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NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Herb Hollinger, Vice President
Fax (615) 742-8919
CompuServe ID# 70420,17

BUREAUS

ATLANTA *Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522*
DALLAS *Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232*
NASHVILLE *127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300*
RICHMOND *Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151*
WASHINGTON *Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223*

March 14, 1994

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Dilday supporters at rally
ask reversal of dismissal

Baptist Press
3/14/94

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Outraged by the firing of Southwestern Seminary President Russell H. Dilday Jr., about 300 pastors, students, seminary faculty members and others cheered a call March 11 that the action be reversed.

Texas Baptist President Jerold McBride admitted the chance for that happening is "nil."

"These kinds of people (the trustees who fired Dilday) never admit error," he said.

Meanwhile, key seminary supporter, aerobics author and clinic founder Kenneth H. Cooper resigned from the chairmanship of the seminary's Southwestern Council in protest of Dilday's March 9 firing by trustees.

Contacted by Baptist Press, Ralph W. Pulley Jr., Dallas attorney and chairman of the seminary trustees, said he was aware of what was said at the March 11 meeting but did not want to comment.

"It would not be productive for the seminary to get into an exchange with these good folk," Pulley said.

But those at the rally at Gambrell Street Baptist Church in Fort Worth and other Texas Baptist and Southwestern alumni were urged to write to the trustees and express their outrage.

"The board must face up to its grievous wrong, confess its terrible injustice, ask forgiveness for its betrayal of a sacred trust and its terrible injury to Dr. Dilday," said a statement presented to the rally.

"And the trustees must seek to restore integrity to the seminary and re-establish a Christ-like style of relationships and action within the school."

McBride, Texas Baptist Executive Board Chairman Leroy Fenton and former Texas Baptist leaders Phil Lineberger and George Gaston led the rally at Gambrell Street church, adjacent to the seminary campus, and then fielded questions at a press conference.

McBride, pastor of First Baptist Church in San Angelo, said the rally was organized by a group of concerned Texas Baptist pastors and alumni of the seminary. More than 50 pastors stood to note their presence and concern.

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Gaston, pastor of Pioneer Drive Baptist Church in Abilene and former chairman of the Texas Baptist administrative committee, said that five times that many had indicated they would have attended if they could. Som, however, said they had come from as far away as San Antonio and Laredo.

McBride read the statement prepared by a group of the pastors and stated the firing of Dilday was a day that will be remembered in Southern Baptist life "as a day of destructive darkness, a day when an oppressive act of injustice and price pierced the soul of a people called Baptists."

Wayne Allen, pastor of First Baptist Church in Carrollton and one of the seminary trustees, was commended for opposing the firings as were the other six who stood with him.

Lineberger, pastor of First Baptist Church of Tyler, decried Dilday's dismissal, saying it was the first time the chief executive of an SBC institution has been dismissed without cause.

"The institution can't exist long with that kind of instability," he said. "No one would take a job with that kind of trustee leadership."

McBride and others predicted people will begin to designate their mission gifts to voice their outrage.

Gaston said most of those who organized the meeting expected it to have little effect on the trustees, comparing it to a "voice crying in the wilderness -- but a voice."

Rick Davis, pastor of First Baptist Church of Midlothian, got the largest applause when he said he was "tired of being led by the lowest level in our convention."

The organizers said they had no plans for additional rallies.

Cooper, in a March 10 letter to the seminary, wrote, "I will no longer offer my services in any capacity in support of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary."

Effective immediately, he wrote, "I resign as a life member of the Southwestern Council (formerly known as the Advisory Council), relinquish my Chairmanship of the Fund-raising Campaign for the Southwestern Council and am canceling my three-year pledge to the Vision for Excellence Campaign," the seminary's current \$36 million endowment effort.

"After prayerful consideration," Cooper wrote, "I have made these decisions due to the unwarranted, disrespectful and embarrassing manner in which you treated a dedicated Christian gentleman and outstanding leader, Dr. Russell Dilday."

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Toby Druin, Art Toalston and Herb Hollinger contributed to this story.

EDITORS' NOTE: The following story can be used in tandem with the (BP) story titled "Southwestern trustees respond to questions about Dilday firing," dated 3/11/94.

Dilday responds to trustees
over reasons for dismissal

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
3/14/94

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Russell H. Dilday responded March 13 to statements in a press release issued March 11 by trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary who dismissed him as president of the institution March 9.

