

# Black Southern Baptists respond to seminary presidents

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FAIRFAX STATION, Va. (BP)—Citing “concerns that affect all ethnic groups in the SBC,” the president of the National African American Fellowship of the Southern Baptist Convention issued a statement on behalf of the group related to the “breadth and depth” of a recent statement by presidents of the six Southern Baptist seminaries.

Marshal Ausberry, who is also pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Fairfax Station, Va., and first vice president of the SBC, said his hope was for Southern Baptists to achieve unity, adding: “As brothers in Christ, we of all people should be able to dialogue and resolve all of our concerns.”



The statement by the Council of Seminary Presidents, released Nov. 30 reaffirmed the Baptist Faith & Message as “the doctrinal statement that unites and defines Southern Baptist cooperation and establishes the (convention’s) confessional unity.”

The seminary presidents’ statement said while condemning “racism in any form,” they agree “affirmation of Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality and any version of Critical Theory is incompatible with the Baptist Faith & Message.”

## **‘Systemic racism exists’**

In his response, Ausberry wrote that members of the National African American Fellowship “hold most sacred and dear to our hearts the supremacy of Scripture,” and affirmed the Baptist Faith & Message.

But they also “recognize that there are ideologies from a sociological and anthropological perspective when used appropriately, help us to better understand the inner workings of a fallen and sinful world,” Ausberry wrote.

He added: “We affirm that all such ideologies do not supplant, by any means, the supremacy of Holy Scripture. And where such ideologies conflict with Scripture, it is Scripture that governs our worldview, our decisions, and our lives.”

Ausberry wrote: “We affirm that systemic racism exists, and like all Southern Baptists we oppose racism in all its forms. We do realize that there are theories and constructs that help us to see and discover otherwise undetected, systemic racism in institutions and in ourselves.”

## **‘Good men’ but bad ‘optics’**

In an interview with Baptist Press, Ausberry characterized the statement by the Council of Seminary Presidents as well-intended. But he said it created concerns not only among African American pastors, but also from representatives of other ethnic groups in the SBC.

“Especially for those of us who have experienced the brunt of systemic racism in our daily lives, our seminary presidents are good men and they had good intent,” Ausberry said.

“But the optics of six Anglo brothers meeting to discuss racism and other

related issues without having ethnic representation in the room in 2020, at worst it looks like paternalism, at best insensitivity. The only outcome can be from their life experience, which really ignores the broader family of Southern Baptists.”

In the statement, Ausberry said he had conversations “with SBC leadership and with the leadership of the Council of Seminary Presidents,” with plans for a meeting “in the near future.”

## **‘We want to listen well’**

Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and current chairman of the Council of Seminary Presidents, said he was “grateful for our African American brothers and sisters and their vital role in the SBC,” and looked forward to meeting with them “in an effort to more effectively achieve our common goals of advancing the gospel and fulfilling the Great Commission.”

“On behalf of the six seminary presidents, I want to say we appreciate their taking the initiative to reach out to us to discuss concerns they have about our recent statement on the (Baptist Faith & Message), racism and critical race theory,” Akin said.

“We want to listen well and hear their hearts as we talk with one another as family.”

Noting “our common enemy wants to derail us from reaching the lost,” Ausberry urged “all Southern Baptists to refrain from condemning each other on social media and other media outlets,” and to “pray for each other and for a better understanding through our mutual love for Jesus Christ and one another.”

Ausberry told Baptist Press his desire is that resulting conversations help

to create unity within the SBC and greater focus on the Great Commission.

“My hope is that truly it unifies our convention,” he said. “That we’re going to have some hopefully minor differences, but that we hold to the essentials of our faith and don’t miss the opportunity to be a picture of heaven to the world as we move forward to share the gospel around the world and plant churches throughout North America, and that Christ is glorified through our work.”