

MEMORANDUM

TO: Guidepost Solutions

FROM: Christa Brown

DATE: October 25, 2021

SUBJECT: Sexual abuse and SBC Executive Committee actions & inactions

Introduction

I hold no expectation that the Southern Baptist Convention will take meaningful action to address clergy sex abuse, to create effective accountability structures, or to truly care for SBC abuse survivors – at least not in my lifetime – but I am writing this anyway in the hope that the SBC may someday prove me wrong. After so many years of speaking out, only to be met with wholesale institutional betrayal, I know full well that my effort in writing this is an effort that does not reside in reason. For the love of future generations, I choose to persist in hope anyway.

My focus will be on actions and inactions of the SBC Executive Committee, but I also think it important to provide context by giving you the gist of my personal story. You can learn more about my story from my book, *This Little Light: Beyond a Baptist Preacher Predator and His Gang*, which contains extensive footnoted documentation.

The gist of my abuse story when I was a kid

“Sexual abuse in the name of God creates a triple-trauma involving the abuse itself, the betrayal of trust, and spiritual harm.” – Victor Vieth

When I was a 16- year-old church girl, I was sexually assaulted over 30 times by Tommy Gilmore, who was then the youth & education minister at First Baptist Church of Farmers Branch in Texas. Those 30-plus assaults don’t count all the handsy/gropey grooming stuff he did when I was younger, some of which could also be classified as criminal conduct. He was 28 or 29 years old, married and a father. His weapons were scripture, prayer, God’s will, and the faith that I held in my own head and heart. Questions, doubts, and resistance were suffocated with Biblical authority.

I hope you will try to imagine the extraordinary damage that is done when God, prayer, Bible verses and faith are twisted into weapons for child sexual abuse. That damage is then magnified when no one in the faith community behaves as though it matters, or worse, they forge faith into a complicit partner by using it as a shield for inaction. Survivors often call this “soul-murder” for a reason; it was spiritually annihilating.

For me, so much about faith and the indicia of faith are now neurologically networked to child rape. For example, every time when Gilmore was done with me, he ended by saying “God loves you, Christa.” The result? I can’t even hear talk about “God’s love” without wanting to vomit.

After 7 to 8 months of abuse, I completely broke down and talked to the music minister, who was also my piano teacher. He told me to never speak of it again, and after that, Gilmore moved on to a bigger church, First Baptist of Tyler, Texas. He was sent on his way with praise from the pulpit about what a great man of God he was.

Years later, I learned that the music minister had actually known about Gilmore’s abuse of me even before I broke down, because Gilmore himself had talked about it with him. But the music minister did nothing and so allowed the abuse to escalate. Others also knew: the senior pastor, deacons, probably their wives, and even a pastor at a different Baptist church in the community.

Despite the knowledge of so many, Gilmore went on to have a full career in children’s ministry at prominent Southern Baptist churches, including First Baptist of Atlanta (the church of former SBC president Charles Stanley) and First Baptist of Oviedo (the church of former Florida Baptist Convention president Dwayne Mercer). Perhaps it’s also worth noting that he went to college at Hardin-Simmons University, a relatively small school, during the same period of time when Paige Patterson was there.

What happened when, as an adult, I tried to report

“One of the most difficult moments for a survivor is when their story, told to the leaders of the organization with the expectation that it will be met with light – a listening ear and a compassionate heart – is instead met with darkness – a refusal to listen and a hard, cold heart.” – Wade Mullen

When my own daughter reached the age I had been when Gilmore abused me, I began to take down my memories from the dark shelf in the back of my brain, and I could hardly bear to look at them. Recalling that Gilmore had simply moved on to another church, I became desperate to warn people. But when I approached my childhood church for help, it responded by threatening to sue me. And the music minister, who was still there, said once again that I had no business talking about it, described the abuse as “consensual” (even though I had been a minor), and joined in the church’s threat of a lawsuit. It was bald intimidation.

Eventually, I fought back and mustered significant substantiating documentation of what church leaders had known all along. This included: 1) The church’s written acknowledgment of the [“very serious sexual abuse”](#) that its minister, Tommy Gilmore, inflicted on me when I was a child, and its acknowledgment that another church leader who was there at the time had substantiated the fact of Gilmore’s abuse of me as a kid; 2) The music minister’s [sworn statement](#) attesting to his knowledge that Gilmore sexually abused me as a child, to the fact that Gilmore himself had talked about it with him at the time, and to the fact that I had talked about it with him at the time; 3) A third party’s sworn statement that the music minister referred to my “relationship” with Gilmore as having been [“consensual”](#) despite the fact that I was below the

age of consent; and 4) [Written acknowledgement from the Baptist General Convention of Texas](#) that it had placed Tommy Gilmore's name in its confidential file of "known offenders," which, according to its published policy at the time, required its own determination of "substantial evidence" of abuse or a confession.

The cost of this was enormous: psychologically, financially, emotionally, relationally, spiritually, and even physically. It took a profound toll. It felt as though religious leaders had seen a badly wounded animal – me – and decided to go ahead and eviscerate it. What you see here are just a few paragraphs. The actual process of this, during a time when I was simultaneously just beginning to deal with the sexual abuse trauma itself, nearly killed me. I mean that literally.

I believed then – and still do – that no one should ever have to traverse such a hellhole for the sake of trying to report a pastor who has committed sexual abuse. It was an experience that, even more so than the sexual abuse itself, prodded me toward advocacy efforts. Since then, almost every SBC survivor I've ever talked with – and there have been many – has said that the effort to report an abusive pastor caused even greater trauma than the sexual abuse itself. This has to end.

If the Southern Baptist Convention wants to find out about sexually abusive pastors, so as to be able to better protect kids and congregants, then it needs to provide survivors with a safe place where they can report abuse with a reasonable expectation of being compassionately and objectively heard. Over and over, with countless survivors maltreated in the process, the SBC has demonstrated that such a "safe place" will almost never be the church of the accused pastor or the church in which the abuse occurred.

In sum, the effort to report Gilmore was Hell. I wrote more about it [here](#).

Gilmore continued in ministry

"Victims live with the profound disillusioning sense of injustice when their abusers, when those who cover for them, absent any accountability, move through life with apparent ease, while the victims, absent support, struggle to survive." – Wade Mullen

Even after I went through the Hell of reporting him, and even after I obtained written corroboration and documentation, Gilmore continued in ministry.

I contacted [18 Southern Baptist church and denominational leaders](#) in four states (TN, TX, GA and FL) informing them about Gilmore. Though my report was well-substantiated, most simply ignored me and no one helped me. Gilmore still continued in ministry.

Among [those notified](#) were SBC president Bobby Welch and the Office of Convention Relations. Both offices are part of the Executive Committee.

Finally, I mustered media attention. The *Orlando Sentinel* [ignored the threat of a lawsuit](#) to do what no one in Southern Baptist life would; it reported his name. Gilmore resigned from the

ministerial position he had at that time. (But this wasn't the end of his ministerial career; read more below.)

The fact that 18 Southern Baptist leaders could know about a corroborated report of a minister sexually abusing a kid and choose to do nothing left me gasping. All 18 of them were willing to turn their backs and leave Gilmore working in a position of trust in children's ministry. It was a reality that, as a mother, I found unbearable, and I still do.

To this day, no one in SBC leadership has *ever* treated this as though it were a big deal, or as though it even mattered. This includes SBC presidents, SBC Executive Committee presidents, Executive Committee members, and other SBC officials.

To this day, SBC clergy sex abuse survivors still face nearly all the same impossible hurdles that I did in trying to report a pastor and protect others. Quite rationally, most survivors eventually walk away, wanting to never again draw near to anything connected to the SBC. The survivors you see on social media are the tiniest tip of the iceberg.

Gilmore didn't act alone, and he didn't get away with it alone. He didn't have a whole ministerial career alone. From the get-go until this very day, he has had the support and enabling aid of many others within the Southern Baptist Convention. In such a blind-eyed system, he was able to act with impunity. Now he is 80 years old, and he has [never shown a shred of remorse](#). Nor has he ever faced any meaningful consequence.

Things I've learned since writing my book

When I wrote my book, I thought that my extraordinarily painful efforts had at least succeeded in getting Gilmore removed from ministry. I was wrong. As it turned out, he only left employment as a staff minister (such that his picture wouldn't appear on a church staff directory), but according to his LinkedIn profile, he continued in children's ministry on a contract/consulting basis for several more years. Thus, despite numerous SBC leaders knowing what he did to me as a kid, despite significant substantiation, and despite media exposure, he *still* continued in ministry.

When he was finally ready to "retire," Gilmore then traded on his ["45 years in the ministry"](#) for [credibility as a realtor](#) and he reaped still more support from within the SBC. First Baptist Church of Orlando was shown as a "church partner" for his real estate business, featured him on the church blog, and [promoted him](#) on the church website as a provider in the church's "Financial Peace University." I was also told that he had been allowed to teach Sunday School.

And the music minister who knew from the get-go about Gilmore's abuse of me as a kid? The guy who did nothing and allowed the abuse to escalate? The guy who, when I myself finally broke down, told me to never speak of it again? The guy who, even years later, described my abuse as a kid as having been "consensual?" There was no consequence for him either. Even after plenty of people knew what he had done, he became choral director for East Texas Baptist University, and he had an SBC church concert series named in his honor. He was honored for his work with youth choirs. As a kid, I was a member of one of his youth choirs.

To this day, I would expect that, in churches where Tommy Gilmore served, most people probably have no idea that their prior children's minister was a man *known* to have sexually abused a kid. At [First Baptist of Atlanta](#), when I tried to hand out flyers to people leaving the church so as to inform them about Gilmore (after the church had ignored my letter), the church [called the police](#) on me. The police said we were fine; we were on a public sidewalk. But the irony was not lost on me. No one ever called the police on *him*, but they called the police on *me*.

