

Southwestern, McKissic back away from ‘tongue’-lashing

March 16, 2007

Posted: 3/16/07

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Associated Baptist Press

FORT WORTH (ABP)—Board leaders at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and an embattled trustee have agreed to meet and discuss their differences—with [a threat to remove](#) Texas pastor Dwight McKissic from the board taken off the table.

McKissic, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington, and trustee officers issued a joint statement announcing a private meeting to be held immediately prior to Southwestern trustees’ spring meeting.

Dwight McKissic

McKissic, who compared his treatment by the seminary to a “lynching,” previously had rejected the meeting because of preconditions he called unreasonable.

“Rev. McKissic and the officers of the board of trustees at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary have agreed to meet privately and confidentially,” the statement said. “The officers have also agreed to table any recommended action against Rev. McKissic. Both the officers and Rev. McKissic plan to make no further statements at this time.”

The statement did not describe the details of the planned meeting.

McKissic and board Chairman Van McClain previously disagreed publicly on terms for the meeting, which McClain had requested.

McClain told McKissic failure to reconcile prior to the April meeting could lead trustees to recommend that messengers attending the Southern Baptist Convention’s annual meeting in June remove McKissic from the board.

Only voting constituents at SBC annual meetings—known as “messengers”—have the power to forcibly remove a trustee from an SBC board. Although messengers never have taken such an action in the denomination’s 162-year history, trustees at a sister SBC agency recently made an abortive attempt to do the same thing.

Last year, trustees of the International Mission Board tried to remove Oklahoma pastor Wade Burleson from their ranks, but later backed down.

In both cases, the trustee controversies emerged around the issue of “private prayer languages,” a controversial devotional practice related to speaking in tongues.

And in both cases, the trustees were accused of breach of confidentiality with fellow board members.

McKissic preached a sermon at Southwestern Seminary last August in which he acknowledged he has practiced a private prayer language since

his days as a student at South-western. He said he disagreed with the IMB's November 2005 decision to amend its list of missionary qualifications to exclude candidates who use a "prayer language" in private.

Two months after McKissic's sermon, Southwestern trustees adopted a policy stating the Southern Baptist seminary would not "endorse in any way, advertise or commend the conclusions of the contemporary charismatic movement including 'private prayer language.'" McKissic was the lone trustee to vote against the measure.

McClain then requested the meeting with McKissic, saying the trustee had inappropriately used confidential material sent to him in advance of the board's fall meeting. McClain also said he is concerned about the way McKissic has expressed his disagreement with board actions and seminary policies.

McClain said trustee leaders tried to meet privately with McKissic to discuss their concerns about his behavior. But McKissic insisted on bringing outside witnesses and tape-recording the meeting, McClain said, adding that would make a private meeting impossible.

McKissic said he simply was asking for those measures to protect himself and to ensure an accurate account of the meeting, should details be leaked to the media.

McKissic described the threat to remove him, as well as McClain's refusal to present him with evidence of his wrongdoing prior to the meeting, as "nothing but a 21st-century lynching of an independent-thinking black man who has demonstrated strong support for the Southern Baptist Convention."

"Because I will not join the 'good old boys club,' I'm subjected to removal as a trustee," he said.

McKissic later apologized to McClain for the tone of his comments.

Southwestern trustees will meet April 2 in Fort Worth.

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