

Patterson controversy prompts called meeting of trustees

May 7, 2018

FORT WORTH—Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary’s board of trustees will gather for a special called meeting May 22, prompted by controversy surrounding remarks seminary President Paige Patterson made in 2000 regarding spousal abuse.

Trustee Chairman Kevin Uekert, lead pastor of First Baptist Church in Georgetown, called the meeting for 1:30 p.m., May 22 on the seminary’s Fort Worth campus.

In recent weeks, an [audio recording](#) resurfaced from Patterson’s question-and-answer presentation to a 2000 meeting sponsored by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, in which he said the proper response to spousal abuse “depends on the level of abuse, to some degree.”

Since the recording came to light—along with a video of a 2014 sermon in which Patterson joked about a “built” 16-year-old co-ed—some Southern Baptists have called for Patterson to [step down](#) from his seminary post.

In a [statement released May 6](#), Uekert said: “Since April 28, I and the executive committee of the board of trustees have been in conversation with our president. In light of recent events, Dr. Patterson has requested that I convene our full trustee board to meet in official session.”

‘A message to women that we must not

send'

Patterson—an architect of what supporters call the “conservative resurgence” within the Southern Baptist Convention—is scheduled to deliver the convention sermon at the convention’s annual meeting at Dallas in June.

The controversy surrounding Patterson happens at a time with Paul Pressler, another key figure in orchestrating what opponents termed the “fundamentalist takeover” of the SBC, faces a [lawsuit alleging sexual abuse](#).

“If Patterson preaches at the SBC, he will, because of his past work, get a standing ovation. Every news story will point to that moment, tie it together with the accusations against Paul Pressler, and say Southern Baptists don’t take abuse seriously,” Ed Stetzer, former executive director of LifeWay Research and now professor at Wheaton College, wrote in a [Christianity Today article](#).

“And that’s not just a public relations crisis. It’s a message to women that we must not send.”

Stetzer went on to thank Patterson for his service, but called on him to step down.

“You did the right thing when it was hard. Now, let me encourage you to do so again,” Stetzer wrote. “Thank you for thinking first of the SBC as you step into a well-earned retirement.”

‘Be submissive in every way that you

can'

In the 2000 recording, Patterson said he never counseled a woman to divorce her husband, although in extreme cases of physical abuse he occasionally advised temporary separation. Rather, he urged a woman in an abusive situation to pray for her husband and “be submissive in every way that you can.”

When the recording began to circulate online, Patterson issued a [statement April 29](#), which said in part, “I have never counseled or condoned abuse of any kind.”

In the public statement, Patterson recounted an incident he described in the 2000 recording in which a woman approached him to talk about her desire to see her husband attend church.

“He was neither harsh or physical with her, but she felt abused,” he explained. “I suggested to her that she kneel by the bed at night and pray for him. Because he might hear her prayer, I warned her that he could become angry over this and seek to retaliate. Subsequently, on a Sunday morning, she arrived at church with some evidence of physical abuse.”

In the recording, Patterson told the woman he was “happy” about what had happened, because it prompted her husband to slip into the back door of the church sanctuary before the worship service, and the man subsequently made a commitment to Christ.

‘Probably unwise’

“For sharing this illustration, especially in the climate of this culture, I was probably unwise. ... I do not apologize for my stand for the family and for seeking to mend a marriage through forgiveness rather than divorce. But I do greatly regret that the way I expressed that conviction has brought

hurt,” Patterson said in the prepared statement. “I also regret for my own family this deliberate misrepresentation of my position, as well as the hatred that lies behind much of it.”

In an [April 30 interview](#) with Baptist Press, information service of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Executive Committee, Patterson sought to clarify his position further, saying he seriously doubted anyone experiencing spousal abuse would be morally obligated to remain in a home with the abuser.

However, he added, “minor non-injurious abuse which happens in so many marriages” might prompt a wife to “pray through this” rather than leave her husband.

No level of abuse is acceptable

Several Southern Baptist leaders quickly issued statements condemning the abuse of women.

Thom Rainer, president of LifeWay Christian Resources, [tweeted](#): “There is no level of abuse of women that is acceptable.”

Rainer went on to say, “I stand with all who say ‘no’ to any type of abuse of women at any time and under any circumstance.”

Russell Moore, president of the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, affirmed Rainer’s statement on Twitter in a [series of tweets](#).

Moore pointed to what he interprets as scriptural justification for divorce in cases of sexual immorality (Matthew 5:32) or abandonment (1 Corinthians 7:25).

“Abuse make a home unsafe and constitutes abandonment,” Moore said.

“A woman being abused should leave the house and call the police. The state should prosecute the abuser, and the church should discipline him.”

At least two Southern Baptist seminary presidents—Daniel Akin of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Al Mohler of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary—also took to Twitter to denounce abuse of women.

Another Patterson statement

On May 2, Patterson issued a [second public statement](#), this one in conjunction with the seminary trustees’ executive committee.

“When Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary comes to the topic of abuse, above all other emotions we feel compassion, concern and a commitment to protect women, children and others whose lives of promise and potential have been altered in tragic ways by the sin and violence of abuse. These are people whom God has made in his image,” the statement says.

The statement goes on to affirm the “vital and God-ordained role” of law enforcement and civil authorities in addressing abusive relationships and “the importance of protecting victims of abuse.”

It also affirms a statement on abuse issued by the [Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#), which calls on churches and ministries to “establish safe environments; to execute policies and practices that protect against any form of abuse; (and) to confront abusers and to protect the abused, which includes the responsibility to report abuse to civil authorities.”