

Paige Patterson no longer seminary president

May 23, 2018

FORT WORTH—After more than 13 hours in a closed-door meeting that started May 22, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's board of trustees announced Paige Patterson's time as president ended, and he was moved to the role of president emeritus, effective immediately.

Board Chair Kevin Ueckert announced Patterson, whose comments about spousal abuse and women prompted what some called a Baptist #MeToo moment, had accepted the board's decision.

Patterson and his wife, Dorothy, will be allowed to live on campus in the Baptist Heritage Center, once it is completed, where they will serve as "theologians-in-residence."

Trustees named Jeffrey Bingham, dean of the School of Theology, as interim president, pending his approval.



Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological

Seminary, waits for seminary trustees to meet. (Photo / Ken Camp)

The same day the board convened, the [Washington Post reported](#) Patterson allegedly instructed a woman who told him she had been raped not to report the assault to police and said she should forgive her attacker. The woman said she was sexually assaulted as a student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., when Patterson was president there.

Patterson—an architect of what supporters call the “conservative resurgence” within the Southern Baptist Convention and detractors consider its “fundamentalist takeover”—is scheduled to deliver the convention sermon at the convention’s annual meeting at Dallas next month.

Special meeting convened

Ueckert, lead pastor of First Baptist Church in Georgetown, called a special meeting of the Southwestern Seminary trustees for 1:30 p.m., May 22 on the seminary’s Fort Worth campus.

Within 15 minutes, the board entered executive session to discuss the seminary president’s performance and the situation “currently facing the seminary.” The board continued in executive session until 3 a.m. May 23. with a one-hour break for the evening meal.

Before going into executive session, trustee Wayne Dickard of Easley, S.C., raised a point of order, saying the board’s executive committee had “acted in an illegitimate way” by exceeding its authority and meeting “multiple times” after the called meeting had been announced.

Uekert ruled the point of order not well taken. Dickard challenged Uekert's ruling, but the board affirmed the chair, with only a couple of dissenting votes.

Throughout the day and into the night, Patterson alternated between long periods of time with the trustees in their closed-door meeting and times when he was sequestered in a private room with members of his family and inner circle.

Board announces its actions

Patterson was not in the room when Uekert called the meeting back into general session shortly after 3 a.m., and he was not available to the news media.

In addition to announcing Patterson's removal as president, his new title of president emeritus and Bingham's appointment as interim president, Uekert touched briefly on two other issues.

He reported trustees found "evidence exists" that Patterson complied with reporting laws regarding assault and abuse. He mentioned trustees had investigated the matter but offered no details.

He also reiterated "the seminary stands against all forms of abuse."

Uekert also noted no evidence of misconduct in the personnel file of former seminary employee Nathan Montgomery, who asserted he was fired for a Twitter entry critical of Patterson.

Within a short time, a [public statement](#) from the board of trustees appeared on the seminary website.

"After much prayer and a more than 13-hour discussion regarding challenges facing the institution, including those of enrollment, financial,

leadership and institutional identity, the board determined to move in the direction of new leadership for the benefit of the future mission of the seminary,” the statement said.

“The board passed a motion through a majority vote to appoint Dr. Patterson as president emeritus with compensation, effective immediately, which he accepted. In addition, the board passed a motion to affirm the trustees’ September 2017 offer for Dr. and Mrs. Patterson to live on campus as the first theologians-in-residence at the Baptist Heritage Center, scheduled to be completed in July 2018.”

2000 audio recording prompts outcry

Patterson’s involuntary transition to the role of president emeritus followed a public firestorm triggered in large part by his public statements in the past regarding women.

In April, an [audio recording](#) began recirculating online from Patterson’s question-and-answer presentation to a 2000 meeting sponsored by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.

In that recording, he said the proper response to spousal abuse “depends on the level of abuse, to some degree” and emphasized he never counseled women to seek divorce.

Patterson insisted he never counseled a woman to divorce her husband, but in extreme cases of physical abuse he occasionally advised temporary separation. He urged a woman in what she considered an abusive situation to pray for her husband and “be submissive in every way that you can.”

Patterson issues statements

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

In that 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 fact, in the recording, he said the woman appeared at church with black eyes and asked Patterson if he was “happy.” He assured her he was, because her husband attended church that day and subsequently made a faith commitment to Christ.

“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 April 29 prepared statement.

On May 2, Patterson released a [second public statement](#), this one issued 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 emphasize “the importance of protecting victims of abuse,” and 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.”

Sermon illustration stokes the fire

After the audio recording from 2000 came to light, a [video](#) of a 2014 sermon also began circulating. In it, he talked about a “very attractive” 16-year-old girl and defended a teenage boy who found himself in trouble after describing the young woman as “built.”

“Leave that boy alone,” Patterson said. “He’s just being biblical. That’s what it says right here: ‘God built her and brought her to Adam.’”

On May 6, an [open letter](#) to the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees from Southern Baptist women appeared online and soon gained about 3,000 signatures.

“We cannot defend or support Dr. Patterson’s past remarks. No one should,” the letter said. “The fact that he has not fully repudiated his earlier counsel or apologized for his inappropriate words indicates that he continues to maintain positions that are at odds with Southern Baptists and, more importantly, the Bible’s elevated view of womanhood.

“The Southern Baptist Convention cannot allow the biblical view of leadership to be misused in such a way that a leader with an unbiblical

view of authority, womanhood and sexuality be allowed to continue in leadership.

On May 10, Patterson issued "[An Apology to God's People](#)," asking forgiveness for comments that "have obviously been hurtful to women in several possible ways."

"I wish to apologize to every woman who has been wounded by anything I have said that was inappropriate or that lacked clarity," he said. "We live in a world of hurt and sorrow, and the last thing that I need to do is add to anyone's heartache. Please forgive the failure to be as thoughtful and careful in my extemporaneous expression as I should have been."

Historical perspective

Patterson became the eighth president of Southwestern Seminary in 2003.

Alan Lefever, church historian and director of the Texas Baptist Historical Collection, offered a historical perspective on the transition at Southwestern Seminary.

"Of the men who have served as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, only one retired of his own choice—L.R. Scarborough," Lefever noted.

Two presidents—founder B.H. Carroll and J. Howard Williams—died in office.

"The rest (E.D. Head, Robert E. Naylor, Russell H. Dilday, Ken Hemphill and Patterson) were forced out or fired by the trustees," Lefever said.

(This article originally was posted at 3:30 a.m. May 23 and updated at 11 a.m. when additional information became available.)