LSU statement regarding resignations and Bradley’s email

Posted: 14 Jun 2011 03:44 PM PDT

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Private Recorded Conversation Prompts La Sierra Resignations

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Educate Truth shares the following article from Spectrum as a service to readers. By Bonnie Dywer The conversation had been very frank on April 21 when the La Sierra University faculty met with the president of the North American Division Dan Jackson and Larry Blackmer, NAD Education Director. The...

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June 14, 2011 · 19 Comments

The following statement appears to only be published at Spectrum. According to Spectrum, this statement from La Sierra University was released at 3 pm Tuesday.

Last Friday, four members of our campus family tendered their resignations at the request of our board chair. Each one had the choice of submitting his resignation or having the details of the situation in which he was involved presented to the Board of Trustees for discussion and action. All four chose to resign.

The university has a duty to all of its employees and students to follow appropriate policies and procedures in dealing with disciplinary matters. Part of this duty is to respect the privacy of the individuals involved. Even in the face of highly inaccurate and destructive speculation, policy and Christian courtesy require us to release information with great care. Institutions carefully work out policies in advance for just such circumstances so that they will act wisely and responsibly when the need arises.

Dr. Gary Bradley has chosen to email a letter to a wide circle of friends and colleagues that shares certain information about the circumstances leading to the request for his resignation. His letter, posted with his permission by a friend on the internet, acknowledges a recording made of a conversation among friends. He later provided the information, also posted online, clarifying that the recording was recorded by accident by one of the participants in the conversation. That person was also responsible for sending the recording out, apparently not realizing what he was sending. The content of the recording has not been disclosed by Dr. Bradley or the university.

While the university understands Dr. Bradley’s desire to explain what happened, the result of the letter has been further confusion and anger directed by some at the Church and at the university. People have made serious allegations without knowing what the recording contained and its context.

In an effort to reduce some of the most inaccurate speculation, the university released a statement on Monday stating that the matter at hand was not part of the biology controversy, and that no students were involved. This is correct. Despite Dr. Bradley’s letter and the unfortunate way it has shaped the debate, the university will only release additional information as appropriate according to both policy and Christian courtesy.

When people in highly visible positions who have long served an institution are asked to resign, many questions naturally arise. One reason for these questions is the disconnect that colleagues, friends, alumni, and students sense. “How could it be that someone I have known and respected for years is suddenly asked to resign? That can’t be right!” It is important to emphasize that their resignations, while sad, in no way invalidate their years of valuable service to the university and to our students.

Because La Sierra University has been the center of the biology debate in the Church for several years, it is also easy for people who do not know the facts to jump to the conclusion that these
resignations must be related to that issue. Some have taken it further, blaming the Church for carrying out a biology-related “witch hunt” by asking these individuals to resign. This is simply not true. The “convenient” explanation is sometimes the wrong one.

The board and administration of La Sierra University understand the frustration of the public when details about a situation such as this are not quickly forthcoming. We ask for your understanding and patience as we work the process through to the appropriate conclusions. And we ask for your prayers on behalf of the individuals involved, the university, our students, and our Church.

Here is Gary Bradley’s email referenced in the statement:

To: My treasured friends and colleagues
From: Gary Bradley
6-12-11

On Friday, June 10, 2011, I signed a letter resigning from the faculty position that I have enjoyed for 39 years. Since such an action always precipitates much speculation and many rumors, I want you to know exactly what happened and why.

Recently a secret tape of a private conversation among four friends was released and distributed widely in the SDA church hierarchy. A professional transcript of that tape was prepared, albeit with some mistakes in identifying the speaker. I participated in that conversation, was confronted therewith in the Friday meeting, and agreed with much, but not all, of what was ascribed to me. This conversation has already been mischaracterized and is being used in further attempts to discredit La Sierra University.

