

Chuck Kelley to retire as New Orleans seminary president

October 2, 2018

NEW ORLEANS (BP)—New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary President Chuck Kelley announced his plan to retire at the end of the current academic year during Founders' Day chapel Oct. 2.

Kelley will continue to lead the seminary through July 31, 2019.

"This is the biggest decision of my life in a lot of ways," Kelley said in an interview. "I have been a part of almost half of the 100-year existence of NOBTS. It is very much the fabric of my whole life, and it has been a joyful, wondrous journey.

"This is a happy decision for us. We have served the seminary in a variety of ways and are thrilled to do so now in a completely different way."



Chuck Kelley

The public announcement came during Kelley's Founders' Day presentation called "A Walk through the Presidents." During the chapel service, Kelley

noted the highlights of the seven other presidents who have served since the seminary launched 100 years ago. He concluded with the story of his presidency and the announcement about his future.

After much prayer and several years of planning, Kelley said the conclusion of the centennial celebration offered a great opportunity to announce the transition. He expressed his desire to see new leadership in place that will set the course for the next era of ministry.

“As I look back at how intertwined my life has been with nearly half of the first century of the school, it seems appropriate to let the next leader start fresh with the second century” of the seminary’s history, he said.

Kelley notified trustee chairman Frank Cox, senior pastor of North Metro Baptist Church in Lawrenceville, Ga., of his retirement plans in a written statement on Sept. 24. Shortly before the chapel service, Kelley announced his plans to the executive committee of the NOBTS trustee board who were on campus for their regular fall meeting.

“Dr. Kelley has been committed to training and equipping young ministerial students all of his life, first as a professor of evangelism and then serving as the longest-tenured president of our institution. We applaud him,” Cox said on behalf of the board. “I think the future is bright for him and (his wife) Rhonda, and the future is bright for our seminary.”

Cox praised Kelley’s leadership following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when the school faced its greatest challenge. Although enrollment declined in the initial aftermath of the hurricane, it rebounded to reach an all-time high enrollment of 3,955 students in 2015.

The board has great appreciation for Kelley’s accomplishments at NOBTS, his commitment to evangelism, and for the many contributions he and his wife Rhonda made to the Southern Baptist Convention as a whole, Cox said.

The trustees will enact the seminary's presidential search protocol during their fall meeting Oct. 3. The seminary bylaws call for Cox to appoint a committee with 11 voting members—including the board chairman, the immediate past chairman, one faculty member, one student, and seven other board members.

"By making the announcement now the trustees have a reasonable chance to have someone in place by the start of the next academic year," Kelley said.

The seminary's board of trustees unanimously elected Kelley as the school's eighth president in 1996 following a 20-year tenure by Landrum Leavell. A professor of evangelism at New Orleans since August 1983, Kelley assumed the office of president March 1, 1996.