

X XXXXXX XXXXXX XX
XXX X XXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXX, XX XXXXX-XXXX
XXX.XXX.XXXX
XX@XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.com

January 22, 2024

Dr. Jamie Dew, President
Chairman, Council of Seminary Presidents
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
3939 Gentilly Boulevard
New Orleans, LA 70126

Dr. Jamie Dew:

I write to you in your capacity as current Chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention Council of Seminary Presidents (CSP), though I could also have written to commend you on recent reports of the overall institutional health¹, fundraising success², campus improvements³, and enrollment trajectory⁴ of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Leavell College. As a donor to NOBTS and Leavell College, I am grateful for how your visionary leadership, commitment to transparency and fiscal responsibility, and investment in campus community life are bolstering enthusiasm among Southern Baptists. It was not long ago that many of us openly and publicly speculated that NOBTS might eventually shutter, yet the seminary's return to a position of fiscal responsibility, ministry focus, and administrative competence has given cause to dismiss these earlier suspicions. For this, I am both grateful and determined to continue my prayerful support of the institution and the students who train there.

Nevertheless, the matter that now gives rise to this letter concerns your leadership of the Council for Seminary Presidents, and more specifically, the Council's oversight of the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives (SBHLA). As you know, the 1990s-era reorganization of the Southern Baptist Convention brought SBHLA governance under Council's ministry assignment

¹ An examination of NOBTS Financial Disclosures (2019-2023) found in the SBC Book of Reports indicate that during the first four years of the Dew Administration, total investment value of the seminary's endowment increased by 23.5 percent, total gifts to the school increased by 89 percent, total revenue (including tuition, fees, investment income and Cooperative Program receipts) increased by 43 percent, while institutional expenses only grew by 12 percent.

² The record \$421,111.00 raised during the 2023 Giving Tuesday season translates to revenue equal to tuition receipts from an additional 111 full time Southern Baptist students taking 12 hours of credit.

<https://www.nobts.edu/givingtuesday/>

³ More than 4,000 visitors participants gathered on the NOBTS Campus in June 2023 to celebrate the dedication of the newly-renovated Fred Luter Student Center. Additionally, the NOBTS Cafeteria was expanded and renovated. As a donor to these campus projects, I am delighted to help underwrite these important facilities. <https://www.nobts.edu/news/articles/2023/yearinreview.html>

⁴ See, for instance, <https://nobts.edu/news/articles/2023/trustee-meeting-june-6-2023.html>

following the dissolution of the Historical Commission.⁵ Among the explicit purposes served by the SBHLA, one includes the assignment to “to serve as the denominational archives for the Southern Baptist Convention and to collect, preserve, and *make available for use* the official records of the Convention and its agencies.” (emphasis added)⁶ Since that time, Southern Baptists have been consistently told that the SBHLA is “the most outstanding denominational history service, library, and professional archiving services”⁷ that Southern Baptists “take for granted,”⁸ despite its unique place as the “repository of the denomination’s memory.”⁹

Indeed, the ministry of SBHLA is critically important, as Dr. Mohler has previously noted, because “there will be a time in the future...when someone will want to know the story”¹⁰ of Southern Baptists. This story, Dr. Mohler has also noted, “is told through the army of researchers who come into that library year by year.”¹¹ Of course, Southern Baptists will need to wait for the “future” to know some of their own story, owing in part to the apparent CSP insistence that *some* materials in the archives must remain be inaccessible to researchers, even those who have been authorized by convention action.¹²

As one member of the aforementioned “army of researchers” who has found the resources of the SBHLA to be extraordinarily useful, I write to seek clarification of the Council’s policy regarding the accessibility of the archive’s collections.¹³ To help you better understand the events and circumstances that give rise to my concern, some background information might prove helpful.

