



# NEW ORLEANS

BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

September 24, 2018

Dr. Frank Cox, Chairman  
NOBTS Board of Trustees  
Pastor, North Metro Baptist Church  
1026 Old Peachtree Road NE  
Lawrenceville, GA 30043

Dear Frank,

In July 1975 Rhonda and I drove across Lake Pontchartrain and turned into the campus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary to start the MDiv degree as preparation for a ministry in evangelism. We planned to be in New Orleans for three years. Little did we know that three years would turn into forty-three years and that the odd, intimidating, distinctive city of New Orleans and the campus of NOBTS would become our beloved home for more than four decades.

A family crisis during my work on the MDiv turned our world inside out and upside down. What I intended to be one degree became two, and the ministry as a vocational evangelist I expected became ministry as an evangelist and a seminary professor equipping students for evangelism. It was a future we never imagined, but one we embraced and loved.

When Dr. Landrum P. Leavell II concluded twenty outstanding years of service as our President, the Trustees asked me to become the eighth President of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. It was an astonishing, overwhelming moment. I had to step away from the professor's life I dearly loved and adjust my evangelism ministry in light of the things a seminary president must do. Rhonda had to step away completely from her work as the first female, first non-MD head of a division at Ochsner Clinic and Hospital in order to fulfill her role as First Lady of NOBTS. To serve the Kingdom and the Seminary in these roles was a great privilege, and we determined to hold nothing back.

Today NOBTS has much to celebrate. Enrollment grew and we became the largest seminary in the SBC before the onslaught of Hurricane Katrina, and still remain one of the largest seminaries in North America. The endowment rose to historic highs, including new faculty chairs and scholarship funds for students serving in smaller churches, ethnic minorities, preaching ministry, and doctoral fellowships, among others. We weathered the greatest natural disaster in the history of the United States, and kept teaching for a year without a campus. We created a church-centered curriculum and became a national leader in innovation to make that curriculum available to anyone God calls, regardless of their location or circumstances. We took seminary education into maximum security prisons, teaching inmates how to minister to other inmates, creating a transformational effect on prison culture so profound that today prisons all over the country are seeking seminaries to do similar programs for them. We rebuilt the campus twice, once due to the extensive damage of Formosan termites and again after Hurricane Katrina.

Along the way we added more land and 49 new buildings to the campus, including new housing for students, staff, and faculty. I am especially proud of the faculty dreams we launched, creating world class research centers and ministry points like the Haggard Center for the Textual Study of the New Testament, the Greer-Heard Point/Counterpoint Lecture series, the Leeke Magee Center for Christian Counseling, and the Caskey Center for Church Excellence, among others.

As I looked back over the 100 year history of NOBTS, forty-three years of life on this campus, thirty-five years as a professor of evangelism, and twenty-two years plus as President, I reached a conclusion: A seminary President always has a list of things left to do. However, given the length and breadth of my list of things now done, it is time for me to pass the baton to someone else to start shaping the next hundred years. I began discussing my transition plans with Trustees and auditors several years ago. Now is the time to implement those plans. I will retire effective July 31, 2019. We have a strong, healthy board well positioned to search for the next leader to begin this new chapter. Hopefully this will allow the board enough time to have a new leader in place August 1 to begin our Seminary's second century.

A major factor in the timing of my decision is the current state of evangelism in Southern Baptist life. The SBC is in an evangelistic crisis of epic proportions. Evangelism originally drew me to this seminary and city. Forty-three years later my passion for evangelism now leads me away to allow more time for research and reflection, for speaking and writing about the things I learn, and for stimulating SBC conversations about leading the lost to Christ. Rhonda and I are building a cottage in Alabama where I will take up anew the work of an evangelism scholar. We are told the cottage will be ready for occupancy in July.

I will definitely assist the new president as needed as an ambassador-at-large lifting up NOBTS at every opportunity and do all that I can to help our present friends of the seminary connect with the new leader God will bring. Rhonda and I can be counted on to use any opportunity we have to raise students, friends, and funds for NOBTS as a part of this new chapter.

My heart is filled with an inexpressible sense of gratitude for the privilege of serving this School of Providence and Prayer. The Trustees through the years have been terrific. My faculty and administrative colleagues made the journey a great joy that Rhonda and I will always cherish. The friends of the seminary who have made so many amazing things possible have been encouragers to us as well as to the Seminary. The thousands of students who have passed through our gates are an unceasing source of optimism about the future for Southern Baptists and for our school. As much as we have to celebrate and be grateful for in looking back, however, there is one absolute certainty about the future for NOBTS: the best is yet to come! You have my commitment to do whatever I can to make this the smoothest possible transition. Thank you again for your confidence and support through these years.

Yours and His,



Chuck Kelley  
President, NOBTS