Dilday was unavailable for comment March 11 when Baptist Press reported on the trustees' press release.

Dilday, 63, president of the Fort Worth, Texas, seminary the past 16 years, told Baptist Press March 13 he felt three basic issues were cited by trustees in the press release and voiced a response to each.

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On a question of his "reluctance to move in concert with policies established by the board," Dilday said, "We have in recent years developed a very clear board of trustees policy manual in which all of the board's policies are spelled out very clearly as they have voted them. We recognize the board's governance of the seminary. It primarily involves their setting policies. That's their job, and our job is to carry them out. I cannot think of a single one that we haven't carried out explicitly."

On a question of "gridlock within the administration and to his stonewalling the board," Dilday said, "I guess the record speaks for itself. It's amazing how well the seminary has done in spite of (the 15-year controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention), and I don't think that would be described as gridlock. There were certainly times of disagreement on the board about issues, which I think is appropriate. I would propose things, they would disagree, I would argue my point, but then if the board voted, we followed it."

On a question of him continuing "to speak out on political issues fostered by others, in contradiction to his earlier agreement with the trustees not to do so," Dilday recounted he and the trustees had made a covenant several years ago that neither he nor they would be involved in denominational politics. "I've tried very hard not to be caught up in, or speak, or anything else in the arena of denominational politics," Dilday said. "In the appraisal review the night before the action, none of these complaints about my speaking out came out at all."

Both the trustees' press release and Dilday in the interview with Baptist Press made reference to comments by Robert Naylor, Southwestern's president from 1958 to 1978 when Dilday became president.

"It's just most regrettable for the seminary," Naylor told Baptist Press of the dismissal. "The seminary, with our Baptist people, will suffer, in that it will deepen the conflict."

But, Naylor said, "The question of directions for the seminary is not a doctrinal matter. The seminary is larger than Naylor or Dilday or one or another individuals. I have nothing but love for the seminary and my chief concern is that the seminary at this point, as it has always been, is a Bible-believing, committed institution for Southern Baptists."

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EDITORS' NOTE: The following two stories deal with the conversion of former drug dealer Alton Edmondson.

Former drug dealer warns
youth of devil's appeals

By Lee Hollaway

Baptist Press
3/14/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--Alton Edmondson wasn't supposed to be there.

After four gunshots to his head, he wasn't supposed to be anywhere.

The drug "family" for which Edmondson worked had ordered him killed. The "hit man" had fired four shots from a small-caliber pistol at point-blank range. Still Edmondson was not dead.

"Lord, help me!" he called out. As he recalls it now six months later, he heard a voice as clear as any person say, "If I do, will you serve me the rest of your life?"

"Yes, Lord," he replied, and the Lord raised him up -- literally.

"I couldn't get up by myself. I was hurt too bad. But then there I was standing. The gunman fired five more shots into me but I didn't go down. Then he threw his gun down and ran off, and I staggered across the street to a store for help."

Today the 31-year-old Edmondson begins sharing his testimony by saying, "I praise God that he has allowed me to see another day."

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True to his pledge to God, he says he has left behind all connections with illegal drugs, liquor, gambling and even a budding career as a professional comedian. Ten years of that life style have been replaced by regular speeches in churches and anyplace else he can get his message across, especially to young people.

Edmondson knows several other people died in violent crimes the same night he was shot. "He saved me for a reason."

He believes part of that reason is so he can carry the gospel to some of the kinds of people he used to know.

"You will not hear my gospel behind the pulpit as much as in the street. My desire is to go into every crack house to tell them what Jesus has done for me. It is my desire to help my people."

When he talks to youth, as he did recently at Simeon Baptist Church in Nashville, he tells them, "You have a right to choose who you are going to serve."

Edmondson warns that the devil -- whom he refers to as "the enemy" -- does not play fair. He uses videos and popular music to talk about murder and carrying guns and quitting school.

"The enemy is so deceiving, he will use your best friend to approach you about drugs and other temptations.

"We seem to want to wait on God, but the devil is moving now. When you are sitting at home, the enemy is sitting beside you, and he knows what you like. He's going to hit you at your weakest point."

There are ways to resist the devil, Edmondson says. "So many doors are open whereby the enemy can get to us. I close some doors -- I don't listen to rap unless it is gospel rap."