⁵ Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., who served on the SBC Program and Structure Study Committee, noted in 1997 that maintaining the “important function” of the SBHLA was a “priority.” See, for instance, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/historical-library-and-archives-to-continue-serving-baptists/>

⁶ <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/historical-library-and-archives-to-continue-serving-baptists/>

⁷ See the report of the Council for Seminary Presidents, Wednesday morning of the 2019 SBC Annual Meeting. Videos accessed through the Acts2 streaming service, a ministry of the Georgia Baptist Mission Board. See <https://acts2.vhx.tv/privacy>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Dr. Mohler, a member of the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force, is principally responsible for ensuring those archival materials will not be available for study for some time due to their sensitive nature and a concern to protect the confidentiality of Southern Baptists who served in official capacities and whose salaries, benefits, and expenses were underwritten by the generous contributions of members churches to the SBC Cooperative Program. See <https://www.baptiststandard.com/news/baptists/sbc-messengers-defeat-attempt-to-open-task-force-records/>. Moreover, the SBC’s implicit authorization of the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force Review in June 2023 has, thus far, been inhibited by CSP’s refusal to acknowledge the convention’s authority to grant limited access to these convention-sanctioned researchers. See <https://twitter.com/BaptistBlogger/status/1746959728389877835/photo/1> and <https://twitter.com/BaptistBlogger/status/1746959731036492259/photo/1> for context.

¹³ I have visited the SBHLA on at least 40 separate occasions over the past twenty years. At my own considerable personal expense and on account of the SBHLA’s limited financial resources, I have paid to have archive materials converted to digital formats that better serve Southern Baptist researchers and the general public.

Between the Fall of 2018 and Spring of 2019, I requested from the SBHLA archivist access to all records of former SBC Presidents Adrian Rogers, Bailey Smith, Jimmy Draper, Charles Stanley, Jerry Vines, Morris Chapman, Ed Young, Jim Henry, Tom Elliff, Paige Patterson, James Merritt, Jack Graham, Bobby Welch, Frank Page, Pastor Johnny Hunt, Bryant Wright, Fred Luter, and Ronnie Floyd. After that time, I have accessed additional collections and made both digital and hard copies of available documents.¹⁴ This effort, including travel expenses, has cost me nearly \$10,000.00 in the past five years alone.

After my authorized access and at some point before March 2019, I received a private text communication from another Baptist researcher suggesting that materials in the Paige Patterson Collection had been placed under new restrictions, despite their having been available without restriction since the original acquisition in February 2002.¹⁵ Essentially, this meant that materials available for more than seventeen years had been determined too sensitive for unrestricted access until January 1, 2050.¹⁶ Similarly, the Jerry Vines Collection, which had been available for unrestricted access for almost three decades since their original acquisition in 1992, were placed under restriction until Vines's death.¹⁷ No other SBC Presidential Papers have been similarly restricted *ex post facto*.¹⁸ What possible and convincing rationale could these men have made to warrant these changes by SBHLA employees? And why, all of a sudden, in February and March of 2019?

Naturally, I made several inquiries. These inquiries alerted me to the fact that former SBC Presidents Paige Patterson and Jerry Vines, perhaps coincidentally yet within days of each other, made individual requests for a material change to their gift agreements.¹⁹ Upon this discovery, I inquired of two of your colleagues on the Council of Seminary Presidents if they had been advised of these significant restrictions and/or granted authorization to make changes that impede access to documents that Southern Baptists have already accessed for decades. I was told by both of your colleagues in private communications that they were not, in fact, aware of the changes. Of course, this raises even more questions about the adequacy of CSP oversight, some of which I now proffer to you formally and with a polite request that responsive answers be provided, allowing that

¹⁴ I paid for and was granted unlimited access to duplicate the entire collections of Paige Patterson and Pastor Johnny Hunt, as well as significant portions of the Jerry Vines collection. Additionally, I have sent numerous paid assistants to access these and other materials for my research on a forthcoming book, ostensibly entitled "The Fall of the Red Bishop."

