

Baylor selects alum as new president: John M. Lilley inherits a campus in turmoil

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After fits and starts, Baylor University's search for a new president ended with the choice of Baylor alumnus John M. Lilley, 66, president of the University of Nevada, Reno, and previously president for 21 years at Penn State-Erie.

Lilley was elected November 3 by the regents at Baylor, the world's largest Baptist-affiliated university with 14,000 students. He takes over January 2.

He inherits a campus in turmoil for more than two years and succeeds Robert Sloan, who stepped down to the chancellor post on May 31 under pressure from some regents and faculty.

Baylor law professor William Underwood has been serving as interim president—a tenure that has also not been without controversy. Several days after the Lilley choice was announced, Associated Baptist Press reported that Underwood was expected to be elected president of Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, during the December 2 trustees meeting of that Baptist-related school.

Lilley quickly ran into questions. A news release described him as the son of a Louisiana Baptist pastor and as a licensed Baptist minister in his student days, but said nothing of his current affiliation. The *Dallas Morning News* described Lilley as “a ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church.” In Erie, Pennsylvania, he had been a ruling elder of First Presbyterian Church of the Covenant, according to his profile on the University of Nevada Web site.

Lilley acknowledged his Presbyterian ties in a news conference after his Baylor election, but added, “I was raised a Baptist and have always been a Baptist, and Gerri [his wife] and I will be joining First Baptist Church this Sunday here in Waco. That was my student church when I was here.”

Lilley's selection surprised some for several reasons: his age, his current religious affiliation and his experience at state schools, said the paper. "In addition, the school he is leaving—which was unaware of his departure until an hour before the public announcement—has been racked by the same kind of faculty-administration discord that has scarred Baylor during the last decade." The *Morning News* also reported that Lilley is divorced and remarried.

In praise of Lilley, regents chairman Will D. Davis said that at every place of service in his career, Lilley has been known as a consensus builder. "His collaborative approach involving governing boards, faculty, staff, alumni, students and friends has allowed him to lead the campuses he served through periods of dramatic growth and enhancement," Davis said.

The Baylor Alumni Association awarded Lilley its 2005 Distinguished Alumnus Award in January. Lilley majored in music at Baylor, earning bachelor's degrees in 1961 and 1962 and a master's in 1964. He received his doctorate at the University of Southern California, focusing on works from the Baroque and modern eras. -*Baylor University News Service*