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SBTS trustees establish
new faculty guidelines

By Marv Knox

N-CP (KTS)

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Southern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees have established new guidelines for hiring, promoting and granting tenure to seminary faculty.

The new criteria -- adherence to the Southern Baptist Convention's 1987 Peace Committee report -- were approved during a called trustee meeting Sept. 24-25 in Louisville.

The Peace Committee report declares that "most Southern Baptists believe" people who say the Bible is true believe that "Adam and Eve were real persons," "named authors did indeed write the biblical books attributed to them," miracles "did indeed occur as supernatural events in history" and "the historical narratives given by biblical authors are indeed accurate and reliable."

Southern's board meeting had been called to deal with the conduct and concerns of trustee Jerry Johnson, pastor of Central Baptist Church in Aurora, Colo.

Last spring, Johnson distributed a 16-page document, "The Cover-up at Southern Seminary," which was critical of seminary President Roy Honeycutt and five faculty members.

Trustees received the document at their April meeting, but deferred "the Jerry Johnson matter." Subsequently, faculty called for his resignation. A motion demanding his removal was presented to the SBC annual meeting this summer and referred to seminary trustees.

The trustees, who met in closed session for about five hours, decided to treat Johnson's conduct and concerns as two matters.

Their statement on his conduct noted they "accept Jerry Johnson's apology and forgive him and ... affirm him as a member of the board with the hope that this will be the first step in the healing process, not only within this board but in the Southern Baptist Convention as a whole." It was approved with four dissenting votes.

Johnson's letter of apology notes some language in his document "was ill-chosen and too harsh" and concedes that he did not follow proper trustee procedure for expressing concerns.

"I caused unnecessary sorrow for many," the letter says. "I deeply regret this and wish to apologize at this time."

It adds, "Under no circumstances should this statement be construed to mean that the issues I addressed have ceased to be concerns in my mind and heart."

Those concerns were addressed by a second trustee recommendation, which was approved 36-14.

The first part of that recommendation declares "that the action of the 1986 board of trustees concerning the trustee report to the SBC Peace Committee not be revisited."

Almost all of Johnson's document deals with matters that were raised by an investigative subcommittee of the Peace Committee and handled by seminary trustees at the time.

Trustee Vice Chairman Wayne Allen, pastor of Briarwood Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., and moderator of the meeting, told reporters that trustees had "drawn a line" regarding the old matters and do not intend to consider them again.

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The second part of the recommendation deals with the future. [redacted] says, "In addition to existing guidelines, the Peace Committee report -- both findings and recommendations -- serve as a guideline for the employment of temporary and permanent faculty, the promotion of existing faculty and the granting of tenure."

The four illustrations of biblical belief are included in the Peace Committee report's "findings" section. The "recommendations" section calls upon SBC institutions "to build their professional staffs and faculties from those who clearly reflect such dominant convictions and beliefs held by Southern Baptists at large."

"This is an instrument for the administration to use. It's for dealing with the future," Allen said. "We're not going to the faculty to say, 'Do you agree with the Peace Committee?'"

However, the new policy calls for use of the Peace Committee report when considering faculty promotion and tenure. For example, an assistant professor now on the faculty apparently would be questioned about the document when being considered for promotion to associate professor.

The trustees' action reflects a step toward peace and harmony, Allen said. It also should provide security for faculty by closing the books on past action and "establishing parameters" for future action, he added, noting he expects changes on the faculty to come through attrition, not firings.

Ten trustees also filed a minority report concerning the Johnson matter.

Julian Pentecost, editor of Virginia Baptists' Religious Herald newspaper, presented the four-point minority report.

First, the minority had asked that trustees' deliberations be conducted in open session, he said, noting closed meetings depart from Baptists' heritage and tradition. "We deeply regret the cover of darkness used for anonymity," he noted.

Second, the minority wanted to separate the trustees' action on not opening past grievances with the faculty from trustees' consideration of future hiring, promotion and tenure decisions.

Third, they decried some trustees' repeated attempts to deal with past actions of faculty, noting those questions have been "already answered."

Fourth, the minority expressed concern about adding the Peace Committee report to the other faculty guidelines. Faculty have operated under the seminary's Abstract of Principles since the founders wrote it in 1859. For three years, they formally have affirmed the Baptist Faith and Message Statement.

"We have been a free people," Pentecost said. "Where I come from, people were imprisoned ... for the crime of insisting on their freedom. So we're deeply disturbed about what has happened and the repetitious nature, that it continues to happen."