Some Christians -- including some Christian young people, he says -- are "secret service agents or double agents, in church on Sunday but in the club on Saturday."

Real believers are going to act different from that, he says. "If your father is a king, what does that make you? If you are a prince or princess, walk like one!"

He concedes he still goes into clubs and similar places but says it is for a different purpose now. "I go in to share the gospel because people that need to hear it are there, but when I finish telling them, I'm out of there."

Edmondson says he is committed to his new life in Christ. Since he went to work for God, there has been no turning back. And he plans to keep on talking about Jesus:

"I will not shut up till I go up."

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(BP) photo available upon request from Baptist & Reflector, Tennessee Baptists' newsjournal.

Former comic cursed preachers;
now he's behind the pulpit

By Connie Davis

Baptist Press
3/14/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--Alton Edmondson, 31, was forced into an alley in Nashville at gunpoint. The hired gunman pointed the gun at Edmondson's temple and shot him.

Minutes later he had been shot nine times, Edmondson told the Baptist Student Union at Tennessee State University in Nashville, at a recent "Stop the Violence" program.

Edmondson's brush with death and God was six months ago; he still has several bullets embedded in his skull.

"I am a new creature," said Edmondson, who claims God healed him.

"I used to think being on the streets, selling cocaine, going to 'The Club' and sleeping with a lot of women really made me a man," explained the former comic with Def Comedy Jam, a touring company which produces shows on TV's HBO channel.

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"There's pleasure in sin," he admitted. But he said he do sn't miss the fam and fortune.

Ironically, Edmondson's rise as a comedian, which began in Nashville nightclubs, was fueled by curses against preachers. Now he's one, he proudly stated.

The former TSU football player speaks to groups mainly in churches. Edmondson subsidizes his income by working for a company that cleans churches. He's a member of Mount Nebo Baptist Church in Nashville.

Edmondson attended church during the nine years he gambled with money and his life. "Nobody know what happens when the door at home closes," he noted.

To fulfill his promise to God, he visits people from his former life and kids in Nashville's housing projects.

Today's youth think they're "down" -- happy -- when toting a gun, listening to rap music or hanging out with gang members, Edmondson said.

Most of the rap music encourages premarital sex; murder, especially of the police; drinking alcohol and taking drugs, Edmondson said. He recommends kids listen to Mike E, a Gospel rapper.

"I tell them how the enemy (devil) has got them out there selling drugs and killing their own brothers."

But his change in life is because God "always does something for a reason," Edmondson reminded. "I'm not supposed to be here."

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Southeastern Seminary sponsors

Black Pastor Appreciation Day By Chele Caughron

Baptist Press

3/14/94

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Just like some pastors today, Paul, the great missionary of the early church, wanted to quit, said Fred Luter, speaking at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary's Black Pastor Appreciation Day.

Luter, pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, preached from Acts 18:9-10 to an ethnically mixed crowd of more than 750 people March 2.

"Paul had a serious case of the blues," Luter said about the apostle who was asked to leave Athens and take his preaching ministry to the ungodly city of Corinth.

"At those times it appears nothing is going right, that's when you feel you're just spinning your wheels. That's the time when you feel like giving up. I've come all the way from New Orleans to tell you it's too soon -- it's too soon to quit!" Luter declared.

"Why was Paul, the man who declared, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,' weary to the point of despair? One reason was Paul had to walk everywhere he went. The man got tired," Luter said.

Paul wanted to quit for the same reasons today's pastors consider quitting, Luter said. "Paul believed he was a failure; he was fatigued; he was frustrated.

"When we feel we have failed, as Paul did in Acts 17, because of few converts to Christianity, we want to quit. The devil will say, 'I told you that would happen,'" Luter warned. "But our response to failure should be to pause, repose and move on to another opportunity."

Paul's frustration also came from organized opposition. "Any of you pastors had to face organized opposition? They don't like each other, but they'll get together to oppose you. God's people need to remember, he is always the majority. You just put yourself in God's hands; you just trust in him," Luter advised.

Luter himself faced opposition when he took his current church when it was a mission of 63 members in 1986. He gave God the credit, however, for building the flock to more than 1,200 people.

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Noting the words of comfort the Lord spoke to Paul during a vision recorded in Acts 18:10, Luter said the Lord promised his presence and his protection for his children. "Satan is limited in what he can do to God's children. He can't overtake you, because God's got a chain on him. The only way he can overtake you is if you get in his yard.

