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### Pastor Cook Resigns -- Baptist Board Investigated Sex Allegations

By Leo Morlock

The Rev. Dorovan Cook has resigned as senior pastor of University Baptist Church and has been suspended as an ordained minister, on the recommendation of a regional board that investigated accusations of sexual misconduct brought against him.

With yesterday's events, University Baptist Church now faces a time of healing and rebuilding, its congregation still reeling after months of internal agony and conflict.

"There is an immense amount of hurt, and it's going to require an immense amount of compassion and caring," said John Doty, chairman of the church's board of trustees.

Cook, 49, submitted his resignation after the Department of Ministerial Standards and Concerns of the American Baptist Churches of the Northwest (ABC) recommended he step down as pastor. It also recommended he be suspended as an ordained Baptist minister for an unstated period.

The department's recommendations, which it said Cook accepted, followed an inquiry into allegations Cook had sexual relations with two members of the congregation around 1982 and 1984. A third woman alleged that Cook made an unwanted advance a little more than four years ago.

The department said Cook admitted professional misconduct in the first two cases, but his brief written statement did not mention the third case. Cook, who is married, has denied the most recent allegation, according to friends. Church members who attended a private congregational meeting yesterday said the ABC did not include in its report what it did not substantiate.

Cook had said last week that he would not comment after the meeting yesterday. No one came to the door at Cook's home north of the University District yesterday afternoon.

University Baptist Church has been a voice for peace and social justice in the Seattle area for years. In the 20 years Cook was its senior pastor, the church garnered a national reputation providing sanctuary to Central American refugees in the 1980s and to conscientious objectors during the Persian Gulf War. It is one of a minority of churches in the country to affirm and welcome gays and lesbians in its congregation.

But the congregation split over the misconduct allegations, first reported Aug. 27, when it was announced Cook had been placed on paid administrative leave.

"He should have resigned the first week," said one church member yesterday, declining to give his name. "They put us through hell for six months," he said, referring to Cook's supporters in the congregation.

But some other church members have maintained Cook was denied due process and contended the ABC wasn't impartial because of conflicts Cook had with the denomination over such issues as homosexuality.

"Considering the controversies you've had with this congregation and Dorovan Cook, you've had no right to sit in judgment and you should have disqualified yourself," Bill Brugnot, a church member, told the Revs. Dwight Neuschwander and Jerold Sutton and ABC lay leader Inge Hart, who made yesterday's presentation to the congregation for the regional ABC.

Others in the congregation said the regional body has supported University Baptist Church over the years and did not have an ax to grind.

There was no immediate word how the women who brought the allegations felt about the ABC report. The women have not identified themselves publicly.

One church member said people in the congregation are "fairly relieved" that the controversy is at long last ending. However, she said, the church is struggling financially, and annual pledges are running behind where they were a year ago. Church newsletters last month reported a need for "many more pledges" in order to plan church programs and adopt a budget.

Another church member said he was confident people will "put their money back into the pot" now that there is a final resolution to the case.

Some members reportedly have been meeting in people's homes to provide Cook support and a place to worship. He was not allowed to attend services at University Baptist during his leave. There was no indication yesterday whether the home gatherings would continue or whether supporters of Cook would worship at University Baptist now. Some have said they would not.

Rich Kemp, the church moderator, declined comment on the church's financial situation. As for the future, he said, "Our trust is in God."

Kemp said the Rev. Anne Hall would continue as the church's associate pastor but he did not discuss how the position of senior pastor might be filled.

The ABC's suspension of its recognition of Cook's ordination, as the action is termed, means Cook could return to ministry as an American Baptist Churches pastor at some point. The most severe action it could have taken was withdrawal of recognition, with no chance for restoration.

The Department of Ministerial Standards and Concerns gave no details about how long the suspension would last.

The Rev. Elaine Stanovsky, president-director of the Church Council of Greater Seattle, said, "Clearly, the whole situation is a tragedy."

She said Cook had provided "important leadership on peace-and-justice issues" and that his loss would be felt. But she said people need to realize the depth of damage that clergy misconduct causes for those involved and for the congregation as a whole.

Friends of Cook's did not say what his plans are.

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