

Arlington pastor resigns from Southwestern Seminary board

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ARLINGTON (ABP)—Dwight McKissic, the Southern Baptist pastor frequently at odds with fellow trustees at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has resigned from the board of the Fort Worth school.

McKissic, pastor of the predominantly African-American Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington, said he chose to step down in order to “return to the place I was prior to being a trustee.”

McKissic was the lone dissenter when trustees voted last October to forbid the seminary from employing professors who advocate speaking in tongues. Earlier, in a 2006 chapel sermon at Southwestern, McKissic said that since his days as a student at the seminary, he has used a “private prayer language,” considered by many a variation of tongues-speaking.

In March, trustees tried to expel him permanently from the board, a move McKissic called “nothing but a 21st-century lynching.” The trustee chairman said McKissic used confidential material inappropriately and expressed his disagreement poorly. Trustees later decided not to remove

him.

“My involvement as a trustee has been a huge distraction from my ministry priorities for the past nine months,” McKissic said. “I’ve devoted too much mental, physical, emotional and even spiritual energy to matters resulting from the aftermath of my chapel sermon.”

While the seminary usually posts chapel sermons on its website, Southwestern Seminary President Paige Patterson declined to post McKissic’s sermon, reportedly in order to avoid appearances that the school endorses the practice of speaking in tongues.

McKissic said the controversy surprised him. He hadn’t thought Southern Baptists were uneasy with his views until intense opposition to his belief and practice emerged after the sermon, he said. He recently spoke on the floor of the annual Southern Baptist Convention in San Antonio urging pastors to avoid narrowing doctrinal boundaries regarding glossolalia, or speaking in tongues.

The debate over tongues “has taken a tremendous toll on my family and ministry, and my wife believes it has negatively impacted my health,” he said in a letter to Van McClain, chairman of the trustee board. He also said he has been “distracted and consumed” by the controversy and needs to refocus on his family and church.

Patterson, who was out of the country, said in a prepared statement that he has enjoyed a long and happy relationship with McKissic. He also commended the Arlington pastor on his “very kind letter” of resignation.

“I anticipate that that relationship will continue and that Brother McKissic will continue as a faithful supporter of the seminary,” Patterson said. “It is well known that we have not always agreed, but we are brothers in Christ, and I love this pastor.”

Despite the mutual goodwill, McKissic said his resignation was also prompted by concerns for future interactions between the seminary and his ministry.

“I don’t want any possible future relationships or involvements with other missions or ministry opportunities to in anywise be misconstrued as a conflict of interest with my role as a trustee” at the seminary, he said. “I do not want my exercise of freedom of speech or freedom of associations in any way to create conflicts of interest or violations of (seminary) ...policies.”

Cornerstone Baptist will remain affiliated with the SBC as long as the convention moves “in what I consider to be the right direction,” McKissic said.

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