How to be in the world and not of the world. How to be salt and light in the world. How not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind," he said, quoting Jesus and the Apostle Paul.

In previous news conferences, Sloan insisted Baylor, because it is a Christian university, must adhere to higher standards than mandated by NCAA regulations for other schools.

"Here we as an institution have clearly had our failures, and that calls us to repentance," he said. "It calls us to re-examination. But it doesn't call us to quit. It calls us to hold ourselves accountable because the Lord does, then to recommit ourselves and go back and try again.

"Every Christian faces this on an individual basis. We know our lives are supposed to be a witness in the world. We want others to see Christ in us. Yet we all fail in that -- sometimes in large ways, sometimes in small ways."

Sloan will not concede that Baylor cannot win while acting ethically, even if other schools might cheat to gain an advantage.

Life's not fair, he said, and those who try to compete honestly in any undertaking face competition from those who don't play by the rules. That's no excuse for succumbing to temptation, he said.

"The fact [is] that we succumb to temptation. Now the question is do we accept responsibility for it, accept the consequences and then by faith try to move on?"

Baylor should no more forsake highly competitive athletics than it should forsake its quest to perform on the highest academic levels, Sloan declared.

"It would be a great mistake for Christians to say, 'We can't take the pressure,' or 'We can't compete,' or 'We can't participate.' Whether it is research or athletic competition or music, the arts, the business world, journalism, all of the great influencers of culture, we have to be there."

Two Texas Baptists with different vantage points on Baylor agreed with Sloan's assessment.

Jon Mark Beilue, sports editor at the Amarillo Globe News and a member of First Baptist Church in Amarillo, affirmed that Christian principles should not prevent one from participating in competitive college athletics.

"It's not mutually exclusive in Division 1," he said. "If you look at it individually, for example, you see a lot of Christian athletes who are quite successful in what they do."

It is hard for private schools to make it in a conference like the Big 12, he said, but that has more to do with enrollment and resources than faith. Also, "it's more crucial at a private school like Baylor than it might be at public schools to hire the right coach," he added.

Likewise, former Baylor regent John Boyd of Amarillo continues to feel strongly that Baylor can compete in the Big 12. Boyd, an emeritus chief justice with the Texas 7th Court of Appeals, served on the Baylor board when the university entered the Big 12.

"I think we can compete, and we can compete well," he said. "Nothing good is easy," he added. "You've got to want to succeed, and I think Baylor can succeed. We've got to realize and emphasize our distinctive."

That distinctive is being the only private, church-related institution in the Big 12, he said.

"My conception of the aim of Baylor is to demonstrate that being a Christian intellectual is not an oxymoron, to graduate students who are not ashamed of their faith, who know there is an intellectual justification for it," said Boyd, also a member of First Baptist. "I think there are enough good athletes who would want to go to a school like that."

And that should be a pull for the right kind of coaches, as well, he added. "Baylor being unabashedly Christian would be an inducement to a lot of people. [Head football] Coach [Guy] Morriss made that distinction when he came to Baylor."

Boyd and others point to Notre Dame as evidence of another Christian school succeeding in big-time college athletics.

The Baptist Standard attempted to get a comment from Notre Dame administrators about how they have accomplished this goal. However, university spokesman Matthew Storin said the Catholic school is "reluctant to hold ourselves up as the ideal, or even a more positive example, when a school is in trouble."

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Mississippi court rules fetus has 'person' status

By Robert Marus

JACKSON, Miss. (ABP) -- Mississippi's highest court has ruled that a fetus is a "person" worthy of some legal protections under state law.

In a ruling that one of the court's justices criticized as an attack on abortion rights, the Mississippi Supreme Court ruled Aug. 21 that a Bolivar County, Miss., woman had the right to pursue a wrongful-death lawsuit on behalf of her unborn child. The fetus was 19 weeks old at the time the woman miscarried.

The 6-2 ruling means that, under Mississippi's wrongful-death statutes, fetuses can be included under the definition of "person."

Tracy Tucker sued a car-repossession company, a credit union and a Cleveland, Miss., doctor and hospital after suffering a miscarriage in 1997. She alleged that emotional distress brought about by the repossession of her

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automobile and misdiagnosis by medical professionals led to the miscarriage. The ruling allows her to proceed with her lawsuit.

Under Mississippi law, women already had the right to sue for the wrongful death of babies born prematurely or late-term fetuses that otherwise would have been expected to live had they been born. However, the new ruling expands that right to mothers with unborn children that have not reached the so-called stage of "viability," or ability to live outside the womb.

Justice Chuck McRae, in a dissenting opinion, said the act was an assault on the right to abortion established by the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision.

