



Nashville, Tennessee  
Associated  
Baptist Press

Editor: Bob Allen  
Executive editor: Greg Warner

Phone: 800.340.6626  
Fax: 904.262.7745  
E-mail: bob@abpnews.com

June 2, 2000

(00-48)

**IN THIS ISSUE:**

- FBI investigating church records, as controversial pastor steps down**
- Christian educators take aim at problem of clergy sex abuse**
- Victim of sexual abuse by clergy battles code of silence in churches**

**FBI investigating church records,  
as controversial pastor steps down**

By Bob Allen

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- The FBI has subpoenaed financial records of a Florida church whose pastor has admitted to channeling funds to a secret Swiss bank account.

In a related development, Altus Newell resigned as pastor of Deermeadows Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla., May 31.

The Florida-Times Union reported June 1 that the FBI is investigating claims by Newell, pastor of the Southern Baptist congregation for 10 years, that checks he sent overseas totaling about \$184,000 in the church's name were intended for missionaries. Questions arose after Newell confessed to church leaders that receipts he produced to document the gifts were faked.

An FBI spokesman confirmed to the Jacksonville newspaper that the agency is involved. "We're conducting an investigation to determine if there is a federal violation within the jurisdiction of the FBI," said public-affairs agent Bill Cheek. He declined further comment.

About 300 church members at a three-hour business meeting May 31 voted to accept Newell's resignation and to pay premiums on his health, life and disability insurance for up to six months. Church members voted down a motion from the floor to grant additional severance pay.

Newell, 56, has not preached at the church since early April but has continued to draw his \$153,000-a-year salary.

Newell offered to resign the 2,100-member church in April when confronted about checks purportedly for evangelism in Eastern Europe sponsored through the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic.

He later withdrew his resignation, however, claiming he is disabled because he suffers from severe depression.

Newell, a former Southern Baptist missionary who served as president of the seminary in Prague in the mid-1980s, when it was located in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, said he and another donor made the series of contributions through the school to help churches in areas where Baptists are persecuted.

Current leaders at IBTS, however, said there is no such program related to the seminary and that documents acknowledging receipt of funds by school officials were false.

Newell maintains the funds went to missionaries, and that he misled the church about them in order to protect Christians who might suffer if their identities were revealed.

Newell is a longtime Southern Baptist minister who previously was pastor of prominent churches in Birmingham, Ala., and Louisville, Ky.

-30-

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following two stories first appeared as a series in Baptists Today. They are used with permission.

## **Christian educators take aim at problem of clergy sex abuse**

By Laurie Lattimore

(ABP) -- A group of Baptist educators is seeking to move sexual misconduct by clergy out of the gossip mills and into the open, so churches and seminaries can deal with it more honestly.

Meeting last fall in Nashville, Tenn., nine church leaders discussed proper responses to the all-too-common occurrence.

Organized by the Christian Educators Network, the two-day session was led by Marie Fortune, director of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence in Seattle and Bill Sapp of the Cornerstone Counseling Center in Louisville, Ky.

Cherie Smith, associate pastor of Christian education at Kirkwood Baptist Church in St. Louis, said the idea for the session grew from the resignation of a seminary professor because of sexual misconduct. The situation was extremely unsettling to several members of the group who regarded the professor a mentor and a friend.

"We heard rumors, but no one was talking about it, and we kept hearing ourselves saying, 'Why aren't we talking about it?'" Smith said. "We were not vigilantes, we just wanted to talk."

"And it was horrible," Smith said of the conversation. "It was enlightening, but it was painful."

Because of their profession, ministers face both higher expectations of their conduct and more severe consequences when they fall. But the common response of keeping wrong behavior a secret only exacerbates the problem and postpones, if not prevents, healing, experts say.

"It is very hush-hush, yet everybody knows and is wondering if anyone is going to say anything," said Frank Granger, minister of education at First Baptist Church in Athens, Ga. "We fool ourselves into thinking silence protects the victim. Ultimately it hurts them."

