

Baylor disinvites former law prof to speak in chapel

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WACO—A former Baylor Law School professor planned to speak to a university chapel about clemency reform and ask a released prisoner to tell his story, but Baylor cancelled his invitation, citing two opinion articles he wrote for the Waco newspaper.



Mark Osler Mark Osler, now a professor at the University of St. Thomas School of Law in Minnesota, was scheduled to speak at Baylor University's chapel Feb. 13.

However, according to a Feb. 12 first-person [article](#) in the *Waco Tribune-Herald*, Baylor Chaplain Burt Burleson cancelled his appearance.

Articles on LGBT matters and Pepper Hamilton investigation noted

“He cited as the reason two articles I had written in the *Tribune-Herald*,” wrote Osler, who serves on the Waco newspaper's editorial board of contributors. “One, which did not mention Baylor, argued for integrity and rootedness in the Bible as churches struggle with the possibility of gay church members.”

Osler wrote a Nov. 20 [article](#) in response to actions the Baptist General

Convention of Texas took to exclude any churches that affirm same-sex relationships.

“The other decried the PR-centered approach Baylor had taken regarding the tumult over sexual assaults by students and urged that the Pepper Hamilton report on those assaults be reduced to writing and made available to the students,” Osler continued.



Burt Burleson In a Nov. 6 [article](#), he wrote, “At this point, what people see is a university more committed to PR than to Christian values of accountability, honesty and confession.”

Burleson noted he and the director of chapel exercised “pastoral discernment” in making decisions about chapel speakers.

“Our discernment about this in planning our spring chapels was made last fall as we worked to offer the most fitting programs and presenters for our students in our current context,” he said.

Planned to talk about redemptive work in federal clemency

Osler planned to use his time as a chapel speaker not to address LGBT issues or the Baylor sexual abuse crisis, but rather to talk about his work on federal clemency, “seeking the shorten the sentences of nonviolent narcotics prisoners who have an exemplary prison record and a personal narrative that includes taking active responsibility for what they have done

wrong and a fervent commitment to do better,” he explained.

“That work for me is a very satisfying vocation; at its heart is the mercy that Jesus urges us to show one another, balanced with a love for community that calls us to protect it from harm,” he wrote.

Specifically, he wanted to talk about Ronald Blount, a former drug addict arrested when he helped his brother sell crack cocaine, hoping to get some for himself. Because of two low-level prior convictions, Blount received a life sentence without the possibility of parole.

In prison, Blount turned his life around and worked in the prison chapel. In November, his petition for clemency was granted.

“I wanted to bring him up to Waco Hall—he works in Houston—to sit in the audience or behind me,” Osler wrote. “I would tell his story—and the story of this deep vocation—then introduce him and have him speak.

“It gives me chills to think of it. It won’t happen, though.”

Osler expressed his regret Baylor disinvited him, noting he had spoken at numerous other schools, including conservative evangelical Christian universities and seminaries.

“None of them flinched, even when it was clear that some of my views might conflict with some of theirs,” he wrote. “Only Baylor showed this kind of fear, and that is a sad thing, for me and for them.

“At Baylor, it seems that the fragile snowflakes needing a ‘safe space’ free from divergent voices aren’t in the student body—they are in the administration and on the board of regents.”