"God also has somebody who will wade the water with you," Luter said. "God has believers who will support you. It's too soon to quit.

"I'm so glad that Jesus didn't quit. You talk about frustration. You talk about organized opposition," said Luter. "They whipped him until the flesh came from the bone, but he didn't quit. He didn't quit. He said, 'I'm here. I was dead, but now I am alive.'"

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Caughron is a newswriter at Southeastern Seminary.

Pastor says reaching men
key to his church's growth

By Chele Caughron

Baptist Press
3/14/94

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--"Now the women are coming to our church because they found out we have a lot of single men," chuckled Fred Luter, pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans. Luter shared church growth strategies with a group of black pastors and students in the home of Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, following his sermon at Southeastern's Black Pastor Appreciation Day, March 2.

Though Luter first joked about the number of men in his church, he could not be more serious about them for Christ. He said targeting men for church growth is the primary mission of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, a former all-white church donated for starting a black congregation.

Luter's philosophy is simple: "If you reach the man, the man will reach his family." Since Luter went to the New Orleans church in 1986, its membership has grown from 63 to more than 1,200 people.

Luter describes himself as a New Orleans street kid who found Christ and became convicted to lead the black men of his city to Christ. When he became pastor of the Franklin Avenue church, he plotted a threefold course of action which recognizes the authority of the Bible, holds church leadership accountable and observes church discipline as a facet of spiritual development.

"I just wanted to go in and live the Bible," Luter said. "Churches have got to get back to the Bible."

The biblically based messages he delivered were pointed. "I dusted off Scriptures which teach men to be the spiritual leaders of their household and how children are to respect their parents," Luter said.

A greater challenge came as Luter vowed to hold the church leadership accountable to Scripture. The policy includes all staff, deacons, teachers, even choir members. Violating the policy results in discipline as outlined in Matthew 18.

"If we're going to reach our community, then our neighbors need to see that we are accountable to each other," Luter said. "One of the problems in our churches is we have people who are carnal-minded in leadership positions.

"My first major storm came during my second year as pastor." Luter explained he had to discipline a church leader for a moral problem. While Luter considered the member a friend, he still suspended the member from the leadership position. "The church body was not surprised. They knew I'd practice what I preached."

Some of Luter's fellow ministers called Luter and questioned what he was doing. Luter responded, "I'm trying to save my friend from sinking any farther; I'm trying to save his life."

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"Word went out. Folks started coming, visiting the church just to see what was going on. It was like the thing in Acts; Saphira and Ananias, they lied, and they died. And fear cam upon the people, and they added to their number," Luter said. "I don't even have to do discipline anymore. Now the members are keeping themselves in check."

Luter said he focuses on developing black men. He said this was his greatest struggle because he "could count the black men in the congregation on one hand." Luter began praying and asked the women to pray as well. Then he announced for a month that any man could come to his home and watch the Sugar Ray Leonard-Tommy Hearns fight on closed-circuit television. The men came, ate, got wrapped up in the fight, cursed and apologized to the preacher wearing bluejeans. "Ten of those men came to church the next Sunday morning. That was enough," Luter said, "because men draw other men." Luter still uses sporting events to draw men and youth.

"Our church women are doing their part," Luter said. "Now we've got to keep raising men where they ought to be, and that's in the Lord's church, serving him."

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Music leader, hymnal editor
Forbis sets early retirement

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
3/14/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--Wesley L. Forbis, director of the Baptist Sunday School Board's church music ministries department and editor of "The Baptist Hymnal," 1991 edition, has announced his intention to take early retirement from the board, effective June 1.

Forbis said he is choosing to retire from the board to continue his care r in other areas and to accept opportunities as a conductor and clinician for which he has had less time since leaving his work as a college-level music educator.

He came to the board in 1981 and will have completed 13 years in leading the department that provides church music services and materials.

In making the announcement, Forbis, 63, acknowledged "the endorsement and support of all up-line administration (at the board) and their assurance to continue in the position until the normal 65 retirement age." However, he said he feels "it would be unfair to develop long-range strategies, plans, actions and products for which my successor would have to be accountable."

Sunday School Board President James T. Draper Jr., who described Forbis as "a cherished friend of more than 40 years," said he "has made an incomparable contribution to the board. I am deeply grateful to God for his example of diligence and faithfulness and for the impact he has made on the work at the board."