Actions & inactions of the SBC Executive Committee

At *all* levels within the SBC, I encountered failures, institutional betrayals, hostility, and intimidation. Although I will not detail the deeds of others, please remember that the Executive Committee's failures occurred within a broader context in which I was also encountering the failures and mistreatments of others, including multiple church leaders, state and local denominational leaders, ERLC leaders, a seminary president, and seminary trustees. System-wide, there was no safe place to turn, nor any place that would take responsible action.

With respect to the Executive Committee, I include actions and inactions of the SBC president because, under article V of the SBC Constitution, the SBC president is a member of the SBC Executive Committee.

July 2004: My 28-page substantiated report of clergy sexual abuse was sent by certified mail to multiple Southern Baptist leaders, including **SBC president Bobby Welch**. It detailed the abuse that was inflicted on me, the church's mishandling of it, and the fact that minister Tommy Gilmore had been allowed to simply move on to another SBC church. Welch merely forwarded my report to SBC attorney Jim Guenther. (Over time, it became apparent that this was a pattern: When SBC officials received abuse reports, they would forward them to attorneys Augie Boto and/or Jim Guenther.)

Writing on behalf of **SBC president Bobby Welch**, attorney **Jim Guenther** responded that he saw no record that Tommy Gilmore was serving in a ministerial position in any church. At the time, I breathed a sigh of relief and, for a while, stopped looking for Gilmore, assuming Guenther's statement meant Gilmore was out of ministry. Months later, I learned that Gilmore was in fact serving as children's minister at First Baptist of Oviedo, Florida (the church of former Florida Baptist Convention president Dwayne Mercer). Because it was a church not far from Welch's own church, it seemed unlikely that Welch hadn't known of Gilmore. A commenter on my prior blog told me that Welch did in fact know Gilmore quite well. Furthermore, Gilmore had been in ministry all along. So not only did no one even bother to look into my abuse report, but Guenther (acting on behalf of the SBC president) affirmatively misled me into thinking Gilmore wasn't in ministry anymore, even though he was. (*mishandling, mistreatment*) http://stopbaptistpredators.org/pdf_documents/SBC_letter.pdf

April 2005: After discovering on my own that Gilmore was in fact still in ministry, and had been all along, I wrote to multiple Southern Baptist leaders, including the **SBC's Office of Convention Relations** (which is part of the Executive Committee) and SBC attorney **Jim Guenther**, to inform them that Tommy Gilmore had been located serving at a prominent Florida

church (First Baptist of Oviedo), that he had previously served a long tenure at First Baptist of Atlanta, and to again inform about my substantiated report of Gilmore's sexual abuse of me as a child. Nothing happened. Gilmore continued in ministry. (*mishandling by failure to act*)
<http://stopbaptistpredators.org/documents/SBC042205.pdf>

August 2, 2006: Together with SNAP, I wrote to **SBC president Frank Page**, informing him of my substantiated report of abuse and of the concerning fact that Gilmore had been able to continue in ministry even after 18 Southern Baptist leaders were informed. We asked for 1) an investigation into the egregious mishandling of my abuse report and to use it as a launchpad for change; 2) the creation of an independent review board and a system for record-keeping on clergy abuse reports with a procedure for notifying people in the pews; 3) dialogue and an in-person meeting so as to work together to make churches safer. Page wrote back saying "I know that this has happened on multiple occasions," and that he would "see if there is some way" the SBC could assist in informing churches. Nothing happened. (*mishandling by failure to act*)
<http://stopbaptistpredators.org/documents/SBCletter02.pdf>
http://stopbaptistpredators.org/documents/Baptist_Letter.pdf

September 26, 2006: Together with SNAP, I wrote to **SBC Executive Committee President Morris Chapman, SBC president Frank Page** and ERLC president Richard Land, asking for dialogue "to make Southern Baptist churches safer," setting forth the gist of my personal story, and making 5 specific requests for action, including again requests for the establishment of an independent review board to assess abuse reports, and a system for record-keeping on abuse reports (a database) and for notifying people in the pews when a report is made about a minister who worked in their congregation. I made a trip to Nashville, hand-delivered the letters to Chapman and Land, and did a sidewalk media event outside SBC headquarters. Apparently, SBC leaders weren't happy about it.
https://www.snapnetwork.org/snap_letters/2006_letters/092606_southern_baptist.htm
<https://goodfaithmedia.org/southern-baptist-leaders-challenged-to-get-tough-on-sex-abuse-by-clergy-cms-7942/>
<https://goodfaithmedia.org/advocating-for-safety-of-southern-baptist-church-kids/>

September 29, 2006: **SBC Executive Committee vice-president and general counsel Augie Boto** responded on **SBC Executive Committee** letterhead that "discourse between us will not be positive or fruitful." Boto expressly stated that he was writing on behalf of all three offices – i.e., **Executive Committee President Morris Chapman, SBC president Frank Page**, and ERLC president Richard Land. (*mishandling, mistreatment, intimidation, resistance to abuse reform initiatives*)
<http://stopbaptistpredators.org/documents/Botoletter.pdf>

This dismissive letter was written in Boto's official capacity. It was expressly written on behalf of three other SBC officials in their official capacities. It was an act on behalf of the offices and not merely the individuals. Therefore, the current office-holders could retract or disavow this communication on behalf of the office. But that has never happened. Nor has any subsequent person occupying these offices ever made institutional apology for it. This would be such a small thing, but no one has ever bothered. I made this specific suggestion by email to ERLC staff, with no result. I also communicated to current **SBC president Ed Litton** about this on Twitter,

suggesting that, if he wanted to reach out to me, disavowing this prior letter on behalf of the office of SBC president could be a first small step. Nothing happened. Separately, I informed Litton's executive assistant by email that if Litton wanted to communicate with me, he could email me. That hasn't happened either. (*mishandling by omission*)

<https://twitter.com/ChristaBrown777/status/1416065052000460802>

<http://thewartburgwatch.com/2020/01/17/another-sbc-erlc-dopey-move-their-attorney-appears-to-be-contacting-victims-who-have-reached-out-for-help/>

February 2007: While speaking to the Bylaws Workgroup of the SBC Executive Committee about having been sexually abused as a kid by an SBC minister, one man in the room literally chortled as I spoke. He was not part of the Bylaws Workgroup, but since he was there during the time when the whole of the Executive Committee was meeting, I assume he was likely an **Executive Committee member**. In addition, **Executive Committee member Randall James** (from First Baptist of Orlando where I believe Gilmore was then a member), who was part of the Bylaws Workgroup, literally turned himself around in his chair as I spoke. He physically maintained his back to me the entire time I was speaking. **Not one other person in the room** said a word about how inappropriate this behavior was. (Because EC members were sitting at tables that were strung together in a "U," people sitting across would have had to have seen him.) The chairman of the EC's Bylaws Workgroup at that time was **Mitch Gavin**. He stayed silent. **SBC president Frank Page** was in the room, and he stayed silent, too, as did **Augie Boto**. (Note: I identified Randall James at the time from looking at photos of EC Bylaws Workgroup members; I give it about 95% odds that my identification was correct.) (*mishandling, mistreatment, intimidation*)

I ask you to try to imagine what it's like to speak about something so painful to a room in which men disrespect you in such a way. And I hope that you will also try to imagine the long-lasting impact this had on me – to speak about this horrific trauma of having my pastor repeatedly rape me as a child, only to have religious leaders behave in this way and to have not a single other person who thought it mattered enough to speak up. The sharp edge of such incivility has never worn off.

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/sbc-leaders-deny-charge-of-unresponsiveness-about-clergy-sex-abuse-cms-8561/> (This article documents the meeting, the names of EC members who were on the Bylaws Workgroup at that time, Page's presence at the meeting, and the fact that I told my story at that meeting. Note that, at the time, the Bylaws Workgroup allowed press only under strict rules that prohibited them from using direct quotes or specific attributions.) (The chortling man & the EC member who physically turned his back to me are reported in my book at pages 176-77.)

February 23, 2007: The *Baptist Press* publicly smeared me as "making false accusations." It was an article with such a grossly distorted narrative that no individual even put their name on it; the byline was "Staff." (The *Baptist Press* is controlled by the SBC Executive Committee whose president at that time was **Morris Chapman**.) The article's first sentence stated: "A child sexual molestation victims' group apologized to Southern Baptist leaders...for making false accusations that leaders had not responded to the group's letters." Then it mentioned me by name. This was disparaging and false. We never apologized "for making false accusations." (*mistreatment, intimidation*)

<https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/snap-apologizes-to-sbc-leaders-admits-charges-of-silence-were-erroneous/>

What I apologized for was being unaware of a letter that Augie Boto had sent in response to our 9/26/07 letter in which we asked for 5 specific actions. I had told the press that this letter “was met with silence,” but Boto had in fact sent a letter to SNAP’s Chicago office where it had been misplaced, and so I had never seen it (because I was in Texas and it was never forwarded to me). And as it turned out, the misplaced letter was Boto’s 9/29/07 brush-off letter – i.e., his letter saying “discourse between us will not be positive or fruitful.” After SNAP’s Chicago office found the letter, SNAP too issued an apology, but again, this was never an apology “for making false accusations;” it was an apology for a misplaced brush-off letter.

http://stopbaptistpredators.org/press/southern_baptists_still_unresponsive.html

In Florida (where my perpetrator resided), former SBC president Jerry Vines then picked up on the *Baptist Press*’ “false accusations” narrative, and on a Christian news network, he said that we had made “false charges” and he accused us of being “not really forthright.” (It aired on Feb. 28, 2007 on OneNewsNow which was part of the American Family News network.)