I signed the resignation letter that had been prepared for me for two reasons. First, I believe that the best way for La Sierra University to come through this fiasco is for a “head to roll.” Second, I admitted to consuming a small glass of an alcoholic beverage during this conversation. On the first count, everything I have tried to do for the past 39 years has been to help La Sierra University to succeed. On the second count, I can only say mea culpa.

Needless to say, I am devastated. I feel like my very soul has been ripped from my body. My entire life since I began teaching 46 years ago has been dedicated to Adventist education. I’m not ready to quit and I grieve the loss of the classroom where I have had such rewarding interactions with the wonderful people who are my students. I have many important projects underway here now and many other people will be inconvenienced by my sudden departure. I can only say that I am deeply sorry and will try my utmost to earn redemption.

If you are among those who welcome this transition, I request that you celebrate with dignity. If you are among those who find this transition upsetting, I ask that you not turn it into a war. Please continue to do what you can to make La Sierra University the best and most progressive SDA university in the world.
Private Recorded Conversation Prompts La Sierra Resignations

By Alexander Carpenter
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14 June 2011 | Bonnie Dwyer [1]
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LSU Board member Lenny Darnell wanted to be sure that he could recall all that transpired, so he turned on his cell phone’s recording device and let it run.

The conversation had been very frank on April 21 when the La Sierra University faculty met with the president of the North American Division Dan Jackson and Larry Blackmer, NAD Education Director. The faculty had questions for the church administrators about the Adventist Accrediting Association board’s vote to revisit LSU in 2012 rather than granting them the five year term of accreditation that had been recommended to the Board by AAA’s visiting team.

LSU Board member Lenny Darnell wanted to be sure that he could recall all that transpired, so he turned on his cell phone’s recording device and let it run.

After the meeting he and three friends—Jeff Kaatz, LSU vice president of development; Jim Beach, LSU dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; and Gary Bradley, professor of biology—went to a private home where they continued their conversation about the LSU meeting while watching the Los Angeles Lakers play the Denver Nuggets in an NBA basketball playoff game. What the four friends did not realize is that the phone recorder continued to run during their discussion.

The next day Darnell shared the recording he had made of the Jackson/Blackmer meeting with several people including an LSU faculty member and Spectrum.

But it was not until the first of June that the sharing of the recording began to have consequences. And the consequences were the result of the recording being transcribed at the office of the North American Division and then passed on to Ricardo Graham, the chairman of the University Board.
How did the North American Division receive the tape? Blackmer says he received it from another LSU Board member. And it was Blackmer who listened to the whole tape and realized that there were two meetings that had been recorded—both the public meeting and the session of the four friends. What he heard in that private conversation that wandered, but included foul language, references to alcohol consumption and unflattering comments being made about board members, administrators, and church leaders—led Blackmer to request a transcription of the recording.

Ricardo Graham received the tape and the transcription from Blackmer on June 1. Graham contacted University President Randal Wisbey on Thursday, June 9, and requested meetings with the three employees of the University on Friday, June 10, in Wisbey’s office.

In separate meetings with each of the individuals, transcripts of the tape were shared. They were then given the option of signing a letter of resignation or having the material shared with the entire Board of Trustees. All signed letters of resignation.

On Sunday evening, June 12, the University issued the first of two releases—the first to announce the resignations, and the second (on Monday) to make a point of the fact that the resignations had nothing to do with the biology issue.

But the releases did not say why the resignations had taken place. And with silence came much speculation. The first public hint of what had taken place came from a note that Bradley sent to his friends in which he said “the recording was not a diabolical plot, but was accidently recorded and released by one of the conversants. Hence this was more 'Three Stooges' than 'James Bond'! :)

He also expressed his devastation over the incident: “I feel like my very soul has been ripped from my body. My entire life since I began teaching 46 years ago has been dedicated to Adventist education. I’m not ready to quit and I grieve the loss of the classroom where I have had such rewarding interactions with the wonderful people who are my students. I have many important projects underway here now and many other people will be inconvenienced by my sudden departure. I can only say that I am deeply sorry and will try my utmost to earn redemption.

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La Sierra University

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