Gene Mims, church growth group vice president, credited Forbis with organizing and staffing the church music ministries department in a way that resulted in its being "the premiere department in all of the evangelical denominations."

"He helped to bridge the gap between the department and developing trends in worship and music in the SBC, and he led in the development of the '91 Baptist Hymnal, the largest-selling hymnal in the world today." Mims said Forbis' influence extended beyond his music responsibilities to "a key role in the organizational and strategic development of the church growth group. Wes has great skills as a strategic thinker," Mims said.

Mike Miller, who recently became director of the church leadership, ministry and worship division, said, "One of the great challenges we face is finding someone who can succeed Wes and carry out the vision he instilled. No one can replace Wes Forbis, but we can hope to find someone who has the same heart and commitment for music and worship that he has had."

Miller said he is "encouraged that though Wes will retire in June, he will stay with us through the transition while we search for a new director and change over to new leadership."

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During Forbis' tenure, the church music program increased in enrollment from 1.5 million in 1981 to 1.9 million in 1993. In addition to the publication of the 1991 hymnal, which has sold 2.5 million units in three years, Forbis has to his credit the development of "Musicians on Mission." M.O.M., as it came to be known among professional church musicians, was a nationwide effort to pair music volunteers with churches in emerging state conventions and fellowships to provide short-term music program assistance. Although the five-year effort ended its national emphasis in 1990, regional and state M.O.M. events have continued to be popular.

A native of Chickasha, Okla., Forbis earned the bachelor of music education and the master of arts degrees from the University of Tulsa. He holds the master of music degree from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and the Ph.D. degree in music education from George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University in Nashville.

He was professor of music and chairman of the music department of William Jewell College in Liberty, Mo., for 18 years prior to coming to the Sunday School Board.

Earlier, he worked in music ministry positions for churches in Tennessee, Texas and Oklahoma.

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Nicaraguan prof underscores
power of art to communicate

By Kathy Dean

Baptist Press
3/14/94

MOBILE, Ala. (BP)--Maria Anzoategui knows the power of art.

A native of Nicaragua, Anzoategui saw art used as a government tool during years of dictatorship and war.

And she saw the people of Nicaragua use art to express a determination to hold fast to their faith, to defy a movement that attempted to replace service to God with service to the political party.

Anzoategui has studied how art communicates ideas -- from the designs on ancient Mayan pottery to the large murals and graffiti that decorate buildings today in Nicaragua, and as a visiting professor at Baptist-related University of Mobile, she is teaching students that understanding a culture's art is part of the key to understanding a people -- an understanding that bridges cultural gaps and leads to a better world.

Her classes on contemporary Nicaragua and on the ancient Mayan civilization are, of themselves, a study in bridge-building. Students from the United States are studying Nicaragua past and present alongside students from Nicaragua who have lived through dictatorship, revolution and an emerging democracy.

"It's a cultural experience in the sense that we are looking at two cultures and discovering how similar we are," said the professor, who is completing a doctorate in art education at Ohio State University. Students are learning how art intertwines with economic, cultural and political events of the day.

"During the Sandinista revolution," Anzoategui said, "huge murals were painted all over my country to idealize the revolution and communicate the new ideology."

"If you don't know how to read and write, a big painting will communicate to you directly," she explained.

Graffiti became a popular form of expression for the people, who could write on walls what they weren't free to say aloud.

"The Sandinistas would say 'Sandino hoy, Sandino ayer, Sandino siempre,' meaning Sandino first and always," she said.

"The people of Nicaragua are a very religious people. They would write 'Cristo hoy, Cristo ayer, Cristo siempre,' -- Christ today, Christ yesterday, Christ forever. That faith in God gave people the strength to survive," said Anzoategui, who attends El Carmen Catholic Church in Managua.

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"I try to challenge students to think, to help them form some criteria for making judgments, to learn how to have a position," she added. "It's important for students to learn they must stand up for what is right."

Frances Garner, dean of the University of Mobile's college of arts and sciences, said Anzoategui is the first of many visiting professors from the institution's new Latin American campus in San Marcos, Nicaragua.

"Faculty exchanges are an excellent way to begin the process of bringing the two campuses -- and the two countries -- closer together," Garner said.

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(BP) photo of Maria Anzoategui is available from the University of Mobile's office of public relations, (205) 675-5990.

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