

'Tongues' resurfaces as Southern Baptist issue: Seminary professor requests reconsideration

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Controversy is again brewing in the Southern Baptist Convention over the practice of speaking in tongues.

Last year the denomination's International Mission Board adopted a policy that forbids considering missionary candidates who use a "private prayer language."

Now, an Arlington, Texas, pastor and trustee of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary has written to Southern Baptist president Frank Page to request that the issues of "spiritual gifts, private prayer language and speaking in tongues" be addressed in the denomination's statement of faith.

Dwight McKissic recently discussed the issue in a chapel sermon at the seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and criticized the mission board policy. "I pray in tongues in my private prayer life and I'm not ashamed of that," he said August 29. "I'm thankful for that."

Traditionally, Southern Baptists have opposed Pentecostal practices, including speaking in tongues, but some pastors and churches have embraced a more charismatic worship style.

Seminary officials opted not to post the sermon on the school's Web site. "While Southwestern does not instruct its chapel speakers about what they can or cannot say, neither do we feel that there is wisdom in posting materials online which could place us in a position of appearing to be critical of actions of the Board of Trustees of a sister agency," they wrote.

McKissic, cofounder of Not on My Watch, a group of African-American clergy who oppose same-sex marriage, said in his September 15 letter to Page and the Southern Baptist Executive Committee that he thinks there's a "lack of consensus

and clarity” in the denomination about speaking in tongues.

“I believe that we could unify our convention,” McKissic said, “by acknowledging in the context of the Baptist Faith and Message that Baptist scholars and laypeople have diverse viewpoints and they are all within the boundaries of acceptable evangelical scholarship.”

Kenyn Cureton, a spokesperson for the Southern Baptist Executive Committee, said Page could either request a committee study or leave it to McKissic or others to propose a resolution at next June’s denominational meeting. -*Religion News Service*