Then, the *Baptist Press* “false accusations” article was reprinted and published a second time on April 1, 2007 in *SBC Life* (which I understand to be a subsidiary publication of the *Baptist Press*, and also controlled by the Executive Committee).

<https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/sbc-life-articles/snap-apologizes-to-sbc-leaders/>

Meanwhile, the Executive Committee continued to be unresponsive in terms of actually *doing* anything about our 5 requests for action or about combatting clergy sex abuse. So, our statement that SBC officials were unresponsive remained true. SNAP’s national director, David Clohessy, summed up this scenario the best when he stated: “For Baptist officials to use their own *Baptist Press* to publicly twist that apology into a vindication of their do-nothing response was perverse.”

http://stopbaptistpredators.org/press/southern_baptists_still_unresponsive.html

It was perverse indeed, and it was also extremely upsetting for me personally to be publicly maligned – repeatedly – for “making false accusations.” To this day, it is *still* upsetting. (*mistreatment, intimidation*)

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/snap-cries-foul-over-baptist-press-reporting-cms-8710/>

https://www.christianpost.com/article/20070412/26854_Sex_Abuse_Victims_Still_Say_Southern_Baptists_are_'Unresponsive'.htm

(All of this is also reported in my book at pages 178-180.)

Finally, the *Florida Baptist Witness* published this distorted “false accusations” narrative yet again on January 10, 2008 (and once again, I note that Florida was where Tommy Gilmore was then active in Southern Baptist life). This was after SNAP had written to trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary urging that Paige Patterson be suspended and that there be an investigation of allegations that he had failed to warn others about a reported serial sexual predator. The article quoted me as saying that “vulnerable Baptist teens and young people suffered because of Patterson’s secrecy,” and then wrote this: “Brown has made similar guilt-by-

association charges in the past, but apologized to Southern Baptist leaders Feb 22, 2007 for making false accusations...” I have no clue what “similar guilt-by-association charges” the article could even possibly have been referencing, and once again, the article parroted the *Baptist Press*’s “false accusations” language, which is where this whole smear originated. (*mistreatment, intimidation*)

https://www.bishop-accountability.org/news2008/01_02/2008_01_10_Ledbetter_SouthwesternPresident.htm

March 2007: Father Thomas Doyle, a priest and canon lawyer who first warned of the looming Catholic sex abuse crisis, wrote to **SBC Executive Committee president Morris Chapman** and **SBC president Frank Page**. He expressed his concerns that SBC leaders could be falling into some of the same patterns that Catholic leaders did of not dealing with clergy sex abuse, and he urged that Southern Baptists should learn from Catholic mistakes and take action early-on to implement structural reforms so as to make children safer. Rather than addressing Doyle’s concerns with the seriousness they merited, Page’s response was defensive and perfunctory. Doyle himself characterized Page’s response as “dismissive.” I never saw that Chapman made a response. (*resistance to abuse reform initiatives*)

http://stopbaptistpredators.org/documents/thomas_doyle.html

http://stopbaptistpredators.org/documents/documents/Page_ltr_Doyle.pdf

https://www.snapnetwork.org/snap_press_releases/2007_press_releases/041107_doyle_writes_baptist.htm

https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/what-would-jesus-say/article_74704bcd-f972-52d1-abb9-4f1c25bc88d1.html

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/20-20-airs-report-on-predator-preachers-cms-8784/>

April 1, 2007: The *Baptist Press* publicly disparaged the reporting of Associated Press reporter Rose French, by name, for, in its words, implying that “the Southern Baptist Convention is sheltering pastors that have a record of sexual abuse and that the SBC is resisting attempts to address the problem of clergy abuse.” The article also claimed that the SBC Executive Committee had given French “materials that specifically addressed every concern presented in her story.” But Rose French’s reporting was completely accurate. It was true then in 2007 that the SBC was failing to root out clergy sex abusers; it was true during all the years I was logging SBC clergy abuse cases at StopBaptistPredators.org (2006-2012) and blogging (2006-2016); and it was still true in 2019 when *Houston Chronicle* published the “Abuse of Faith” series. To this day, it remains to be seen whether the SBC will *ever* implement meaningful effective reforms.

Furthermore, in addition to reporting generally about the SBC’s clergy sex abuse problem, Rose French also reported specifically about my own case and about the case of Debbie Vasquez. So, even while the Executive Committee was disputing French’s reporting on the ground that it had “addressed every concern,” it had not even addressed our two cases, much less the problem at large.

Once again, no individual put their name on this *Baptist Press* article of disparagement and distortion; it was written by “Staff.” The *Baptist Press* is controlled by the **Executive Committee**, which was then under the leadership of **EC president Morris Chapman**. (*resistance to abuse reform initiatives, mishandling*)

<https://www.chron.com/news/nation-world/article/Priest-sex-watchdogs-eye-Southern-Baptists-1809627.php>

<https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/sbc-life-articles/disputing-sex-abuse-claims/>

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/sex-victim-advocates-eye-southern-baptists/>

April 2007: When **SBC president Frank Page** was interviewed for the *ABC 20/20* program on “Preacher Predators,” which spotlighted the Southern Baptist Convention, he was asked about the creation of a denominational database of SBC clergy predators, which we in the survivor community had been urging. “If it would help to have some kind of national database, I know we are looking into that,” he said. Because it is not at all apparent that anyone in the SBC was in fact giving serious consideration to the database, Page’s remark appears as little more than dissembling (i.e., a form of *resistance to abuse reform initiatives*).

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=505075320644219>

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/sbc-president-says-denomination-looking-into-sex-offender-registry-cms-8788/>

My own story was featured in the *ABC 20/20* exposé and a number of other SBC clergy abuse stories were also told. In addition, the *20/20* report illuminated the ease with which abusive clergy could church-hop and the systemic nature of the problem within the SBC.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=772856430067744>

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=185996200118841>

<https://abcnews.go.com/2020/story?id=3034040&page=1>

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/20-20-airs-report-on-predator-preachers-cms-8784/>

Yet, rather than addressing the serious documented revelations of the *ABC 20/20* exposé, **SBC president Frank Page** publicly dismissed it as “yellow journalism,” called it an “attack piece” and an “intentional slice-and-dice effort,” and railed against the media’s “bias against conservative Christians.” **Augie Boto** (who was then vice-president for convention policy with the Executive Committee) wrote a column in *Baptist Press* decrying the *ABC 20/20* report as being “misleading” in giving viewers the impression that the SBC “hides or denies sexual offenses committed by ministers in SBC-affiliated churches.” He said, “The convention does none of those things.” Boto’s words were not true, because the SBC *does* do those things, as was documented by *20/20* at the time, and again, more than a decade later in the *Houston Chronicle* “Abuse of Faith” series. In addition to the overall dismissiveness of Page and Boto toward the *20/20* report, this is yet another time when both men, and likely many other SBC leaders and **Executive Committee members**, would have been made aware of my own abuse story and others. Yet no one did a thing. (*mishandling, resistance to abuse reform initiatives*)

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/sbc-officials-criticize-predator-preacher-report-on-20-20-cms-8803/>

At the time it did the interview with **SBC president Frank Page**, *ABC 20/20* disclosed to him that the SBC’s ministerial registry included men who were *convicted* child molesting sex offenders; so, Page knew about this from the time he did the interview. *ABC 20/20* disclosed it again publicly, several weeks later, when it aired the *20/20* report on television and the convicted child molesters were still on the registry. However, neither **Frank Page** nor **Augie Boto** nor any other SBC official went to work to get the convicted child molesters off the SBC’s ministerial registry. Instead, **Augie Boto** publicly defended – yes, *defended* – the inclusion of convicted

child molesting sex offenders on the SBC's online registry of ministers, as though it were a good thing. (*mishandling, resistance to abuse reform initiatives*)

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/sbc-officials-criticize-predator-preacher-report-on-20-20-cms-8803/> (“Boto defended the inclusion, reported by ABC News, of names of convicted sex offenders on an online database of SBC ministers.”)

<https://web.archive.org/web/20070531200038/http://www.sbc Baptist press.org/BPnews.asp?ID=25398> (Boto complains that 20/20 called it “the list of available ministers” when it should have called it “the list of serving ministers,” as if this semantic distinction could possibly justify having convicted child molesters on the SBC's ministerial registry.)

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/sbc-president-says-denomination-looking-into-sex-offender-registry-cms-8788/> (naming six convicted child molesters found on SBC ministerial registry in 2007)

Only later, after a SNAP press release and still more media were the sex offender names that were on the registry at that time removed. But still no system was put in place to prevent convicted sex offenders from being listed on the SBC's ministerial registry, and reporters again found convicted sex offenders on the ministerial registry. (*mishandling, resistance to abuse reform initiatives*)

<https://baptistnews.com/article/sbc-officials-reject-idea-of-sex-offender-database/#.YWrvubjMI2x>

Eventually, the ministerial registry was completely dropped from the SBC website. I believe it probably came to be viewed as an embarrassment. Also, with its Minister Search function, the ministerial registry made it easier for survivors to locate where abusive ministers had moved, and I wonder if that too was part of the reason the EC decided to eliminate it. Whatever the reason, the net result was that the EC chose to do nothing to rid the SBC's ministerial ranks of sexually abusive pastors and instead took action that effectively made it harder to find them. (*mishandling*)

April 2007: In a column published in the *Florida Baptist Witness*, **SBC president Frank Page** publicly castigated those of us seeking to prod SBC action on clergy sex abuse as being “nothing more than opportunistic persons who are seeking to raise opportunities for personal gain.” This offended me greatly: 1) calling me an opportunist; 2) saying I was “nothing more” than that; and 3) saying I was in it for “personal gain.” There has never been any “personal gain” in any of this for me; to the contrary, it has always carried a very heavy cost. Furthermore, I couldn't help but notice that Page published this in Florida where my perpetrator, Tommy Gilmore, was active in Southern Baptist life. Page also minimized the SBC abuse problem as being only “several reported cases.” There were way more than “several” and that was well-documented. (*mistreatment, mishandling, intimidation*)

