

Christian college to discuss firings for homosexual acts

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HARRISONBURG, Va. (AP) — Eastern Mennonite University President Loren Swartzendruber has agreed to meet students to discuss the dismissal of two professors for homosexual acts and the resignation of another in protest.

Swartzendruber agreed to attend the forum Tuesday at the request of a small group of students at the Christian school.

"We will not tolerate bigotry, poor language, inappropriate comments about persons of any sexual orientation," he said.

Eastern Mennonite is a private school founded in 1917. Most of its 1,400 students are Mennonites, whose members are pacifists and adopt a simple lifestyle.

At EMU, students and faculty agree to a "community lifestyle commitment" that requires them to "refrain from sexual relationships outside of marriage, pornography, acts of violence, abusive or demeaning language" and the use of alcohol or tobacco.

Based on the Mennonite Church's direction, EMU defines marriage as an institution between a man and a woman, Swartzendruber said.

Swartzendruber acknowledged that the university fired two homosexual faculty members before he became president in July 2003.

The firings were because of homosexual behavior, not sexual orientation, Swartzendruber said.

More recently, the university did not rehire an openly homosexual faculty member whose contract expired, Swartzendruber said. The

university, he said, decided not to rehire that individual for reasons unrelated to his sexuality. The faculty member has appealed the university's decision.

"Some would say that the very act of dismissal is somehow violent, unkind, uncaring and unjust," Swartzendruber said. "We are very careful in the process. We agonize. We spend a lot of hours in due process. We are not capricious in these decisions."

Bible and religion instructor Kathleen Templeton recently resigned in protest of the university's decision to fire homosexual faculty and what she says is harassment of others on campus.

In her letter of resignation, Templeton wrote that her decision was based on campus "disrespect toward women who love women and men who love men and harassment of those of us who want to ally ourselves with our lesbian and gay sisters and brothers."

Templeton added, "I find it difficult to do my work under the dread that another incident against sexual minorities could happen at any moment."

Templeton said she objects to the university's close scrutiny of homosexual faculty.

"The scrutiny of private relationships seems only to have been applied to gay employees," Templeton told the Daily News-Record.

Katie Resendiz, who describes herself as "queer," participated in an April 2 protest seeking the forum.

"It's really hard to live in a community where you are watching other people get ridiculed or ostracized," she said.

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