

Patterson accused of taking items from Southwestern

June 2, 2021

FORT WORTH (BP)—Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary used its annual report to the Southern Baptist Convention to assert former President Paige Patterson “improperly removed” documents and other items that belong to the seminary after his firing in 2018.

In an interview with Baptist Press, Patterson denied the allegations the seminary made in the [2021 SBC Book of Reports](#). He also denied he and others have a to divert donations away from the seminary to the Sandy Creek Foundation, his personal nonprofit organization.

In a statement to Baptist Press, Adam W. Greenway, who succeeded Patterson as Southwestern’s president, asserted: “Southwestern Seminary has told the truth.”

Southwestern alleges that documents including “confidential donor information, student records, institutional correspondence, financial records, historical files, and meeting and convention records” were taken from the president’s home.

The seminary also alleges that Patterson, his wife Dorothy, and others working with them “have continued to use institutional records for their own personal benefit and to the detriment of the seminary.”

The allegations are detailed in the seminary’s response to the referral of a motion made during the 2019 SBC Annual Meeting.

Patterson denies allegations



Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary trustee chairman Kevin Ueckert (left) addresses trustees at a special called meeting at the Fort Worth campus. The board met to discuss the controversy surrounding Paige Patterson (right), then president of the seminary. (File Photo by Adam Covington/SWBTS via BP)

In a phone conversation with Baptist Press, Patterson denied the allegations and expressed dismay over the public nature of the dispute.

“I do not think the courtroom or the press is the place where Christians need to discuss their differences,” said Patterson, adding that the interview would be his only public comment on the matter. “We’re responsible for working out our differences with other Christians. I’m very disappointed that we seem to be having trouble doing that.”

Patterson, a chief architect of the self-described “Conservative Resurgence” in the SBC, was [fired May 30, 2018](#), by the executive committee of the seminary’s trustee board for [alleged mishandling of](#)

[sexual assault claims.](#)

Since then, he remained mostly out of public view. But May 30, Patterson preached two services at First Baptist Church of Dallas, his most visible platform since the firing. During his opening remarks in the second service, Patterson referenced “the lynch mob ... trying to get hold of me.”

Paige and Dorothy Patterson attended a Bible conference held by the Conservative Baptist Network in September 2020 at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis. While he played no role in the event’s program, Patterson acknowledged to Baptist Press his involvement in the formation of the CBN.

He confirmed his home in Parker was the setting for initial promotional videos made upon the group’s launch in February 2020. His ties previously had not been acknowledged publicly.

Patterson did not characterize his level of involvement with the group, but said: “I’m very grateful for what they are doing, and I believe in what they are doing.”

Response to motion at SBC annual meeting

The motion Southwestern responded to in the 2021 Book of Reports was made by Ben Cole, a messenger from Oklahoma and former Patterson aide and longtime critic, who requested that Southwestern “pursue ... the lawful recovery of seminary property ... and any official records that may have been removed from the presidential home or other campus facilities without authorization between the dates of May 30, 2018, and Feb. 27, 2019.”

In its response, Southwestern asserted the seminary “repeatedly

requested” the return of the documents, specifically identifying “the records that needed to be returned,” but the Pattersons instead “advised the seminary that the documents had been ‘purged.’” Southwestern asserted that “the Pattersons’ actions have caused substantial financial harm to the seminary.”

Patterson denied to Baptist Press items belonging to Southwestern were improperly taken, saying: “not to my knowledge.” He said documents described as “purged” were “taken care of,” with “nothing of value” being destroyed.

Patterson also said he and associates had not received a confidential donor list or attempted to divert gifts from Southwestern to the Sandy Creek Foundation.

Back and forth on social media



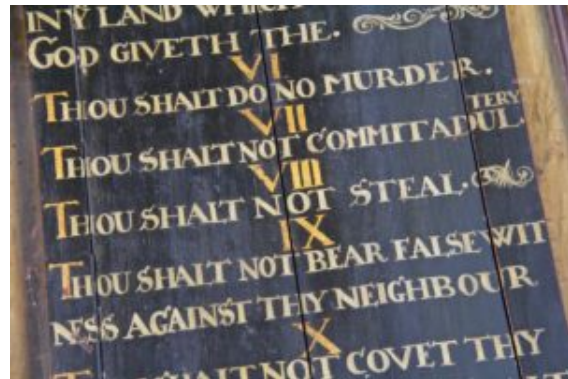
Candi Finch

Candi Finch, a former Southwestern Seminary faculty member and Dorothy Patterson’s former executive assistant, called the seminary’s response in the Book of Reports “absolute slander” on Twitter. Finch, who was named in the response, was fired in October 2018 in what Southwestern trustees described as a “faculty disciplinary matter.”

