

Baptist school cancels mission trip for church dismissed from SBC

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FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) — A Kentucky Baptist university has, at the last minute, withdrawn its invitation to host a youth mission team from Texas after the Southern Baptist Convention disfellowshipped their church for its toleration of homosexuals.

Brent Beasley, pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, said the church's youth minister received a call June 30 from an official at the University of the Cumberlands informing her that the congregation's youth choir is no longer welcome to stay in dorms or perform mission work through the school's Mountain Outreach construction program, which builds houses for the disadvantaged in Appalachia. Beasley said a church near the school's Williamsburg, Ky., campus also canceled a concert that had been scheduled as part of the mission trip.

He said a big part of the 12-day mission trip/choir tour, scheduled to begin July 3, was the stop at the university which is controlled by the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship volunteers build a house in Eastern Kentucky as part of the CBF's rural-poverty ministry. University of the Cumberlands disinvited a youth choir from Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, from a similar project after the Southern Baptist Convention ruled the church out of "friendly cooperation" with the SBC because of its views on homosexuality. (CBF photo)

The [Mountain Outreach](#) program was established in 1982 by two students overwhelmed by the sight of tar-paper shacks without electricity or running water while on a driving tour of rural areas long plagued by poverty.

Beasley said Broadway's youth minister, Fran Patterson, was scrambling to find alternative plans for that part of the itinerary. Beasley said he has received several invitations and suggestions from churches in the general area, most identified with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Paula Settle, eastern missionary in the CBF's Together for Hope rural-poverty ministry, said she offered to serve as host for the group in Kentucky's Owsley and Powell counties, where she works. Since construction materials were being provided through the university, however, she said she isn't sure if she could come up on short notice with enough projects to keep such a large group busy for so many days.

Beasley, whose first Sunday as Broadway's new senior pastor is July 5, said the Broadway Chapel Choir, as the youth choir is called, has been taking these kinds of mission trips for years.

"All these kids want to do is praise God with their singing and serve God by helping those in poverty," Beasley said. "We're not going to let denominational politics keep them from doing this good work."

The Southern Baptist Convention voted without discussion June 23 to accept the unanimous recommendation of the SBC Executive Committee to sever a 125-year-old relationship with Broadway. The committee said the congregation failed to prove it had not acted to "affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior," a requirement for SBC membership since the early 1990s.

The action was in response to a motion at last year's annual meeting calling for an investigation after news reports about a controversy at Broadway over whether to include photographs of same-sex couples in a new church

directory. The church eventually resolved the issue with a compromise that used candid photos of all members instead of family portraits, but in the process church leaders acknowledged there were a handful of openly gay members and that some of them served on church committees.

The SBC, the nation's second-largest religious body behind Roman Catholics, amended its constitution in 1992 and 1993 to change membership requirements by adding a prohibition on affiliating with churches that "act to affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior."

Until then the convention, formed in 1845 to defend slavery, had defined membership by financial contributions and not by any moral issue.

The 1992 action — ratified the following year — was in response to two churches in North Carolina making news at the time for their views on homosexuality. Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh had blessed a same-sex union and Binkley Memorial Church in Chapel Hill had licensed a gay divinity student to the gospel ministry.

Between 1993 and 2009 the membership amendment had been applied only to churches that took some formal action like ordaining a homosexual or blessing a same-sex relationship.

In 1993 a messenger rose to challenge the seating of messengers from Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., arguing the congregation tacitly violated the membership article by failing to exercise church discipline on a wayward member, President Bill Clinton, over his policies on homosexuality and abortion.

After interviewing messengers from the church, however, the SBC credentials committee ruled that the convention could not hold churches liable for actions of an individual member and recommended the church's messengers be seated.

Formerly called Cumberland College, the University of the Cumberlands was founded by Baptist ministers in 1889. The school has historically served students primarily from the collective mountain regions of Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Ohio and Alabama.

University officials did not respond to requests for comment.

-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.

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