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/sbc-president-labels-sexual-abuse-critics-opportunists-cms-8817/>

I actively worked to try to find Southern Baptist pastors who would sign a letter calling out Page's harsh rhetoric about clergy sex abuse survivors. I contacted *a lot* of them, mostly pastors who, in comments on blogs and chat boards, had seemed sympathetic. But of course, it's one thing to speak in generalities about hating abuse and caring for survivors, and it's quite another for a pastor to actually put his name on something specific and particularly something specific that challenges a top SBC official. Even among supposedly survivor-friendly pastors, it was

almost impossible to find *any* Southern Baptist pastors who would sign such a letter. Ultimately, only one active Southern Baptist pastor agreed to sign it and two retired Southern Baptist pastors did. The rest of the signers were clergy in other faith groups.

https://www.snapnetwork.org/snap_press_releases/2007_press_releases/071907_release_nashville_baptist.html

https://www.christianpost.com/article/20070720/28533_Clergy_Rebuke_SBC_Head_for_'Harsh_Rhetoric'_Over_Sex_Abuse_Cases.htm

Once again, I think this speaks to an **Executive Committee failure**. The EC allowed a toxic climate to prevail in which no one felt able to confront leaders about offensive conduct. Alternatively, it affirmatively cultivated such a toxic climate. Either way, it seemed as though there was a code of omerta. This in and of itself is, I believe, a form of mishandling of abuse allegations. If there is no good avenue for criticism about much of anything, and if fear of career repercussions silences critics, then the EC's mishandling of abuse allegations will not be met with criticism either. In effect, by fostering such a toxic climate, the EC assured that its own mishandling of abuse allegations would meet with little to no resistance from within the institution. (This toxic climate continued for years and *still* has impact; see subsequent May 2021 entry about Russell Moore's leaked letters.) (*mishandling*)

May 2007: SBC president Frank Page publicly impugned the motives of those of us pressing the SBC for action on clergy sex abuse. In speaking to the *Tennessean*, he suggested that we had "a hidden agenda" and were trying to set up the SBC for lawsuits. He also was dismissive of the SBC clergy sex abuse problem, essentially saying that there was no good reason to direct attention toward the SBC because sexual abuse is everywhere. (*mistreatment, resistance to abuse reform initiatives*)

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/sbc-president-questions-motives-of-snap-says-sex-abuse-everywhere-cms-8863/> (Ironically, in this same article about Frank Page impugning our motives, it also reports that, years after abusing me, my perpetrator, Tommy Gilmore, was reported for sexual harassment of a church secretary, and when she told other church leaders, she was forced to resign. Lessening the likelihood of harm from church-hopping clergy sex abusers was always part of my *actual* motivation.)

May 2007: Will Hall, vice-president for news services of the SBC Executive Committee, downplayed the SBC sexual abuse problem by telling a Tennessee TV station that there had been only 40 "incidents" in the last 15 years in the SBC's 44,000 churches. Hall said this relatively low number over such a long time period showed that the way Baptists deal with abuse was working. This was a distortion – and in my view a devious one – of a prior statement I had made to the Associated Press, saying, "In the past six months SNAP has received reports of about 40 cases of sexual abuse by Southern Baptist ministers." Thus, the 40 cases had been reported in 6 months' time, not in 15 years, and Hall's distortion served to grossly minimize the problem. There had been no ambiguity. The "six months" was clearly stated by me, and clearly written by AP reporter Rose French. The Baptist Center for Ethics (which is not SBC-affiliated) publicly called on Hall to issue a correction. That never happened. (*resistance to reform initiatives, mishandling*)

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/sbc-official-says-relatively-low-number-of-cases-proves-system-working-against-sexual-predators-cms-8916/>

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/sex-victim-advocates-eye-southern-baptists/>
https://www.christianpost.com/article/20070412/26854_Sex_Abuse_Victims_Still_Say_Southern_Baptists_are_'Unresponsive'.htm

June 2007: At the SBC annual meeting in San Antonio, I was there with 10 other SNAP members, handing out flyers urging support for a motion to study the creation of a denominational database of SBC clergy sex abusers. It was 95 degrees with high humidity, and so we were trying to stay in the shade of trees that were on the large plaza in front of the Convention Center. Two uniformed police officers had already told us that we were fine on the plaza, but a non-uniformed security guy approached and said we had to get off the plaza. This meant moving to the sidewalk where there was no shade. He said that, because the SBC had rented the entire convention center, it included the large plaza area in front, and that therefore the SBC was entitled to have us removed from the premises and they wanted us gone. As he spoke, I saw three men in suits, one of whom I believe was **Executive Committee vice-president Augie Boto**, standing and watching the exchange from about 20 yards away. (*mistreatment, resistance to abuse reform initiatives, intimidation*)

<https://stopbaptistpredators.blogspot.com/2007/06/behind-scenes-with-southern-baptists.html>
<https://baptistnews.com/article/lifeway-says-1-in-8-church-background-checks-finds-record/?print=pdf#.YWbjaCuSk2w> (see caption on photo)

(also reported in my book at pp. 145-46)

Summer 2007: After discovering explicit photos of the pastor on her teen daughter's cell phone, a mother realized that the pastor had been grooming their daughter, and she "called the Nashville headquarters of the Southern Baptist Convention to lodge a complaint" about the pastor. She didn't get any help, and in a subsequent lawsuit, she asserted that the SBC had a part in assigning a man named Gerald Mounce to assemble a team to address the matter and that he did so by creating "a spiritual care plan" for her daughter that "prohibited her from dating or even being alone with a man for a year." Meanwhile, the pastor remained in the pulpit. SBC attorney Jim Guenther told the *Nashville Scene* that the mother had never called and talked with anyone at the SBC, and that Guenther himself had "determined that such a call never came in to Nashville headquarters."

This story raises two questions that could potentially implicate the SBC **Executive Committee**.

- 1) Assuming the mother was correct in her statement that she had called SBC headquarters in Nashville, who exactly talked with her and who assigned Gerald Mounce to address the matter?
- 2) Assuming Guenther was correct in asserting that such a call never came in, how exactly did Guenther make that determination? At that time, was there some sort of internal system at SBC headquarters for logging calls and reports about clergy sex abuse? Without some sort of a log to check, how could Guenther have been so certain that no such call came in? And if such a log was being maintained at that time, who was responsible for logging the calls and reports about sexually abusive pastors? (*possible EC mishandling*)

https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/the-bad-shepherd/article_28ff431a-0e0f-57b0-a47b-81909ca51e2c.html

September 2007: I was present at another Bylaws Workgroup meeting of the Executive Committee. In open session and with members of the press present, an **Executive Committee**

member (who was also a member of the Workgroup) castigated me as “a person of no integrity.” I was not afforded even the opportunity to defend myself. I was not allowed to speak. Not one other member of the **Executive Committee** breathed a word to even so much as say “Woah, that’s over the top.” Every single person in the room sat silent while their Executive Committee colleague verbally kicked me. That includes **Stephen Wilson**, who was chair of the EC’s Bylaws Workgroup at that time, and **SBC president Frank Page**; both stayed silent. (Note: The name of the person who said this is not reported because, at this time, the Bylaws Workgroup allowed for press only on agreement that there would be no direct quotations and no specific attributions. The general language of “a person of no integrity” and “critics that lack integrity” was reported along with “adversarial” references to us and the fact that we were not allowed to speak.) (*mistreatment, intimidation*)

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/clergy-sex-abuse-survivor-questions-fairness-of-sbc-executive-committee-study-cms-9469/>

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/snap-calls-for-open-and-transparent-study-of-sex-abuse-by-clergy-cms-9450/>

September 2007: Together with SNAP, I wrote to all the members of the **Executive Committee’s Bylaws Workgroup**, to **SBC president Frank Page**, and to **Executive Committee president Morris Chapman**, imploring them to honor the mandate of the June 2007 messengers who had voted near-unanimously for the SBC Executive Committee to conduct a study on the creation of a database of admitted, convicted and credibly-accused SBC clergy sex abusers. We asked that the Executive Committee conduct a legitimate study, conduct it with transparency about the methodology and resources, take testimony in open hearings, and seek input from experts, leaders in other religious groups, and survivors. None of that happened. (*resistance to abuse reform initiatives*)

http://stopbaptistpredators.org/press/letter_to_bylaws_workgroup091707.html

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/look-back-snap-seeks-transparent-study-of-clergy-sex-abuse/>

Of all the Executive Committee’s many failings, I view this as the most egregious. Many survivors had sacrificed and had painfully brought forth their stories in an effort to assist in prodding support for the database motion. Survivors had also worked in the sun and heat to hand out over 2000 flyers outside the San Antonio convention center. The **Executive Committee** betrayed not only all the survivors but it also betrayed the SBC messengers who had voted for the database study.