Philip Levant, chair of Southwestern’s trustee board, said the board “unanimously approved” a draft of the response to the motion during its fall

2020 meeting. The trustee board's executive committee approved the final response.

"We emphatically stand by our response as it is truthful and verifiable," Levant said in a statement. "I urge all Southern Baptists to carefully read it in its entirety to understand the scope of the challenges faced by this institution in the wake of the former president's rightful dismissal."



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Greenway said in the statement to Baptist Press: "The inerrant Word of God that we love fervently, that we affirm confessionally, and that guides sufficiently the work of this institution in keeping with our Founder's vision of theological education and in accountability to the Southern Baptist Convention, instructs us clearly, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.' Southwestern Seminary has told the truth."

Bart Barber, who was a member of the Southwestern trustee executive committee that voted to fire Patterson, wrote in posts to Twitter and Facebook that he had "first-hand knowledge" of some of the information in the seminary's response to the motions.

"To my knowledge, every word of the @SWBTS report is true," wrote Barber, pastor of First Baptist Church in Farmersville.

In a Facebook post, Charlie Houck, who in 2018 was Southwestern

Seminary's director of projects and information management, also vouched for the veracity of the report.

Houck wrote that he "directly handled IT security at SWBTS when all the fun happened in 2018," and added: "I've kept my mouth shut because I knew the truth would eventually come to light, and I left the seminary at the end of that year to pursue church planting. I'll just add my own eyewitness testimony to [Barber's] above to say that everything the SWBTS administration has said lines up with the truth to the best of my memory."

Reached by Baptist Press, Houck confirmed his Facebook post but declined further comment.

When challenged by Finch on Twitter, Barber pointed as an example to a \$5 million gift to the seminary, which he claimed was rescinded through Patterson's influence. He said during a May 2018 trustee meeting to consider Patterson's future as president, Patterson "was waving that check in his hand ... and he told the board that night that we were deciding what would happen with that gift."

Referring to Barber's account of the \$5 million check, Patterson told Baptist Press he was attempting to make it clear to trustees that the donor wanted the gift to go to a specific cause, in this case a missions program for Southwestern students.

"I brought it up to [trustees] twice," Patterson said. "They ignored that. They never dealt with it. ... So the donor asked for the check back."

Lawsuit involving the Riley Foundation

The \$5 million gift was a topic of testimony in a lawsuit filed in September 2020 by Southwestern and Baylor University against the Riley Foundation, a charitable foundation set up solely to benefit the schools. Mike Hughes,

the Riley Foundation's president and a former Southwestern Seminary vice president during Patterson's tenure, was a defendant in the suit.

Hughes testified to having characterized the \$5 million gift, during a conversation after Patterson's firing with Travis Trawick, then Southwestern Seminary's vice president for institutional advancement, as more a personal gift to the Pattersons than a gift to the institution. The gift later was returned by Southwestern to the donor.

In financial reports filed with the IRS, Sandy Creek Foundation listed less than \$83,000 in net assets in 2017, with \$0 in contributions. In 2018, with contributions and grants totaling \$5,471,944, the foundation listed almost \$5.3 million in net assets.

In the [lawsuit against the Riley Foundation](#), Southwestern and Baylor claimed some members of the Riley Foundation's board had altered the foundation's governance structure and its purpose, stripping the schools of their rights as beneficiaries.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton intervened in the case on behalf of the plaintiffs "to protect the public interest in charity," alleging that the defendants' actions were "to the detriment" of Southwestern and Baylor.

After Hughes' testimony also included evidence of Patterson's involvement, the attorney general issued a subpoena compelling Patterson to testify. But the lawsuit was instead settled, with [control of the Riley Foundation returned to the schools](#).

'Efforts ... to divert funds and redirect gifts'

When the settlement was announced, Southwestern officials said they had provided information to the attorney general "indicating efforts by

Patterson and his associates to divert funds and redirect gifts away from the seminary to the Sandy Creek Foundation.”

