

After dispute over lesbian coach, Belmont clarifies antidiscrimination policy

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Trustees at Belmont University in Nashville have voted to add sexual orientation to the historically Baptist school's antidiscrimination policy. In December Belmont parted ways with a successful women's soccer coach, Lisa Howe, after she told her team that she and her same-sex partner were expecting a baby.

The controversy captured national attention in sporting news and prompted discussions among campus groups about whether the private, Christian university discriminates against gays.

Belmont president Bob Fisher said January 26 that the trustees' addition of sexual orientation to the school's policy against discrimination simply puts into writing what was already being practiced.

During his 11 years as president, Fisher said, sexual orientation "has not been considered in student admissions nor in hiring, promotion, salary or dismissal decisions."

For more than 50 years Belmont was affiliated with the Tennessee Baptist Convention. Those ties ended in 2007, with the settlement of a lawsuit over whether trustees had the right to elect their own successors instead of those selected by the convention.

Randy Davis, executive director of the state convention, told Baptist Press that Belmont had walked away from

its "Christian heritage and roots."

Howe, the former soccer coach who reportedly stepped down in mutual agreement with the administration, told local media that she is pleased with the new antidiscrimination policy but is pursuing several job leads and doesn't plan to reapply at Belmont. —ABP