There was never anything that any ordinary person would call a “study.” A reporter who tried to get answers on exactly what comprised the “study” wrote that “there’s little to show that...they’re giving the database idea – or the wounded victims left to fend for themselves – much consideration at all.” There was never even any budget allocated for a study. And **SBC Executive Committee vice-president Roger “Sing” Oldham**, handling communications for the EC, “said he couldn’t answer...questions about the specific things the SBC committee studying the database was doing to actually, well, *study* the feasibility of the database.” (*resistance to abuse reform initiatives*)

https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/what-would-jesus-say/article_74704bcd-f972-52d1-abb9-4f1c25bc88d1.html

https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/baptism-by-fire/article_fac88b11-140d-5807-8ec4-2796e7a14662.html

Moreover, based on his own reported comments, it was apparent from the get-go that **Augie Boto** was “predisposed against a database,” that he didn’t think a database would be effective, and that he was “convinced that the answer lies not in a list.” He was also on record as saying that it was “not possible” for the SBC to create an independent sexual abuse review panel to assess credible allegations. Nevertheless, **SBC president Frank Page** (who was also on record against the database) identified Boto as the man “in charge of the subcommittee” dealing with the sexual abuse issue. Executive Committee member **Stephen Wilson** was the chairman of the Bylaws Workgroup, but Page’s remark revealed the de facto reality of who was actually wielding the power. **Augie Boto** “led the process” even though, just one year earlier, he had been so dismissive as to write to me and other survivor-advocates that “discourse between us will not be positive or fruitful.” Given Boto’s open hostility to the database, if the **Executive Committee** and **Executive Committee president Morris Chapman** had truly wanted, in good faith, to honor the directive of the messengers to study the feasibility of a clergy sex abuser database, they never should have placed Boto in charge of it. (*resistance to abuse reform initiatives*)
<https://baptistnews.com/article/augie-boto-sbc-leader-who-opposed-abuse-database-set-to-retire/#.YVxk1CuSk2x>
<https://religionnews.com/2007/02/24/rns-daily-digest2311/>
https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/what-would-jesus-say/article_74704bcd-f972-52d1-abb9-4f1c25bc88d1.html
<https://goodfaithmedia.org/clergy-sex-abuse-survivor-questions-fairness-of-sbc-executive-committee-study-cms-9469/>

Thus, the **Executive Committee**’s “study” was a sham. It was nothing more than the pretense of a study and it was controlled by Boto who was openly against it. Ultimately, under **Augie Boto**’s direction and under the leadership of **Executive Committee president Morris Chapman**, what the EC produced was nothing more than their own predetermined foregone conclusion set forth into writing. Yet, despite the fact that there was nothing even resembling a real study, **every other member of the Executive Committee** stayed silent and went along with it.

SBC messengers went along with it too. Even the pastor who had put the database motion on the floor at the convention told the press he thought it was an “adequate” response and that the EC had taken the abuse issue “very seriously.” I mention this because, again, I think it is indicative of the extent to which the **Executive Committee** and others in SBC leadership had cultivated a toxic dysfunctional culture in which almost no one would challenge them – i.e., a culture of non-accountability. Even when it was obvious that no legitimate study had been done – at least not anything that any ordinary person would call a study – there was literally no one in SBC life who would say, “Where’s the study?” (*resistance to abuse reform initiatives by both commission and omission*)

https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/save-yourself/article_71dab76a-5b6f-5928-bcbf-d5ccadf60c34.html
<https://goodfaithmedia.org/clergy-sex-abuse-survivor-questions-fairness-of-sbc-executive-committee-study-cms-9469/>

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/sbc-seminary-president-labels-clergy-sex-abuse-victims-group-evil-doers-cms-12262/>

<https://religionnews.com/2008/06/11/southern-baptists-elect-president-dismiss-abuse-database/>

February 2008: While trying to ascertain exactly what the SBC Executive Committee was doing to actually study the feasibility of a database (as it had been instructed by the 2007 messengers), the *Nashville Scene* did a series of articles on Baptist clergy sex abuse and the failure of Southern Baptist leadership to address it. When reporter Elizabeth Ulrich attended a meeting of the **Executive Committee’s Bylaws Workgroup**, “**many members of the committee**” responded with hostility and “sideways glares,” telling her the *Nashville Scene* had not given the SBC “a fair shake.” One accused the *Nashville Scene* of having “acted with deliberate deceit to portray SBC officials as uncaring.” And yet, the EC did nothing to address the documented revelations of the *Nashville Scene* series or the fact that “every abuse victim” the reporter interviewed had said SBC officials were uncaring. (Again, please keep in mind that the Bylaws Workgroup imposed strict rules on members of the press, forbidding the use of any direct quotes or specific attributions. So, members could not be identified by name.)

(mishandling, resistance to abuse reform initiatives)

https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/baptism-by-fire/article_fac88b11-140d-5807-8ec4-2796e7a14662.html

June 10, 2008: Without the Executive Committee having done anything that could legitimately be called a study, **Executive Committee president Morris Chapman** reported back to the 2008 SBC annual meeting that Southern Baptist polity precluded the possibility of an independent review board to assess abuse reports and precluded any centralized record-keeping on abuse reports. “The world may never understand our polity,” he preached, as if the EC decision were something other than a long-predetermined conclusion, and as if keeping records and informing churches would somehow intrude on churches’ autonomy. (It wouldn’t; it would provide a resource to churches to exercise their autonomy more responsibly.) While committing the SBC Executive Committee to do nothing at all about survivors’ abuse reports, Chapman deftly filled his statement and sermon with great-sounding platitudes. People applauded. It was public showmanship, and it was all empty words. Chapman also said that anyone who asserts the SBC is “anemic” in fighting against sexual abuse is making “a false accusation.” *(resistance to abuse reform initiatives, intimidation, mishandling)*

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/sbc-leaders-recommend-against-national-database-of-clergy-sex-offenders-cms-12758/>

https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/save-yourself/article_71dab76a-5b6f-5928-bcbf-d5ccadf60c34.html

<https://baptistnews.com/article/sbc-officials-reject-idea-of-sex-offender-database/#.YWbuDyuSk2w>

2008: Sometime during what I think was the first half of 2008, an **Executive Committee member** called me on the phone to tell me about how a 16-year-old volunteer youth “minister” in his childhood church had, as he described it, sexually molested him when he was a 15-year-old in the church. He said that he had *immediately* forgiven the other boy. (He emphasized the “immediately” part over and over.) And given that he had been able to immediately forgive the other boy, he wondered why I couldn’t manage to forgive the pastor who had sexually abused

me. Without ever once bothering to ask me anything about how I actually felt, he then proceeded to lecture me on forgiveness. The conversation – mostly one-sided – went on at some length and at times, he even seemed angry at me. He ended by asking me to promise that I wouldn't tell anyone he had called me because he said it would ruin him if people knew that he had talked to me. (*mistreatment*)

February 2008: An **Executive Committee member** phoned me out of the blue to tell me that *he* didn't think I was evil. He was responding to the fact that Paige Patterson had said that I and others in SNAP were “evil-doers” and “just as reprehensible as sex criminals.” Patterson was apparently angry because we had recently sent a letter to seminary trustees urging them to suspend Patterson and conduct an investigation of lengthy media accounts about how he had covered for a reported serial predator. I think it's necessary to ask: In 2008, why did it still fall to SNAP to bring forward the 1991 media accounts about Patterson's egregious failures? In all those years, from 1991 to 2008 and beyond, why hadn't any other SBC leaders, including **Executive Committee members**, done the job of speaking out about Patterson's failures? I think this speaks yet again to the toxic culture in which no one felt able to confront leaders' wrongdoing. (*mishandling*)

The Executive Committee member, who wanted to assure me that *he* didn't think I was evil, nevertheless made me promise that I would never tell anyone he had talked with me. “It would be the end of me,” he said. So, even though he was willing to tell me privately that he didn't think I was evil, he wasn't willing to speak up publicly against Patterson's harsh rhetoric, and he himself still treated me as though I were a leper of some sort, fearing that he would be tainted if people even knew he had communicated with me. (*mistreatment*)

(documented in my book at pages 182-83)

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/sbc-seminary-president-labels-clergy-sex-abuse-victims-group-evil-doers-cms-12262/>

https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/what-would-jesus-say/article_74704bcd-f972-52d1-abb9-4f1c25bc88d1.html

http://stopbaptistpredators.org/press/southwestern_baptist_theological_seminary.html

February 20, 2008: **Executive Committee member Stephen Wilson** (who was then chairman of the EC Bylaws Workgroup) emailed me. 1) He said that I was one of the “experts” for their study and thought this news would land to my “amusement.” It didn't, because they had not actually consulted with me at all, and because I had previously suggested other experts who could help the SBC in creating effective institutional accountability structures, and the Workgroup hadn't consulted them either. In other words, by saying that I was one of their experts for the study, he was effectively dismissing the need for the study to *actually* consult with and listen to experts. 2) He wrote that he checked my blog every day. By this point in time, I had written 144 blog entries about Baptist clergy sex abuse and cover-ups. I had also logged scores of publicly reported Southern Baptist clergy sex abuse cases on my website. Wilson's remark told me he knew all this. But he did nothing. 3) He wrote that a woman had contacted him to tell her abuse story, and he had responded by referring her to me. So, he took on none of the burden of helping this SBC abuse survivor himself, or even listening to her, and instead placed the burden on me (someone with zero funding, no staff, and trying to maintain a full-time

job and a household while fielding far too many calls and emails from SBC abuse survivors). (*mishandling by omission, mistreatment, resistance to abuse reform initiatives*)
<https://christabrown.files.wordpress.com/2021/10/stephen-wilson-experts-email.jpg>

The irony of this was not lost on me either. In referring this survivor to me, he was referring her to someone whom his own colleagues had castigated as an “opportunist,” an “evil-doer,” and “a person of no integrity,” without Wilson himself having said a word in my defense. (This kind of thing has also happened with local and state denominational leaders referring survivors to me; so, I’ve had multiple occasions to ponder the irony of it.) I view this as not only mishandling *that* survivor’s abuse report, but also as mistreating *me*. The burden of so many other survivors’ stories should never have been mine; the faith group should have had a receptive place for them. 4) He wrote that he was “personally committed to following this issue far into the future.” Since he didn’t follow up with me and, as best I could tell, didn’t actually do much of anything, this was just more empty words. It is disingenuous and mistreating of survivors when religious leaders make hollow “commitments” without deeds that follow. (*mishandling, mistreatment*)