¹⁵ According to the SBHLA Finding Guide for the Patterson Collection, changes were made to the collection's public availability in on or before March 2019. See <https://sbhla.org/wp-content/uploads/554.pdf>

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See https://sbhla.org/finding_aids/vines-jerry-1937/

¹⁸ It is noteworthy that around the same time that Patterson and Vines were acting separately to restrict their papers, Robert Downen, an investigative reporter for the Houston Chronicle, published a series entitled "Abuse of Faith," that raised important and yet unanswered questions about how key Southern Baptist leaders have handled reports of abuse.

¹⁹ It is worth noting that materials contained in the Paige Patterson and Jerry Vines Papers fell within the scope of investigation made by Southern Baptists at the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting. On February 8, 2022, I met with a team of investigators from Guidepost Solutions, who had been charged to conduct an independent third party review of actions and activities of SBC officials with respect to the handling of abuse. Had it not been for my earlier access and duplication, investigators authorized by the Southern Baptist Convention would have been prevented from reviewing these relevant materials.

you may need sufficient time to raise this matter for consideration at the next meeting of the Council of Seminary Presidents in February 2024.

For simplicity's sake, I will enumerate my questions:

1. Does SBHLA have a CSP-approved policy regarding the acquisition of collections like the Paige Patterson and Jerry Vines Papers? Does that policy include the basis upon which SBHLA will preserve and make accessible such papers? Who owns these collections once they are donated? Who, therefore, is authorized to change the terms of their use and access? Is there a policy that clearly delineates the conditions upon which SBHLA will revise access agreements, and is there a timeframe within which collection donors must make such requests for revised and restricted access?
2. Given that some of my information is, at this point, anecdotal from two members of the Council of Seminary Presidents rather than formal, can you tell me when the CSP was advised of the access changes made to the Paige Patterson and Jerry Vines Papers? What rationale was provided by these men that would warrant their restriction after decades of public availability? Was this rationale written? Have you reviewed these copies of these requests? Will these written requests be made public at any time? Does the CSP believe future generations of Southern Baptists deserve to know why such materials were placed on restriction decades after decades of unrestricted access?
3. The SBC Book of Reports and the convention annuals, each year, include information provided by the SBHLA and CSP regarding the SBHLA collections, financial positions, and other pertinent information about CSP's stewardship of this important convention resource. Given that SBHLA's annual report to the convention includes all manner of detail about the acquisition, preservation, and digitization of other archival records, why has CSP declined thus far to report to the convention on the material status changes to the Patterson and Vines collections?
4. During my review of the Patterson Papers, I discovered decades-old, confidential, privileged, and legally-protected student records from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. I notified the affected parties, who thereafter requested that these documents (which had no bearing on the history of the Southern Baptist Convention or its entities) be removed from the archives. That necessary permission was granted, and the documents were removed without the need for litigation. When did SBHLA employees notify CSP that confidential student records had been inappropriately included in Patterson's collection and that those documents had been given to disinterested researchers lacking legal authorization? Since that time, has CSP adopted any policy regarding how SBHLA will review collections upon acquisition to prevent illegal preservation and production of confidential student and/or employment records in the future?
5. Have members of the CSP been contacted at any time, individually or collectively, by either Paige Patterson or Jerry Vines about the accessibility of the papers they donated for use by interested Southern Baptist researchers? If so, will these communications be incorporated into the SBHLA's custodial record for these important collections? If these communications will not become part of the collection record, why not?
6. Where may Southern Baptists access the minutes of the meetings of the Council of Seminary Presidents? If they are not presently available, does CSP have any plan to make them available for future researchers?

Thank you, Dr. Dew, for your courteous consideration of these matters and your commitment to provide an appropriate and timely response. I look forward to working with you and the CSP to ensure that the SBHLA's collections, which are owned by the Southern Baptist Convention, are held in trust and that their revised access is restricted only under exceptional circumstances, and then with transparent notice to the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention.

With every prayer for your health and strength in Christ,

SIGNED:

XXXXXXXXXX