

Plan for Bush library on SMU campus stirs protest: Faculty and Methodist clergy oppose project

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Southern Methodist University, which holds to its denomination's standards for leadership and public service, has become embroiled in a controversy over linking itself permanently to the husband of one of its most famous alumni, Laura Bush.

Representatives of President George W. Bush have selected the Dallas campus to be the location of his presidential library, but many faculty members have protested, saying that the Bush library would harm the university's mission.

SMU president R. Gerald Turner told his staff January 17 that the project would increase the 11,000-student university's visibility. "Over time," Turner said, "the political components of the library complex will fade and the historical aspects will ascend."

Earlier, 68 current and former faculty members sent Turner a letter opposing the move. And a group of Methodist bishops and clergy, most of them retired, on January 18 launched an online petition that termed the library and think tank "utterly inappropriate." The *Daily Campus*, the student newspaper, wrote that it "does not like the idea of a permanent spin-control office for the Bush presidency."

Bush has identified himself primarily with conservative evangelicals in the UMC and other denominations on sociopolitical issues. United Methodist leaders and other mainline Protestants who have opposed the Republican administration's war in Iraq rarely have had access to Bush. Brad Cheves, an SMU vice president, said that the Methodist Church is diverse in its membership and opinions and that those involved with the petition reflect only one view.

"We believe the vast majority of the Methodist membership, university and community support the library and that it will benefit the faculty, students and

community for generations to come," Cheves said.

The project is to be financed with a \$200 million private fund drive. -*Ecumenical News International*