2007-08: Especially during 2007-2008, but also beyond that, I am aware that many Baptist clergy sex abuse survivors wrote to the **SBC president**, to the **Executive Committee president**, to **Executive Committee members who were on the Bylaws Workgroup**, and to **other Executive Committee members**. During that period of time, I kept the email addresses for these SBC officials on my old website, StopBaptistPredators.org, so that survivors could easily find them. <http://stopbaptistpredators.org/SBCexecutivecommittee.html>
 Many survivors told me about the dismissive and perfunctory responses they received, and many were greatly hurt by such callous responses. Not a single SBC abuse survivor ever told me about receiving any help from their communications with these SBC officials. (*mishandling, mistreatment*)

For example, consider these 2 men, “Brad” and “Bill,” who were molested by the same music minister of the same Southern Baptist church in Louisiana when they were boys. Independently, they each tried to report the minister to the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville. “Brad” forwarded to me his emails, which he had sent to multiple SBC officials, including **SBC president Frank Page**, **Executive Committee president Morris Chapman**, **Executive Committee members Mitch Gavin** (who was then chair of the Bylaws Workgroup), **Stephen Wilson** and **David Shepherd**, and ERLC president Richard Land. The response he got from **Mitch Gavin** sermonized Brad on forgiveness and then forwarded Brad’s email to **Executive Committee vice-president and general counsel Augie Boto**. Things got worse. Boto forwarded Brad’s email to the SBC’s general counsel **Jim Guenther** who dismissively responded with the standard “autonomy” excuse and claimed the SBC was powerless. So again, we see the pattern of forwarding survivors’ abuse reports to attorneys; this alone is a form of mishandling and intimidation. (*mishandling, mistreatment, intimidation*)

<https://baptistnews.com/article/sbcs-sexual-abuse-study-should-include-a-probe-of-its-own-files-on-reported-abuse/#.YVuhyCuSk2w>

(Note: At the time I submitted this column for publication, I forwarded all of Brad and Bill’s emails to David Wilkinson and Bob Allen at *Baptist News Global* who verified them prior to publication of my column.)

Based on the fact that many survivors told me they had contacted SBC officials, I think it reasonable to assume that there are many more SBC abuse survivors' reports hidden away in the files of Executive Committee members and/or in the files of attorneys Jim Guenther and Augie Boto. What happened to all those reports? Were they considered of so little significance that they were simply trashed? Or are they still sitting in a file cabinet? And if those abuse reports are still hidden in file cabinets, why aren't SBC officials doing something about them even now? (*mishandling, mistreatment*)

A couple more examples: 1) SBC survivor Dave Pittman talks about the emails and letters he sent to SBC leaders and his belief that they "are long gone or thrown into file 13." 2) Tina Bland-Ulery says: "I have many letters, with zero response...30 years." (*mishandling, mistreatment*)
https://twitter.com/Dave_Pittman/status/1447731302355046404
https://twitter.com/Dave_Pittman/status/1447731544467116034
<https://twitter.com/TinaUlery/status/1447933434798776324>

April-May 2007: Debbie Vasquez is another SBC clergy abuse survivor who wrote to a litany of SBC officials and received "a myriad of uncaring responses." She made public some of her communications with them, including communications with **SBC president Frank Page** and **Executive Committee vice-president Augie Boto**. She also wrote to "**most of the members of the Executive Committee charged with studying the feasibility of the predator database**" – i.e., to the members of the EC's Bylaws Workgroup – and not one offered to help her, counsel her, refer her to a therapist or even to meet with her face-to-face, as she requested. **Frank Page** responded defensively to Debbie and by attacking SNAP, the group that Debbie had turned to for support when no one else would help her. Page tried to discredit SNAP and disparage the motives of those of us trying to prod reform as being "nothing more than lawyer groups looking to raise their caseload." **Augie Boto** responded with equally empty words and also went on the attack against SNAP for, in his words, "placing blame" on Baptists and for being "sarcastic and pejorative." Both Page and Boto asked Debbie to keep their communications confidential and to not share them with anyone. Thus, by maligning SNAP, they worked to undermine Debbie's fragile trust in a support group, without offering her any alternative support. This constituted mistreatment of Debbie and also of me. Furthermore, with their request that Debbie not share anything they said, they effectively mimicked the pattern of secrecy used by clergy-abusers. (*mishandling, mistreatment, intimidation*)

https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/what-would-jesus-say/article_74704bcd-f972-52d1-abb9-4f1c25bc88d1.html
<https://goodfaithmedia.org/clergy-sex-abuse-survivor-questions-fairness-of-sbc-executive-committee-study-cms-9469/>
https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/the-bad-shepherd/article_28ff431a-0e0f-57b0-a47b-81909ca51e2c.html

How many more SBC survivors were shooed away with no help at all and then given the salt-in-the-wound of having SBC officials ask for "confidentiality" in their communications?

November 2008: Together with SNAP, I wrote to **SBC president Johnny Hunt**, again urging the creation of a safe place for victims to report abuse, an independent review panel for

assessing abuse reports and a database to assure information reaches people in the pews.

http://stopbaptistpredators.org/press/letter_johnny_hunt.html

February 2009: It took several months, but we finally received a response from Hunt who said “we are looking into that.” We never heard anything more. Those words – “looking into that” – were meaningless when Frank Page said them to *ABC 20/20* in 2007, and they were equally meaningless when Johnny Hunt said them to us. They were just a way to brush us off without actually doing anything. Wholly hollow words are a form of mistreatment.

(mistreatment, resistance to abuse reform initiatives)

<http://stopbaptistpredators.blogspot.com/2009/02/looking-into-that.html>

May 2014: SNAP leaders wrote to **SBC Executive Committee president Frank Page**, requesting an apology for his hurtful remarks that we in SNAP were opportunists motivated by personal gain. Not only did Page refuse to apologize, he affirmatively stood by his statement that we were “nothing more than opportunistic persons.” *(mistreatment)*

https://baptistnews.com/article/sbc-official-stands-by-criticism-of-snap/#.YWBx_iuSk2w

<https://watchkeep.org/2014/05/a-response-from-the-southern-baptist-convention-to-snap-we-stand-by-our-silence-and-do-nothingness-on-sex-abuse-in-our-churches/> (this site includes a complete copy of Page’s letter)

June 2016: In an open letter, SNAP wrote to **Executive Committee president Frank Page** asking that, at a minimum, a central “safe place” office be created where clergy sex abuse survivors could file reports about their alleged perpetrators. That was it. We were seeking a small incremental change by asking that they create an office to simply receive reports and log them (and our hope was that, if they started by just logging reports, over time they might realize the need to do more in the way of providing an independent professionally staffed office to assess allegations). Nothing happened. *(resistance to abuse reform initiatives)*

In addition, yet again, we asked **Frank Page**, as **SBC Executive Committee president**, to make a public apology for the public remarks he made in 2007 referring to SNAP as “nothing more than opportunistic persons.” No apology was made. (In the letter, we also predicted that, if the SBC didn’t take action, the next “Spotlight”-style exposé would focus on the SBC, and we were surely correct in that prediction, as manifested by the *Houston Chronicle*’s 2019 “Abuse of Faith” series.) *(mistreatment)*

<https://baptistnews.com/article/victims-group-asks-southern-baptists-to-create-safe-place-for-reporting-sexual-abuse/#.YVzyDSuSk2w>

<https://baptistnews.com/article/advocates-fault-sbc-presidents-record-on-child-sex-abuse/#.YVz0QCuSk2y>

<https://www.snapnetwork.org/mo-victims-beg-baptists-for-action-on-clergy-sex-cases>

June 2016: Steve Gaines was elected as SBC president. As senior pastor at Bellevue Baptist in Memphis, Gaines kept quiet about a staff minister’s sexual abuse of a child (until it was finally exposed by a blog), and this fact was much-publicized in Tennessee. To many SBC survivors, including myself, Gaines’ election conveyed the message that a clergy sex abuse cover-up was considered “no big deal” in the SBC. For Gaines to have been put forward as a candidate and then elected, there had to have been support from *a lot* of other SBC leaders, including **Executive Committee members**. But I saw not a single EC member, nor any other SBC leader,

who spoke up to say that Gaines' prior mishandling of clergy sex abuse should disqualify him from the SBC presidency. This is mishandling of abuse by omission. EC members cannot claim to care about clergy sex abuse cover-ups and then stay completely silent when a pastor *well-known* to have covered up abuse is a candidate for SBC president. (*mishandling by omission*)

<https://baptistnews.com/article/advocates-fault-sbc-presidents-record-on-child-sex-abuse/#.YWBz1yuSk2z>

<https://baptistnews.com/article/bellevue-baptist-fires-minister-after-investigation-of-sex-abuse/#.YV4SRCuSk2w>

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/sexual-abuse-at-bellevue-no-consequences/>

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/bellevue-report-faults-handling-of-ministers-sexual-abuse-cms-8460/>

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/bellevue-investigates-minister-for-moral-failure-cms-8308/>

https://www.bishop-accountability.org/news2006/11_12/2006_12_23_Jones_SeminaryHead.htm

March 2018: SBC Executive Committee president Frank Page resigned because of what was described as “a morally inappropriate relationship.” Secular media revealed that this “reportedly involved a female congregant under his care at a church he previously pastored.” This description means that Page’s conduct should rightly be characterized as sexual abuse. Yet, Page moved on to become the pastor of another Southern Baptist church, and as such, this also constitutes a mishandling of the abuse. I have seen no **Executive Committee member** speak out publicly to say that their own EC prior president should be disqualified from the pastorate.

