

By Angela K. Brown, Jan. 31, 2009

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DALLAS (AP) - Some Methodist ministers are making a final yet improbable attempt to stop George W. Bush's presidential library, museum and public policy institute from being built at [Southern Methodist University](#).

They say United Methodist law requires approval from the church's South Central Jurisdiction, whose 290 delegates meet in July. The opponents say at least one-third of the delegates are against the Bush institute because it will promote his administration's policies that they feel conflict with church teachings.

"Let it be a topic of [discussion and debate](#), and let the decision be made at the jurisdiction meeting," said the Rev. Kenneth Hicks of Little Rock, Ark., a retired bishop who opposes the institute. "Whichever side of the Bush library issue you're on, it would be more appropriate to do it in this democratic fashion."

SMU officials said the church already gave its blessing when the Methodist mission council in March authorized the university to lease some land to the Bush Foundation, which will manage construction and raise money for the project. The South Central Jurisdiction owns the land that SMU plans for the library, museum and institute buildings.

"We relied on the mission council's authority to grant us permission to lease the land, and we have continued negotiations with the Bush Foundation," said Brad Cheves, SMU's vice president for external affairs and development.

The jurisdiction's upcoming vote to approve the council's actions is just "a technicality," said the Rev. Scott Jones of Wichita, Kan., president of the church's College of Bishops and an SMU trustee who supports the library project.

He said the delegates—ministers and members of churches in eight states—had never failed to ratify any decisions by the mission council, a smaller body that votes on important issues cropping up between the jurisdiction's meetings every four years. If that were to happen over the Bush library issue, the bishops—who preside over such meetings—would make a final decision, Jones said.

Earlier this month, after the Bush Foundation asked for clarification, the College of Bishops sent a letter saying that the only approval SMU needed was from the council, Jones said.

An official announcement on the library's location still has not been made, more than a year after SMU, the 11,000-student private university and Laura Bush's alma mater, was named the lone finalist.