

Jason Allen: Go midwest, young man

SOUTHERN STORY

| By Craig Sanders |

On Aug. 28, 1995, a young man was baptized at Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala. The guest preacher that Monday evening was R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Seminary.

Jason Allen had never heard of Southern Seminary before that fateful night, but a seed was planted that would come to fruition just five years later when he arrived in Louisville, Ky., in the fall of 2000.

Allen, recently elected president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, enrolled as a student at Southern and accepted a position in the executive cabinet in the same decade. His legacy as vice president of institutional advancement includes growing the seminary's annual fund by at least 13 percent each year and collecting more gifts in three years than the ten-year period prior to his involvement.

Reflecting on his upbringing at Cottage Hill, Allen credits his pastor Fred Wolfe with shaping his views of ministry, the local church and the Christian life by fostering a commitment to biblical instruction and the essential teachings of the conservative resurgence.

During his college years at Spring Hill College, Allen encountered the teachings of Stephen Olford, John MacArthur and Adrian Rodgers, which instilled in him an understanding of and commitment to expository preaching. Allen also played college basketball, which he says offered him a sense of discipline for the Christian life.

Upon graduation from college, Allen married Karen Brunson, also a native of Mobile, Ala. Having recently surrendered to a call to ministry, the newly married couple began praying for the next step.



In late October, Southern Seminary announced R. Craig Parker as its vice president for institutional advancement and executive director of the Southern Seminary Foundation.

Prior to accepting this position, Parker served the seminary as vice president of business services. And before arriving at Southern, Parker served churches in Tennessee, including 15 years as church administrator at Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova.

Eventually, they chose to attend Southern Seminary for its theological convictions, esteemed faculty, the city of Louisville and the beautiful campus.

"It was an overwhelming sense that God was calling us to this place, and we very quickly fell in love with Southern Seminary and what God was doing here."

Muldraugh Baptist Church called Allen as their pastor in 2002 while he was still a student at Southern. He remained there until 2006 when he sensed a call to return to Southern, by then his alma mater. But this didn't mean he had given up on serving the local church.

"As I began to develop a love for the local church and theological education within a Southern Baptist context, we began to sense in our hearts a desire to be a part of equipping a generation of pastors and missionaries," Allen said. "I saw this [return to Southern] as a step towards greater service for the local church."

For the next three years, Allen served as chief of staff for the president's office at Southern, working alongside and representing Mohler, a duty which he calls his "life's highest honor."

Allen describes Mohler as the "quintessential seminary president," identifying his love and commitment to the Great Commission, the Word of God, theological integrity, cultural engagement and institutional excellence as defining marks of his presidency at Southern.

"Those five features have been deeply imprinted on my heart and shape who I am as a leader and a man," Allen said.

In 2009, Allen added vice president of institutional advancement to his involvement at Southern and continued teaching a personal spiritual disciplines course, later earning his



Ph.D. from the seminary in 2011. Among his accomplishments in this role, Allen secured funding for The Bevin Center for Missions Mobilization and The Towery Plaza, The Jenkins Center for the Christian Understanding of Islam, added 60 members to the Foundation Board and increased the SBTS endowment by approximately 15 percent.

His wife Karen also taught classes with the Seminary Wives Institute, an opportunity that provided a greater friendship with Mary Mohler.

"Karen and I are honored to serve the cause of Christ alongside [Mr.] and Mrs. Mohler, and we are even more honored to know them as cherished friends," Allen wrote in his 2011 dissertation, offering an insight to the importance of the Mohler family in his life.

For Allen, his wife Karen and their five children, Southern Seminary is a place they have called home for more than 12 years.

But on Oct. 15, 2012, Midwestern Seminary's board of trustees voted 29-2 to elect

Allen as the seminary's fifth president, setting the course for his departure from his alma mater.

Allen, 36, is only three years older than Mohler was when he assumed presidency at Southern in February 1993. While Allen's election is not embroiled in the SBC controversy of the early 1990s, he still finds himself with a similar opportunity for institutional advancement.

"A lengthy tenure in the presidency of an institution enables you to build momentum, develop donor relationships, cast a long shadow over the institution and hire faculty," Allen said. "I hope to grow old in the presidency of Midwestern Seminary."

Nonetheless, Allen's departure signals a significant change in the life of his family as well as the life of Southern Seminary. He is heading midwest with a bright future, and with a constant reminder of his spiritual roots.

"You can take me away from Southern, but you can't get Southern out of me."