

Seminary president seeks to build bridges

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FORT WORTH—If Texas Baptist ministers who have felt distanced from a seminary they once called their own notice a change in its leaders’ “tone” and “tenor”—but not in the institution’s “lockstep” commitment to the Southern Baptist Convention’s doctrinal statement—then Adam Greenway will feel like he has made progress.

In February, trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary elected Greenway as the school’s ninth president. He assumed the president’s office less than one year after the board cut all ties with former President Paige Patterson, who was accused of mishandling reports of sexual abuse and of using demeaning language toward women.

“I was fortunate to become the president of an institution filled with opportunities cleverly disguised as problems,” Greenway said.

Rather than focusing on difficult days in the seminary’s recent past, Greenway looks back to the vision of founder B.H. Carroll. He wants to connect to what he calls Southwestern Seminary’s tradition as “the big-tent seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention” and connect personally with “legacy servants” on the faculty who influenced generations of Texas Baptist ministers.

“As an alumnus, the first alumnus to serve as president here in the last quarter-century, I am deeply indebted to and deeply committed to the best of our history, heritage and legacy,” he said in an Oct. 10 interview.

Greenway said he recognized “our seminary in more recent years in both perception and, to some extent, some reality has been identified with

positions that were more narrow than the Baptist Faith & Message,” the Southern Baptist confession of faith.

Four pegs of the ‘big tent’

Both in the [news conference](#) immediately after his election as president and in his first [chapel sermon](#), he referred to a “big-tent” vision for Southwestern Seminary.



Adam Greenway (Southwestern Seminary Photo)

He envisions the tent as anchored by “four pegs”—a high view of Scripture, confessional fidelity, Christ’s Great Commission and cooperation.

Greenway affirmed the [Baptist Faith & Message](#)—most recently revised in 2000—as a doctrinal guide for the seminary. The most recently adopted version of the confession limited the role of pastor to men. It also deleted a sentence from the 1963 version’s statement on Scripture: “The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.”

“Every iteration of the BFM since 1925 has been the doctrinal position of Southwestern Seminary,” he said. “We are in lockstep solidarity with our convention of churches in terms of where the convention has said we are going to stand theologically.”

However, he added, SBC confessions of faith historically have focused on areas of agreement, while remaining silent on issues where Southern Baptists have disagreed, such as details regarding the End Times or adherence at all points to Calvinist theology.

“For example, on issues related to Calvinism and Reformed theology, the Baptist Faith and Message does not take a position on the extent or the intent of the atonement or on the irresistibility or resistibility of grace,” he said, noting the seminary should “not be defined by” those matters.

Greenway personally embraces the term “inerrancy” to describe his view of the Bible, and he noted the seminary’s board of trustees have affirmed the [Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy](#) as an interpretive guide.

However, he acknowledged the history associated with that term in Southern Baptist Convention life—particularly during divisive times beginning 40 years ago when it was used as a rallying cry by one group.

“For some, that language became politically weaponized and personally problematic,” he said.

A faculty member’s adherence to the ideas about biblical authority in the Chicago Statement and a willingness to affirm the high view of Scripture it expresses are more important than the use of the terms “inerrant” or “inerrancy,” he noted.

Not part of the Baptist battles

Greenway’s predecessor as president was one of the key architects of what supporters called the “conservative resurgence” and critics called the “fundamentalist takeover” of the SBC.

In contrast, Greenway was an infant when the “Baptist Battles” began in 1979. He surrendered to the ministry as a high school student in 1994—the

same year the Southwestern Seminary trustees summarily fired Russell Dilday as president for criticizing the political movement in the SBC.

So, Greenway noted, he “had nothing to do” with the denominational conflict and events that damaged the relationship between many Texas Baptists and Southwestern Seminary.

“I can’t change the past, but let’s change the future together,” he said.

He pointed to the deep “love and affinity” Texas Baptist ministers historically have felt toward Southwestern Seminary.

“That also means the wounds and the hurts go far deeper. They are far more existential—far more painful,” he said.

As a result, some Texas Baptist churches chose to defund some or all SBC agencies and institutions—including Southwestern Seminary.

Even so, through August this year, Texas Baptist churches directed more than \$6.9 million to the Southern Baptist Convention, which means the SBC Executive Committee would have forwarded about \$278,000 to Southwestern Seminary.

Greenway expressed thankfulness for the \$7.5 million Southwestern Seminary receives through the Cooperative Program and his desire to promote cooperation.

Emphasize residential theological education

He also mentioned his desire to emphasize residential theological education “in the context of a learning, worshipping, serving community” and give greater attention to the master’s level degrees the seminary offers

to equip students for ministry in churches.

Last year, Southwestern Seminary reported 1,160 full-time equivalent enrollment, including students in the undergraduate and certificate programs at Scarborough College. Greenway noted the figure was about 2,300 when he graduated in 2002, before the seminary offered an undergraduate program.

When Robert A. Baker's history of Southwestern Seminary, *Tell the Generations Following*, was published in 1983, he reported 3,317 full-time enrollment for the 1981-82 academic year. At that time, he noted, the seminary's leaders were considering whether to cap enrollment at 4,000 students each year until the seminary could increase its resources.

"The enrollment is nowhere near where we want it to be," Greenway said.

Reach out to retired faculty

A priority for Greenway—and "pastoral burden" he has felt—since he assumed the seminary presidency has been reconnecting with former faculty and staff. He wants current students to recognize their contributions.

"We are living in houses we did not build, and we are drinking from wells we did not dig," he said.

As part of that initiative to reach out to former faculty and staff, he invited what he calls the "[legacy servants](#)" to an event at the seminary in early September. Al Fasol, distinguished professor emeritus, preached in chapel that day.

Greenway noted he also has met individually with retired faculty—some of whom left with hard feelings toward the seminary—to express appreciation for their years of service.

“It’s never the wrong thing to do what’s right, even if it’s years after it should have been done,” he said.

EDITOR’S NOTE: A date was corrected in the 8th paragraph from the end after the article first was posted.