

Southwestern Seminary Board of Trustees meet in executive session, demand investigation of dissident board members

Editor's Note: The following article was written and provided to The Baptist Paper by Ken Camp, managing editor of the Baptist Standard, news journal of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Some details have been added/updated by the staff of The Baptist Record.

FT. WORTH, Texas (The Baptist Paper and local reports) – In a special called Zoom meeting May 30, the Southwestern Seminary (SWBTS) Board of Trustees voiced support for board leadership and castigated two trustees who had called for greater transparency and questioned leaders' integrity.

In fact, a board-approved motion called on trustee officers to “conduct an investigation of possible misconduct” by those two board members and report back to the full board within 60 days.



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The statement followed the called meeting of the board, which was held in executive session. Trustees Aaron Sligar, pastor of Living River Chapel in Sutton, W. Va., and Andrew Bunnell, a member of Prince Avenue Church in Bogart, Ga., had called for the meeting, Roberts stated.

Financial records to be published

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“Sligar and Bunnell stated their case. Each of the matters they presented was discussed and evidence or lack thereof was vetted,” Roberts stated.

“A task force presented its findings, and two staff members whose personal morality was egregiously and baselessly questioned were able to speak and share about the harm that has resulted,” he said.



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Paige Patterson was president of Southwestern Seminary from 2003 until the board fired him in May 2018. Adam Greenway succeeded him as president from February 2019 until last September, when he resigned under pressure from the board.

Roberts has made repeated comments calling into question Greenway's leadership and financial oversight of the seminary, but he has offered no specific information. Greenway has asked the board to make public its review of his alleged financial mismanagement.

"I look forward to the seminary fulfilling its promise of transparency to Southern Baptists by releasing the full trustee investigative report, including all related findings, without edit or redaction," Greenway told the Baptist Standard in April.

Alleged 'out-of-control spending'

Last week, a copy of a letter to Roberts calling for a special trustee meeting with the names of the writers redacted was leaked to several media outlets by an anonymous source from an unfamiliar email address.

The letter calling for the special board meeting stated Sligar produced "a detailed written report" for the board regarding an investigation into financial mismanagement, but the board's executive committee asked him not to present the full report to the board. Instead, they asked him to present an oral overview of his findings at the board's April meeting.

A copy of a document labeled "floor report" that Sligar presented as an oral report to the full board also was leaked last week. That document accused Greenway "and others" of demonstrating "a freedom in the finances of the Seminary" and "out-of-control spending." It stated Greenway's "closest staff failed to approach him regarding finances."

The floor report document stated the account for renovations of the president's home was "used as a bucket to throw fixed asset additions into, not just by Dr. Greenway, but others as well." It noted \$12 million spent on a variety of renovation projects.

The document also pointed to alleged credit card fraud and possible illegal donor re-designations, as well as recommendations for financial policy changes.

The Baptist Standard offered Greenway an opportunity to respond, but he declined to comment at this time.

When the Standard contacted Sligar last week, he said the “floor report” was “a working document” that “was never intended for the press or public.”

The letter calling for a special meeting also raised questions about Future Fort Worth, a nonprofit development corporation, and its connection to a seminary administrator. Colby Adams, vice president for institutional administration at the seminary, is the corporation’s registered agent.

The letter stated Adams failed to disclose the business relationship to the board of trustees.

Unanimous approval

Roberts stated the board unanimously approved the following motion at its May 30 meeting:

I move that the Board of Trustees affirms the work of the officers, executive committee, and task force empaneled to examine spending and financial practices of the previous administration as authorized by unanimous vote of the Board during its October 2022 meeting.

That the Board further affirms the ongoing work to strengthen financial guardrails recommended by the task force to ensure greater accountability and oversight of the president and other senior administrators.

That the Board unambiguously expresses its support and complete confidence in Michele Smith and Colby Adams and finds the allegations contained in the email from Trustees Andrew Bunnell and Aaron Sligar of financial mismanagement and misbehavior amongst those individuals to be without merit.

Finally, that the board unreservedly repudiates as unsubstantiated and egregious other rumors trafficked by Trustees Andrew Bunnell and Aaron Sligar made against employees of the Seminary.

Michele Smith is associate vice president for finance at Southwestern Seminary. Before Adams served as vice president for institutional administration, he was Greenway's chief of staff.

According to the statement from Roberts, the board "overwhelmingly" approved motions authorizing "the publication of a response to allegations made" by Sligar and Bunnell, as well as asking board officers to investigate "possible misconduct" by the two trustees.

Sligar did not respond to a request for comment from the Baptist Standard, and the Standard was unable to reach Bunnell.

'Repudiation of allegations'

Roberts expressed gratitude for "the near-total support of the trustee board" and said he wanted to "state publicly and without equivocation my personal repudiation of the allegations made against my colleagues and me, as well as against staff members of the seminary."

"I can state confidently that the board leadership has exercised aggressively its fiduciary duties, with trustees giving collectively thousands of hours of their time in doing so. Financial guardrails have been and continue to be researched and put in place. One example is that the chairman is now examining the expense reports of the president and the Seminary Leadership Team on a quarterly basis," Roberts said.

Roberts insisted "the growing involvement of trustee leadership and our insistence of greater presidential accountability and resistance to our attempts to implement financial safeguards that led to Adam Greenway's resignation."

He confirmed the task force created to examine institutional expenditures made oral reports to the full board in executive session.

“Board leadership asked Sligar to not raise certain matters that he failed to give proper notice of his intent to raise, some of which were clearly untrue, with others having been inadequately researched, baseless and/or egregiously harmful,” Roberts stated.

“On May 20, Sligar and Bunnell emailed these claims, with the unsubstantiated material becoming public several days later by individuals obviously motivated to bring harm on the institution, the board, and certain staff. To send such an email was reckless, since it was inevitable that such claims would become public. In today’s meeting, the board heard all the facts and has now acted.

“I condemn in the strongest possible manner the actions of any individual who has participated in spreading these baseless allegations. Such behavior is ungodly and is contrary to the spirit of Southwestern Seminary.

“Even as they have had to endure these odious attacks, staff have served the seminary faithfully, carrying out their duties with competence and integrity. I am grateful for them, and for their families, as they have remained committed to the mission of Southwestern Seminary.

Representing Mississippi Baptists on the Southwestern Seminary Board of Trustees is David F. Maron of Madison, whose term expires this year and who will be replaced on the Board by Barbara C. McMillin, president of Blue Mountain Christian University in Blue Mountain, which is affiliated with the Mississippi Baptist Convention.