One allegation made by Southwestern in the Book of Reports references an email from a donor that was submitted as evidence in the Riley Foundation lawsuit. In January 2019, a Southwestern Seminary donor wrote to Jeff Bingham, then the seminary’s interim president, and reported receiving “disturbing” emails from both Patterson and Scott Colter, his former seminary chief of staff who was at the time employed by the Sandy Creek Foundation. The donor wrote that Patterson had asked him to alter his will, shifting a gift from Southwestern to the Sandy Creek Foundation.

The donor also said Hughes, who was at the time the executor of the will, had “represented the Pattersons['] firing from SWBTS as cruel and unjust, and represented the Pattersons as being broke and wrongfully terminated and kicked out into the cold by the SWBTS trustees.”

The donor added that he understood the Pattersons had remained in the president’s home at Southwestern Seminary until September 2018 and had since moved into what he described as a 5,500-square-foot home (according to Southwestern’s response in the Book of Reports, the home was purchased in August 2018 for approximately \$1 million by the Sandy Creek Foundation).

The donor added that he and his wife were “both disturbed how Mike misrepresented the Pattersons’ situation to us and has SWBTS represented as the bad guys.” He wrote that Patterson, Colter and Hughes were “implying SWBTS is doing them harm.”

In May 2019, another seminary donor received an email, allegedly sent by Colter, containing “reference points” for the donor to use in requesting the return of funds that had benefited the Dorothy Kelley Patterson chair of women’s studies.

The email included as “reasons to consider” the return of the funds the removal of a gravestone for the Pattersons’ dog, [Finch’s termination](#) and the removal of stained-glass windows in MacGorman Chapel bearing the Pattersons’ likeness and others.

Southwestern’s report also pointed to a July 2020 visit made by the Pattersons to donor Elizabeth Griffin in Memphis. According to Southwestern, the Pattersons “reached out” to Griffin, who died in December 2020, “... to discuss her estate planning.” The seminary alleged the goal was to “convince her to change her will’s beneficiary away from the seminary.”

Patterson acknowledged to Baptist Press the visit to Memphis, but maintained it was initiated by Griffin to Dorothy Patterson.

“Did we ask her to revise her will? No,” Patterson said, adding that if changes to her will were made, “I have no knowledge of it.”

Disputed property

In its response to Cole’s motion, Southwestern also alleged that “several items” from a collection that had been donated to the seminary in 2009, including artwork, taxidermy, antique firearms and other items, were missing. Southwestern asserts that one painting from the collection was identified through social media posts as hanging in the Pattersons’ home, and despite “multiple” requests through the Pattersons’ attorneys, the painting has not been returned to the seminary.

Patterson told Baptist Press no items for his new home were taken intentionally from a collection submitted to the seminary in 2009. And he claimed Southwestern retains items belonging to his late father T.A. Patterson, despite the Pattersons’ repeated requests for their return. T.A. Patterson was a former executive secretary of the Executive Board of the

Baptist General Convention of Texas.

But according to a deed of gift agreement provided to Baptist Press, dated March 27, 2008, and signed by Paige Patterson and his wife Dorothy, the couple “irrevocably” gave “the T.A. Patterson papers and collection” to Southwestern. The agreement “transfer[red] to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary all our rights in and to the property, including literary property rights.”

Colby Adams, Southwestern’s chief of staff and vice president for strategic initiatives, told Baptist Press the seminary had “meticulously evaluated records in its possession connected to the Pattersons and identified nine boxes of materials of a truly personal nature.” He said seven boxes were returned to the Pattersons in May 2019 and two more were returned in August 2020.

“Meanwhile, the Pattersons have not returned any of the seminary’s rightful documents, in spite of repeated requests—unfortunately continuing a pattern over many years of the Pattersons removing institutional materials without authorization,” Adams said.

“Any other collections held by Southwestern Seminary, including the T.A. Patterson Collection, are donations given to the seminary, not to the Pattersons personally, with full supporting documentation on file.”

The allegations by Southwestern were reminiscent of issues regarding documents missing after Patterson left Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary for Southwestern in 2003. Less than a week after Patterson was fired from Southwestern in 2018, officials at [Southeastern released a statement](#) that documents were missing that were deemed necessary for an internal review of the allegations of Patterson’s handling of sexual assault claims that occurred during Patterson’s administration at Southeastern.

In the statement, Southeastern said, it believed documents were not

removed maliciously but due to a misunderstanding on the part of the Pattersons and their attorney. The issue was resolved in January 2019, when Southeastern and the Pattersons determined the rightful owners of 89 boxes of documents in what was described as a cordial meeting.