Sondra Goldschein, an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union, echoed McRae's concerns. According to the Jackson Clarion-Ledger, she said, "Anytime the fetus is recognizable as a person, it chips away at the foundation of Roe."

But Justice Jim Smith, writing the majority opinion, said the ruling would not affect the rights of doctors to perform abortions under Mississippi law. "Tucker's interest is to protect and preserve the life of her unborn child, not in the exercise of her right to terminate that life which has been declared constitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court," he wrote.

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Moore's monument remains, but likely to be gone soon

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore's monument to the Ten Commandments was still in the rotunda of the state judicial building Aug. 22, but its days appear numbered.

A federal judge ordered the 5,280-lb. granite depiction of the Protestant King James translation of the Ten Commandments removed from the public areas of the building by midnight on Aug. 20. Moore vowed to defy the order, even after being turned down by the U.S. Supreme Court. But Moore's colleagues on the Alabama Supreme Court unanimously overruled him Aug. 21.

After a special conference Aug. 21, the court's eight associate justices ordered the building manager to remove the monument from the rotunda as soon as was practical. Compounding the problem of where and how to move a two-ton piece of granite are threats of civil disobedience from supporters of Moore, who have gathered in Montgomery from around the country. Many of them already have been arrested for refusing to end prayer vigils and leave the building as it was closing.

Moore, a Southern Baptist layman, placed the monument in the center of the building's rotunda during the summer of 2001 -- without the associate justices' consent or knowledge.

In November, U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson declared the display in violation of the Constitution's ban on government endorsement of religion. After being upheld unanimously by a panel of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, Thompson ordered the monument removed by Aug. 20, threatening to levy stiff fines against the state if Moore did not comply with his injunction. Moore refused, saying to do so would violate the state

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constitution, which he says allows the state to "acknowledge God" as the source of law.

But the eight associate justices -- seven of them, like Moore, Republicans -- invoked a little-used Alabama law that allowed them to overrule an administrative decision of the chief justice. The building manager erected partitions Aug. 21 to block the monument from public view.

In their order, his peers issued a stern rebuke to Moore. "The justices of this court are bound by solemn oath to follow the law, whether they agree or disagree with it," they said. Moore's continued failure to comply with a higher court's order "would impair the authority and ability of all the courts of this state to enforce their judgments," they added.

In a statement released through a spokesman, Moore said of the move to hide the monument from view, "This is an example of what is happening in this country: the acknowledgment of God as the moral foundation of law in this nation is being hidden from us."

In an Aug. 22 conference call, attorneys for the plaintiffs who sued for the monument's removal agreed not to press immediately for contempt-of-court charges against Moore, thus sparing the state the fines. "Our concern all along has been compliance with the Constitution. Once the monument has been removed, our concerns will have been addressed," said Ayesha Khan of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, according to the Associated Press.

Khan and the other plaintiffs' attorneys reportedly expressed assurance that the monument will be gone before the Labor Day holiday.

Alabama Attorney General Bill Pryor, himself a Republican, a Catholic and a previous defender of Moore's action, endorsed the associate justices' decision after it was announced. "The taxpayers of this state should not be punished for the refusal of the chief justice to follow a federal court order," he said.

The state could incur fines to exceed \$1 billion in the first four months if the monument is not removed, said Gov. Bob Riley.

Riley, also a Southern Baptist, released an Aug. 21 statement saying, "Although I fundamentally disagree with what the federal courts have ordered, the state Supreme Court was correct in unanimously voting to uphold the rule of law." He added that, "Because we are a society of laws, the Alabama Supreme Court has a duty to comply with the federal court order, whether they agree with it or not."

However, Riley also said he would be willing to file a friend-of-the-court brief in Moore's behalf asking the U.S. Supreme Court to review the ruling. Moore ran out of legal options for keeping the monument in place for the immediate future late on the afternoon of Aug. 20 when that court declined to delay implementation of Thompson's order pending Moore's appeal.

The U.S. Supreme Court has never ruled directly on a case about the display of the Ten Commandments in a public building. But lower federal courts have ruled consistently that such displays may be permissible as long as they would not, to a reasonable viewer, convey an endorsement of Christianity over other religions and as long as they appear as part of a larger display with other historic legal documents. Such a display of tablets depicting commandments appears on a frieze at the Supreme Court building itself.

CORRECTION:

In the Aug. 21 article, "Baylor faculty senate may consider 'no confidence' vote for Sloan," one clarifying word needs to be added to the second sentence of the fifth paragraph. As originally written, the sentence reads, "More than two-thirds of the faculty support the direction...." It should be corrected to state: "More than two-thirds of the non-tenured faculty support the direction...."

Also, in the second sentence of the sixth paragraph, the statement "...nearly 100 e-mails from faculty members..." should read "...nearly 100 e-mails from faculty and staff members..."

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