Furthermore, in a leaked letter, former ERLC president Russell Moore revealed that he had asked **Executive Committee president Ronnie Floyd** about whether he planned to release accurate information about the nature of Page’s “moral failing,” and Floyd said the EC would not. (*abuse by an Executive Committee member, mishandling of abuse by both commission and omission*)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/04/30/in-a-metoo-moment-will-southern-baptists-hold-powerful-men-accountable/?noredirect=on>

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/religion/2018/03/27/frank-s-page-top-southern-baptist-leader-announces-retirement/461829002/>

<https://baptistnews.com/article/southern-baptist-leader-steps-down-over-moral-indiscretion/#.YWbsxCuSk2w>

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/religion/2020/02/14/frank-page-southern-baptist-leader-resigned-inappropriate-relationship-leading-south-carolina-church/4753620002/>

<https://baptistblog.files.wordpress.com/2021/06/rdm-final-letter.pdf>

May 19, 2019: In a private memo that was subsequently leaked, **Executive Committee vice-president and general counsel Augie Boto** dismissed the scope of sexual abuse in the SBC as being statistically insignificant and demonized Rachael Denhollander and me as being part of a “satanic scheme.” Further, he said we had “gone to the SBC looking for sexual abuse.” The disparaging meanness of these remarks is obvious. The timing of them also shows Boto’s duplicity. Just 3 months earlier, when interviewed by the *Houston Chronicle*, Boto had made nice-sounding remarks for public consumption. This is an example of the difference survivors have often experienced between SBC leaders’ public presentation and their private dealings, and it is part of why we survivors have learned that, on this subject, the public statements of SBC leaders are not to be trusted. (*mistreatment, resistance to abuse reform initiatives*)

<https://baptistnews.com/article/sbc-executive-committee-declines-to-entertain-the-idea-of-broadening-the-scope-of-its-investigation-of-itself/#.YUFDNfeSk2y>

<https://julieroys.com/august-boto-satanic-scheme/>
<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Southern-Baptists-to-again-meet-under-the-cloud-16241733.php>
<https://www.chron.com/news/investigations/article/Southern-Baptist-Augie-Boto-answers-questions-13592141.php>

May 2021: In a letter to **SBC president J.D. Greear**, which was subsequently leaked, ERLC president Russell Moore wrote this: “**Leadership in the Executive Committee**, at the trustee level with **Mike Stone** and his allies, and at the staff level by former **Executive Vice-President Augie Boto**, have stonewalled many attempts at reform for the sake of the sexually abused. You know that this has happened even after they have given publicly what appeared at the time to be very good and open statements about the matter. And you know that when their stonewalling has failed, you and I have not called them out publicly on what they did privately.”

<https://baptistblog.files.wordpress.com/2021/06/rdm-final-letter.pdf>

This speaks volumes, not only about the Executive Committee’s resistance to abuse reform initiatives, but also about the toxic and hostile culture that was fostered by the Executive Committee. It was a culture in which no one felt able to criticize leaders, not even other leaders with power, platform and position. As Moore states, though both he and Greear knew about the EC’s stonewalling, neither he nor Greear called it out. Moore’s letter also speaks to the duplicity of what was going on, as Executive Committee leaders acted privately to stonewall reform efforts even while making good-sounding statements publicly. (*resistance to abuse reform initiatives, mishandling*)

In this letter, Moore also spoke about the “undiluted rage” that he and Greear had faced from Executive Committee officers and about the EC’s “horrific actions behind the scenes.” In addition, he described the “constant backroom attempts to stop any forward momentum” on dealing with abuse, “psychological terror,” “mafia-level intimidation tactics,” and “endless psychological warfare aimed at silencing through intimidation.” He described the “spiritual and psychological abuse of sexual abuse survivors by the Executive Committee itself” as well as “a pattern of attempted intimidation of those who speak on such matters.” (Moore’s description of a hostile culture was consistent with what he had written some 15 months earlier in a letter to ERLC trustees, describing EC “tactics that have been used to create a culture where countless children have been torn to shreds, where women have been raped and then ‘broken down.’”) (*intimidation, resistance to abuse reform initiatives, mistreatment*)

<https://religionnews.com/2021/06/02/russell-moore-to-erlc-trustees-they-want-me-to-live-in-psychological-terror/>

Moore concluded his letter to Greear by stating that he felt “conscience-driven to put down in writing” what he had seen, but it’s worth noting that he wrote this revelatory letter on his last day in SBC leadership when he was departing the ERLC to become pastor at a church not part of the SBC. Thus, it was only when he was on his way out the door that Moore felt safe enough to be able to speak out publicly and with specificity about what he had encountered in the conduct of Executive Committee members. Moore’s situation is demonstrative of how, *even if* people are well-intentioned, if they work within a system that is wholly lacking in effective structures for

accountability, they will be unlikely to be able to effect change within that system. Such is the nature of the SBC. (*intimidation*)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/06/08/decline-fall-southern-baptist-convention/>

Moore's letter revealed what survivors had been telling about for many years. But it took the telling of it by a white male elite insider for many people to finally hear. As appreciative as I am for the revelations that Moore brought forth, I also believe the very fact that it took someone of his stature in order to generate wide concern is, in and of itself, indicative of how deep the problem runs. Why were the voices of hundreds of survivors not enough?

As reported in the *Washington Post*, factual details of Moore's letter were corroborated by three employees "who said they needed to remain anonymous to keep their current jobs." Again, this is still more evidence of the toxic no-criticism-allowed culture that the **Executive Committee** cultivated – a culture that served both to squash people bringing forward reports of sexual abuse and to squelch any criticism of the EC for its mishandling. (*mishandling by omission, intimidation, resistance to abuse reform initiatives*)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2021/06/05/russell-moore-southern-baptist-sex-abuse-allegations/>

<https://www.christianpost.com/news/sbc-leaders-mishandled-crisis-of-sexual-abuse.html>

September 2021: For years, SBC presidents and Executive Committee members have publicly put forward a seemingly endless verbal stream of platitudes and professed caring about clergy sex abuse. This includes the words of prior **SBC president Frank Page** about "precious children," the promise of prior **SBC president J.D. Greear** for "bold steps," and the words of former **SBC Executive Committee president Morris Chapman** about how the SBC "shall stand as a sentry in the midst of God's children." The examples could go on and on. They tend to proliferate particularly after media exposés.

Two recent 2021 examples are these: 1) **SBC Executive Committee president Ronnie Floyd**: "The SBC Executive Committee stands against all forms of sex abuse, mishandling of abuse, mistreatment of victims, and any intimidation of abuse survivors;" 2) **SBC Executive Committee member Joe Knott**: "Nobody here is pro-pedophile."

<https://twitter.com/SBCExecComm/status/1440043038869372932>

<https://twitter.com/RobDownenChron/status/1440409481150566407>

Joe Knott's statement is cringe-worthy and falls in the ludicrous-to-say-it category. Floyd's statement is much smoother, but in the absence of action, equally meaningless. This is exemplary of what we survivors have seen and heard from countless SBC leaders for many years: wholly hollow words without deeds.

This kind of duplicity, in and of itself, is a type of mistreatment of survivors. And platitudes without action are a form of mishandling. No matter how nice the words may sound, when they are void of meaningful action, they are not survivor-centric but institution-centric. They are

performative. Toothless words rub salt in the wounds of survivors and are *not* caring in nature. (*mistreatment, mishandling*)

"Church leaders who speak empathetic words and make empty promises without substantive and self-sacrificing actions are exploiting and re-victimizing the abuse survivors who still have hope that the church will do 'the right thing'." – Boz Tchividjian

2007-2021: Not only did the **SBC Executive Committee** fail to act on individual clergy sex abuse cases reported to it, and not only did it fail to implement structural safeguards based on my specific requests for action and the cases I logged on my StopBaptistPredators.org website, it didn't even take meaningful action in response to major media exposés. For example, nearly 15 years have passed since the *ABC 20/20* exposé documented church-hopping SBC “preacher-predators.” Then the Associated Press revealed that insurance company data showed Protestants, including Baptists, likely had as big a clergy sex abuse problem as Catholics. In response to these major media reports and others, the **SBC Executive Committee** repeatedly chose institutional inertia. They knew about the extent of the problem; they knew about the awful patterns of church-hopping clergy-predators, church cover-ups and maltreatment of survivors; and in the face of all of it, over and over, they chose to do near-nothing. (*mishandling by omission*)

Now it's been nearly three years since yet another major media exposé, the “Abuse of Faith” series done by the *Houston Chronicle & San Antonio Express-News*. It was a series that made clear the SBC's clergy sex abuse problem was more than isolated cases and was instead a systemic problem in which the very “structure of the SBC...enabled predators to move undetected and stifled reforms to prevent abuse.” Yet, in three years' time, though there has been much talk, there has been very little in the way of deeds. Even with this current investigation, it still remains to be seen whether it will result in truly meaningful reforms, or only in more talk and more institutional image-repair maneuvers. (*mishandling by omission, resistance to abuse reform initiatives*)

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/As-SBC-confronts-abuse-crisis-other-faiths-watch-14920019.php>

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/insurance-companies-shed-light-on-extent-of-sex-abuse-in-protestant-churches-cms-9149/>

https://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/16/us/16protestant.html?_r=1&

2019-2021 Credentials Committee: In February 2019, while I and other SBC survivors were still reeling in shock from the fact that “only 10” churches had even been designated for consideration – a minimization from the get-go – the **Executive Committee's** Bylaws Workgroup immediately announced that “no further inquiry” was needed for 7 of the 10. Reportedly, **Executive Committee officer Augie Boto** even called one of the churches to apologize. This purported EC “inquiry” was the predecessor for the Credentials Committee, and the EC's dismissive approach set the precedent for the Credentials Committee process. It was an approach that focused on prior judicial determinations, thereby abdicating institutional accountability and assuring that few churches would *ever* face scrutiny. In short, it was a deeply flawed approach from the get-go and filled with Catch-22 standards. (*mishandling, resistance to abuse reform initiatives*)