Trustee Ron Meredith, a federal judge from Louisville, moved that Pentecost be removed from the board, noting Pentecost had disclosed some actions of the private meeting. Chairman Sam H. McMahon Jr., a businessman from Charlotte, N.C., ruled the motion out of order.

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New Southern Seminary policy
'creedal;' will be followed

By Marv Knox

NCO (Ky.)

Baptist Press
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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--New guidelines for hiring and promoting Southern Baptist Theological Seminary faculty are "creedal," a professor said. But they will be implemented, an administrator reported.

Southern Seminary trustees voted Sept. 25 to add the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee report's findings and recommendations to the seminary's guidelines for hiring, promoting and granting tenure to faculty.

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The document says most Baptist believe Adam and Eve were real people; the Bible's books were written by the stated authors; the miracles were real, supernatural events; and the Bible's stories are accurate historically. It also calls upon SBC seminaries to construct faculties "from those who clearly reflect such dominant convictions."

"The trustee action in effect establishes a new creedalism at Southern Seminary that is the result of the Peace Committee action," said Bill J. Leonard, professor of church history and president of the SBTS faculty association.

"I remember poignantly when Charles Fuller (chairman of the Peace Committee) said this document would never be used as a creed. Charles Fuller's statement is proved absolutely false."

The overlay of the new guidelines bodes ill for the future, Leonard said: "This is for the moment -- these specific statements are required. But given the change, we don't know what it will be next year.

"Is this the only test we'll have? You could pass this test and still be a poor teacher, a poor scholar."

He also took exception to placement of new requirements for advancement on current faculty. The compliance-for-promotion clause has an "economic tilt -- if you don't conform, you don't get paid more," he said.

In addition to adding new requirements for faculty, the trustees accepted a letter of apology from trustee Jerry Johnson of Aurora, Colo., who last spring distributed a document critical of seminary President Roy Honeycutt and five professors. They also decided the concerns of the document had been handled in 1986 and would "not be revisited."

"While we're grateful the charges against our six colleagues for now were not reopened, the entire faculty is brought into a new kind of creedal scrutiny," Leonard said. "Apparently the Abstract of Principles, written by (seminary founders) James Boyce, John Broadus and Basil Manly is no longer sufficient for our trustees and statements never approved as recommendations by an SBC meeting (the "findings" of the Peace Committee report) have now been made mandatory.

"In deciding not to deal with six of the faculty, the trustees dealt with the whole faculty. This is a major, major long-term issue."

The seminary's acting president, Willis Bennett, said the trustees' action provided "much cause for encouragement and continuing cause for concern."

"We have officially taken positions that will put some things behind us and allow us to move forward in a more productive manner without quite the kind of suspicion that has been existing for some considerable time," he said.

"I have no difficulty working with the ... report. We will promise them our cooperation and try to implement the policies they have now put in place.

"The intent of the trustees is to secure what they perceive as more representative personnel. They are not asking for radicals."

The seminary already has moved in the direction of recruiting more conservative faculty members, Bennett said. He cited the presence of conservatives from 10 schools on the campus as visiting professors in the past three years.

Trustee Johnson's 16-page criticism of Honeycutt and the faculty members is "a dead document as far as the seminary is concerned," Bennett said, citing the trustees' decision not to re-enter the cases.

Trustees greeted with
prayerful presence

By Pat Cole

F- (SOTS)

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Students at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary prepared for the Sept. 24 meeting of the Louisville, Ky., school's trustees with a prayer vigil and other displays of community building.

Five days prior to the trustee meeting, students declared a 24-hour period "Koinonia Day" emphasizing prayer and fasting for the seminary. The students sought to emphasize the New Testament teaching of "koinonia," the Greek word for fellowship, Tina Pugh, president of the seminary's Student Government Association, said. Pugh, a church social work student from Nashville, said organizers of "Koinonia Day" recognized the need for people to stand together in solidarity regardless of the actions of trustees. Students, she noted, wanted to stress that "people are Southern Seminary."

"We have bought into the idea of community," she said. "We want to become the type of community God wants us to become."

During "Koinonia Day," students were invited to share their concerns at open forums with the deans of the seminary's four schools. Many students donned T-shirts with "Koinonia" emblazoned across the front. Students, faculty and staff were also invited to drop by a prayer chapel during the 24-hour period for a special time of intercession. The observance concluded with a special chapel service Sept. 20 featuring testimonies from faculty members. Professors also were recognized during a reception hosted in their honor by the seminary's Women In Ministry organization.