Whether or not the minister initiates the intimate relationship, Sapp said, the minister is always at fault. Speaking from the pulpit or being in a counseling relationship puts the minister in an environment of power. That power is abused, Sapp said, when it is used to meet emotional needs of either party.

"People come to ministers for help by virtue of their office, so there is automatically a power imbalance, so it is always their responsibility," Sapp said.

Sapp said ministers sometime feel flattered to think a parishioner finds them attractive, but he insists the affair has nothing to do with physical attraction. Church members come to the pastor for ministry, not for

sex. "I tell them not to get too puffed up on themselves, because that had nothing to do with it," he said. "It was their position, not their handsomeness or whatever."

Because of that unbalanced environment, pastors should follow certain precautions, Sapp says. Likewise, churches need to recognize when they have a potentially dangerous situation and have prevention and intervention policies in place.

David Matthews, pastor of Christ Community Church in Orlando, Fla., resigned First Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C., 14 years ago after the church discovered he was having an affair with a member. The four-year relationship started with both people seeking needs that were not being met in their own marriages. Matthews said at the time that he didn't think he could be vulnerable sexually, but he was in complete denial about how he could be vulnerable emotionally.

"It was basically a failure to be honest with myself about needs," Matthews said, adding that the pressure among ministers to keep up a wholesome image often prevents them from admitting problems in marriage or in other areas. One step toward prevention, he says, is for clergy to have a mentor outside the church who can keep them accountable. "Every minister needs to have one or two people to whom they cannot lie and can talk about the deepest issues of their lives."

The fact that sexual misconduct by ministers is an issue of power and not just morality is part of the reason it is so damaging to churches. Smith says she thought opening up the topic of misconduct for discussion in Baptist circles would reveal a lot of men in midlife crises who become attracted to young, energetic women working in the church. Instead, she discovered a syndrome that involves predators and victims.

"I didn't want to learn that, because it changed how we could handle it," Smith said. She assumed writing a curriculum for seminaries and educating pastors and church members would be enough to remedy the problem. What she discovered is that the solution would have to be much more involved. "I realized we can't just be educators, but we have to be shepherds watching out for our flock to spot the wolves."

Michelle McClendon, minister of Christian education at First Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C., said it took the church about 10 years to heal completely after Matthews resigned. Although McClendon didn't come to the church until a few years later, she has watched the church struggle to move on. Now as the church searches for a new pastor, the personnel committee is recommending a policy be developed that addresses what to do in case the situation arises again.

"I think that is a really good step in the right direction," she said. "Sometimes in church life we embrace the fallen, and we are in denial about what damage that person has done. It is so important to deal with it openly and honestly. It takes so much longer if it just becomes a family secret."

Sapp believes helping churches to develop policies on clergy sexual misconduct in advance would go a long way in helping damaged congregations to heal after the fact. "First it's important to inform everybody so they have the correct information to process it and deal with it," Sapp said. "But churches must also seek to do justice by survivors. It is easy for survivors to feel re-victimized."

Having a process in place for investigating an allegation, approaching the minister, terminating a minister and helping the victims and perpetrators get counseling helps ensure a healthy rebuilding in the church and provide justice and retribution to the survivors. "Forgiveness comes at the far end of the process and on the survivors' timetable," Sapp said. "Healing takes a long time."

Granger noted that just getting rid of the perpetrator is not enough. Since so many are affected -- the victim, spouses and families of both people, the church, etc. -- there are many areas in which healing must take place. And while forgiveness is an eventual goal, Granger believes there should be policies in place that state the church believes certain behavior is wrong and will result in consequences. "It's not that forgiveness and restitution are not possible, but there are consequences."

The educators agree the first step toward healing is communication, so they are hopeful that more honesty will emerge on the topic as more are willing to address it. In fact, Sapp and Smith are leading a breakout conference on ministerial misconduct during the national Cooperative Baptist Fellowship meeting June 28-30 in Orlando, Fla.