On the eve of the Monday trustee meeting, about 300 faculty, staff, students and Baptists from the Louisville community gathered on campus for a candlelight vigil of prayer and hymn singing.

Another prayer vigil, organized by Louisville area Baptists, was held on campus from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. on the day of the meeting. Betty Cook, chairperson of deacons at Crescent Hill Baptist Church and an organizer of the vigil, said her love for the institution and a concern over what the trustees might do prompted her involvement.

"The seminary has meant more (to local Baptists) than Baptists in Louisville will ever realize," she said. "It's given us much opportunity for learning. The seminary people in our church have been faithful and have contributed so much."

During Monday afternoon's meeting, a crowd of students and area Baptists that at times swelled to as many as 400 waited outside while trustees deliberated privately. As the meeting stretched into the night, participants in the vigil carried candles and occasionally sang hymns. About 150 people remained to file into the meeting when trustees finally opened their session after midnight.

Pugh was invited to address the trustees during their dinner recess. In her prepared remarks, Pugh said students came to Southern for "what it stood for -- its heritage and its character." She called on trustees to exercise prudence in their decision making.

"You make the decisions that influence the quality of Southern," she said. "That is a tremendous responsibility to bear, and we want you to know that we have been praying and continue to pray for you. It is our prayer that your decisions will enhance Southern's ability to continue fulfilling its purpose."

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Mikese Muslims open
to Christianity slowly

By Vicki Brown

N- FMB

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MOROGORO, Tanzania (BP)--Lajabu Ndulu came to learn to read. He left with Jesus Christ.

Ndulu, a man of 50-odd years and bent because he spent too many of them hunched over a hoe, shuffled up to a four-wheel drive vehicle one day and asked, "Is the reading class today?"

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"No, I'm sorry," Southern Baptist missionary Calvin Brown said. "My wife will begin that next week. But, if you can, please join us for Bible study."

When Ndulu accepted the invitation, Brown scrapped his lesson plan for the afternoon to present the plan of salvation. Listening intently and interjecting a question from time to time, the Muslim accepted Christ at the end of the session.

A few months later, in a waist-deep pool of muddy water, Brown baptized him. As a symbol of his new life, Ndulu changed his name to Edwardi Lajabu.

His conversion illustrates the sometimes slow -- but progressive -- inroads Christianity is making into a cluster of 11 villages known collectively as Mikese. Located 15 miles east of Morogoro, Tanzania, Mikese stretches about 18 miles east along the main road leading to the port city of Dar es Salaam, the nation's capital.

William Msimu, the first Muslim in the area to convert to Christianity, believes God is rewarding his six years of persistent and patient witness. He accepted Christ in 1984 as a result of inner conviction. "I just felt in my heart that Jesus is Savior. No one told me about him," he explained. Msimu did not even have a Bible until a Pentecostal woman in town gave him one.

In search of knowledge and fellowship, Msimu rode into Morogoro town by bus to attend a different church each Sunday morning. After visiting them all, he chose to align with Baptists.

Through Msimu's witness over the next few years, an older man, his son and another young man embraced Christianity. Shortly after stepping into his role as a church developer in the Morogoro area, Brown baptized the three.

During the past several months Msimu and Brown have witnessed door-to-door each Thursday afternoon. Twenty-three villagers, most of them Muslims, accepted Christ. Seven have been baptized.

Though Msimu admits change moves slowly, he is encouraged by what has already taken place. "People more readily accept Christians in the community now than they used to," he explained. "They usually ask why we have come, which gives a Christian the opportunity to witness."

At least in Mikese, Muslims converting to Christianity generally are no longer ostracized or forced to leave their families or communities, he added.

Most young people remain reluctant to rebel against established family or tribal tradition, Brown said. "That's why older men like Msimu and Lajabu are so important to the spread of the gospel here. Age is highly respected." Brown meets with Msimu weekly to teach him basic Bible doctrine and skills he needs to lead the Mikese preaching point.

Although the area is predominantly Muslim, the Anglican church and the Roman Catholic church hold services each Sunday in the village school. Only a smattering of local residents attend. The membership of both congregations is made up of workers brought in to staff the police station and install an oil pipeline that will eventually stretch from the Indian Ocean coast to Zambia.

Msimu prays for others in the community to turn to Jesus and for a building to house the fledgling preaching point. "We just must give them God's word. We must explain God's word so that they will accept Jesus, because of him, not because of other things we might give them."

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Vicki Brown is a Southern Baptist missionary serving in Tanzania.