-30-

## **Victim of sexual abuse by clergy battles code of silence in churches**

By Laurie Lattimore

COUNCIL BLUFFS, Iowa (ABP) -- Dee Miller, and her husband, Ron, envisioned serving God in Central Africa perhaps for the rest of their lives. But more than 10 years ago, their careers as Southern Baptist missionaries ended traumatically.

The couple now is serving an American Baptist church in Iowa and speaking out on an issue that is close to home -- the problem of clergy sex abuse and the church's collusion in keeping it quiet.

Miller first told her story of being sexually assaulted by a fellow missionary in a 1993 book, "How Little We Knew," published by Prescott Press.

But it was not the attack, she says, but the denomination's efforts to cover it up, that eventually caused her to resign.

"They wanted me to go back to sleep, and I'm not going back to sleep," said Miller.

Miller's alleged perpetrator went on to become pastor of a church in Texas one year after being confronted with claims he sexually assaulted her, plus other co-workers and two children, while on the mission field. Miller and her husband left Southern Baptists in 1990, but they have done anything but leave their mission to help put an end to ministerial sexual abuse.

Every pastor knows of a colleague who was forced to resign amid a sex scandal. In an oft-cited Christianity Today survey, 12 percent of ministers admitted to having engaged in extramarital sex and 23 percent in some other form of illicit sexual activity.

Yet Miller claims that in her case and many others, it is the victim who comes forward to report sexual misconduct, and not the perpetrator, who is put on trial.

"Everybody just wants everything back where it was, but a healthy church shouldn't be hoping to go back to where it was," Miller said. "What it was before was a pile of manure with frosting on it. That's all."

Miller admits she "comes down hard" on Southern Baptists and all denominations that turn their heads to the problem of sex abuse by clergy, but she makes no apologies. A desire for a "quick fix" is the worst approach Baptists or any faith group can take in dealing with what experts say is a growing problem, Miller says.

Only recently, however, has any other approach been tried. "The thinking is that we have a quick-fix God, so we want to fix the church quickly and fix the offender fast," Miller said. The quick fix usually involves getting the pastor out of town in a hurry and into another church.

The victim, her family and the minister's family are often given blame but no help. Often, churches are so concerned with the tarnished image they will get if word gets out, they don't warn another church about the reason behind the pastor's departure. This allows ministers to bounce from one church to another without any repercussions for unethical behavior.

Furthermore, churches avoid offering counseling to the victims, the ministers and the families of both. Joe Trull, former ethics professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, said the typical church reaction is to blame the victim and exonerate the pastor.

"It is not healthy. It is not right. And it is destructive to both," Trull said. "When an incident happens, the church has to deal with it in the most open, loving, caring way it can and be the love of Christ to the victim and family and the minister and family. If a church fails to do that, it is contradicting its own calling to act as the body of Christ."

This refusal to hold the pastor accountable is one of the main hurdles preventing churches from taking responsibility for sexual misconduct. The sexual encounter involves two consenting adults, so the minister's supporters rationalize that it must be the woman's fault for leading the pastor astray. Or perhaps they blame the pastor's wife; had she been a better spouse, he might not have broken his marriage vows.

Miller is adamant in her response to these attitudes. "It is never two consenting adults. The woman was taken advantage of because the pastor is in a power position," she said, noting that sexual misconduct often begins in counseling. "The pastor has the most responsibility to not lead people astray."

Miller also denounces another common response to the problem, expecting victims to simply forgive their perpetrators. This "theology of forgiveness" is just another expression of the quick-fix theology so often applied to the problem, she says.

"Christ did not teach instant forgiveness, and sometimes there can only be a certain amount of forgiveness," Miller said. "There is a difference between letting go and forgiving. Christ can forgive; we can let go."

The Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas is working to change many of these attitudes among Baptists and others. Texas Baptists got involved just over two years ago after a woman called the CLC office looking for help. She said she had been sexually abused by her Southern Baptist pastor and did not know where to turn for help.

The moral-concerns agency is assembling a host of resources pulled together over the last two years into a packet that churches can use to educate their staffs and members about the issue. The agency also recommends that churches be financially obligated to pay for whatever counseling is necessary and accepted by those involved.

"It is a devastating trauma for churches, and it takes some real skills to work with people who have experienced [sexual abuse from clergy]," said Phil Strickland, director of the Texas CLC. "There are not a lot of places to go for help, particularly if the church rejects the victim and refuses to provide counseling for either."

Strickland said such procedures are needed now as never before. "A lot of churches do not have a policy, so the traditional response is to sweep it under the rug and hope the victim will go away," he said. "This is devastating to the victim, the church and clergy member."

Strickland pulled together a task force in 1997 of interested and qualified people to consider how Southern Baptists can get churches back on track following clergy sex abuse.

Trull, who served as a consultant with that group, believes a sexual code of ethics is a step in the right direction. The Texas convention adopted such a code last fall, encouraging ministers to sign it and share it with their churches. Trull hopes Baptists in other states will follow suit.

"All ministers have a certain ego and enjoy being in the public eye," Trull said. "That trait allows them to be leaders, but it also makes them vulnerable. "

Churches as a whole have a difficult time recognizing an unhealthy situation, which the Texas CLC is hoping to change through its resource packet. Educating congregations about the situations in which sexual misconduct is likely to develop, the personalities involved and the typical behaviors and reactions is another step toward ending the problem.

Trull has characterized three types of perpetrators -- the predator, the wanderer and the lover.

A predator has many serious internal psychological and emotional problems and uses his power to manipulate women who are susceptible to his charm. Predators believe they are above the law and can always rationalize what they have done.

The wanderer does not seek out women but has emptiness in his life that he tries to fill with a woman who is also searching for happiness. The wanderers are typically redeemable because they acknowledge wrongdoing and work it out through counseling.

The lovers are an odd category, Trull said, because the pastor ends up falling in love with a church member. Even though some may disagree that such encounters are just unethical rather than abusive, the power role of the pastor still cannot be ignored.

"We know it is a betrayal of sexual trust, but we tend to overlook the power trust," Trull said. "Prevention is in knowing the nature, the process and the power element."

Churches need to be educated about this kind of behavior and the dynamics between a minister and parishioners that lead to unhealthy situations. Miller argues that no pastor should be doing long-term counseling, which puts both vulnerable women and unfulfilled ministers at risk.

Trull believes that ministers should set up certain safeguards and observe boundaries. Simple rules such as having doors with glass windows, always keeping the door unlocked with a policy that other ministers or assistants can walk in at any time and a policy of no hugs or handshakes except in public are ways to limit the opportunity for misconduct.

A strong marriage and a close network of accountability are the best prevention, Trull believes. "Ministers also need to recognize when they get to a state where they could be vulnerable because anyone, given the right moment, can be vulnerable."

But since perfection is not human nature, efforts to prevent clergy sexual misconduct can only go so far. Knowing how to respond to such situations and to restore victims' lives is also crucial.

Miller recommends that churches bring in a consultant to publicly state the allegations and announce an investigation. Open discussion among members must be allowed so all have a chance to air feelings of anger, disbelief, hurt, fear, etc. The minister should be given a leave of absence until the investigation is complete and further decisions are made. Once the facts are known, counseling should be offered to the victim, minister and their families.

Miller also believes churches should pay for some vocational training of the pastor, so he can find work in a non-helping profession. Decreasing the amount of collusion over the issue of clergy sexual misconduct is probably the best way to end it, Miller believes.

"There is no quick fix. We just have to keep speaking the truth and then take some vacations because it is hard work," she said.

-30-

**END**

---