<https://baptistnews.com/article/whats-wrong-with-the-proposed-sexual-abuse-amendment-to-the-sbc-constitution/#.YWDUMiuSk2z>

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Southern-Baptist-leaders-quickly-clear-7-13643282.php>

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/religion/article/Southern-Baptist-church-says-it-s-uncovered-10-16247770.php>

The Credentials Committee process effectively set survivors up to be re-wounded in the telling of their stories into an impotent process that was never designed to render care for survivors or to effectively hold accountable clergy perpetrators, their enablers, or the churches that harbored them. It was at its very conception an institution-centric approach that appeared more oriented toward optics and institutional image-management. Even worse, because it provided no protections for complainants, because it wasn't staffed with experts, and because the Committee members lacked adequate training, it was a flat-out unsafe process, not only for survivors but for anyone else who might want to report abusive clergy or churches that harbor them. In this column, I wrote more about the problems of the Credentials Committee process. (*mishandling, mistreatment*)

https://baptistnews.com/article/sbcs-new-reporting-process-again-fails-clergy-sex-abuse-survivors-whats-needed-is-an-independent-review-panel/#.YWDD_iuSk2x

The ineffectiveness of the Credentials Committee process is evidenced by the fact that, in 2 1/3 years' time, only a few small churches have been disfellowshipped for having *known* sex offenders in the pulpit. In other words, even as to those few, it wasn't the Committee that did the job of bringing truth to light and exposing clergy sex abusers and complicit churches; that job had *already* been done by the media and the criminal justice system. In the face of a pervasive problem, this isn't progress; it's performative. Moreover, survivors should not have to muster media attention in order to gain even the tiniest measure of accountability. (*mishandling*)

<https://religionnews.com/2020/05/04/theres-a-new-baptist-sex-abuser-database-but-sbc-action-is-still-needed/>

In light of all this, I do not view the development of the Credentials Committee process as even being a tiny step forward. It was so ineptly done, so ineffective in design, so unsafe for survivors, and so uncaring of survivors that I view it as having been yet another institutional betrayal and yet another hollow public display. It was an institutional face-saving gesture designed to obfuscate the lack of any truly meaningful action. (*resistance to abuse reform initiatives, mishandling, mistreatment*)

Please don't misunderstand me. I have long urged that clergy sex abusers should be removed from the pulpit and that churches who persist in harboring them should be disfellowshipped. But without a legitimate independent process for objectively and professionally assessing clergy sex abuse reports and determining credible allegations, a Credentials Committee process winds up being, at best, mostly toothless. An independent assessment process must come *first* so as to provide the information on which a disfellowship decision could be made.

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/opinion/outlook/article/What-Southern-Baptists-must-do-to-fight-clergy-13961274.php> (if paywall, see link for a pdf version below)

<https://christabrown.files.wordpress.com/2021/10/what-southern-baptists-must-do-to-fight-clergy-sex-abuse.pdf>

<https://baptistnews.com/article/sexual-abuse-in-the-sbc-what-will-it-take-to-prompt-meaningful-action/#.YUX7hiuSk2w>

During these past 15 years, I have gone through multiple periods in which I received volumes of hate mail, awful blog comments, vitriolic phone calls, and occasionally worse. For example, I received one anonymous message threatening to cut off my head. I also received a large brown envelope with an anonymous 25-page diatribe delivered straight to my doorstep. Because it was delivered not long after I had moved, I realized that the sender had tracked me. These were two of the most pointedly frightening examples, but I also found the sheer volume of vitriol I received to be incredibly disturbing. In addition to receiving a smorgasbord of slurs, it was also terrifying to repeatedly encounter the rage of so many men determined to send me to Hell and to recount in vivid violent Tarantino-style images exactly the kind of Hell they yearned to see me experience. These things had an enormous impact on my life and on my personhood, impossible to overstate.

I place responsibility for this harm on the shoulders of SBC leaders, including **Executive Committee members**. When the highest leaders of a powerful religious institution publicly castigate a survivor with poisonous dehumanizing rhetoric (and no telling what they say in private), it fosters a hostile climate and has an insidious trickle-down effect. An SBC president publicly castigated me as an opportunist. *Baptist Press* printed that I made false accusations. An EC member denigrated me as “a person of no integrity.” Augie Boto denounced me as part of a “satanic scheme.” A seminary president called me an “evil-doer” and “as reprehensible as sex criminals,” and no one in **Executive Committee** leadership said a word to call him out for it. (And actually, there has also been some telling of the kinds of things they say in private. Former ERLC president Russell Moore’s May 2021 letter stated that survivors were referred to with “spurious biblical analogies,” as “Potiphar’s wife,” and as “crazy.” He wrote: “The conversations in these closed-door meetings were far worse than anything Southern Baptists knew – or the outside world could report.”) <https://baptistblog.files.wordpress.com/2021/06/rdm-final-letter.pdf>

When the highest leaders set this kind of an example, and when no one else in leadership calls them out for it, no one should be surprised to learn that there are some in SBC life who will then take that meanness even further. When a survivor is called “evil” and “satanic,” it’s not a far stretch for others to conclude that it’s okay to dehumanize them still more. By failing to censure such harsh rhetoric – or to even say a word of criticism for it – **Executive Committee** members effectively assure that many others in SBC life will consider such poisonous language as license for brutishness. It is the kind of failure that fosters bullying, intimidation, and more abuse. (*mistreatment by commission and omission*)

The damage I suffered from this is not damage from the sexual abuse; it is damage emanating at least in part from other SBC leaders, including members of the **Executive Committee**, who have been a part of so much meanness, both by commission and omission. The wounds from all of this continue to fester. I wrote about a bit of it here, but in truth, this barely skims the surface of it. (*mistreatment by commission and omission*)

<https://baptistnews.com/article/cancer-awareness-and-hell-wishing/#.YWCAAiuSk2x>

Concluding Remarks

“True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt, the truth... It is a risky undertaking but in the end it is worthwhile, because in the end only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing.” – Desmond Tutu

I count myself a survivor, not only because I survived more than 30 sexual assaults committed by a Southern Baptist pastor when I was a kid, but also, and perhaps even more so, because I survived every attempt of this powerful faith group to silence me.

Countless other SBC abuse survivors have in fact been silenced and will likely never attempt to speak up again. The survivors you hear from now are but the tiniest tip of the iceberg.

Between 2006 and 2012, just working in my spare time, I logged 167 Southern Baptist clergy sex abuse cases into a small database on my StopBaptistPredators.org website. Many of the cases had multiple victims. With every case I logged, I wondered: “Will this be enough? Will this finally be enough that SBC officials will see the scope and horror of the problem and realize they need to do something?”

It never was. It never was enough.

Even after I abandoned the logging of SBC abuse cases, I continued to blog about clergy sex abuse until 2016 and ultimately wrote a total of 571 blog postings. That was never enough either. Finally, I realized that, on this subject, the difficulty wasn’t that SBC leaders didn’t know the extent of the problem; the difficulty was that they didn’t care. Year after year, they made a conscious unconscionable choice to do near-nothing, and the cost of that choice has been horrific.

Many of the cases I logged and stories I blogged involved people with whom I had communicated and with whom I had walked alongside for some small part of their path. So, I am deeply aware of the enormous suffering that the SBC, through action and inaction, has caused in so many lives – lives decimated not only by clergy sex abuse but also by the exponentially magnified trauma wrought by church cover-ups, denominational do-nothingness, and an entire institutional system that turns its back. These lives are not abstractions for me.

Constantly, I am haunted by these questions: How many kids and congregants could have been spared horrific harm if only the Executive Committee had taken action back in 2006 when I first wrote to them, urging specific concrete steps? And how many survivors could have been spared the re-traumatizing hell of trying to report clergy sex abuse into a system that consistently turns its back?

The SBC Executive Committee’s longstanding resistance to abuse reforms has now yielded a whole new crop of clergy sex abuse victims and of survivors re-traumatized in their efforts to

report. So now I ask the next question: How many *more* wounded kids and congregants will it take before the SBC finally engages meaningful action?

The system is broken and major surgery is needed to fix it. The recommendations that Guidepost makes will be critical. If the recommendations amount to little more than Band-Aids, then the hope engendered by this investigation will be thwarted. A great many survivors will feel betrayed yet again and the harm will be further enlarged.

A systemic problem requires a systemic solution.

In this *Houston Chronicle* column, I wrote in some detail about the kind of meaningful action that's needed, and I ask you to earnestly consider it. Without cooperative structures for independently assessing clergy sex abuse reports, for record-keeping on credible allegations, and for information-sharing among congregations, the SBC's clergy sex abuse problem will persist. <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/opinion/outlook/article/What-Southern-Baptists-must-do-to-fight-clergy-13961274.php> (Also, here is a pdf version: <https://christabrown.files.wordpress.com/2021/10/what-southern-baptists-must-do-to-fight-clergy-sex-abuse.pdf>)

Also, for the better healing of SBC clergy sex abuse survivors, they deserve the communal validation of seeing this institution squarely acknowledge the wrongs done against them and of seeing abusive clergy institutionally named when they are credibly accused. Survivors deserve to have truth made known, deceptions dispelled, and dignity restored. They deserve to feel safety for themselves and others, and this too could be better facilitated by a system in which clergy sex abusers are institutionally named.

All SBC clergy abuse survivors deserve these things, regardless of whether they meet anyone's standard of being a "good survivor" and regardless of whether they remain in any way connected to the SBC. They also deserve concrete aid to assist in their long-term healing and to compensate at least in small part for the harm. This would mean some sort of independently administered program for restitution payments to those with credible allegations, similar to the sorts of compensation programs that now exist in many Catholic dioceses.

I am now 68 years old and have lived my life without receiving care or support from this faith group. Tommy Gilmore is now 80 years old, and he has had nothing but care and support from this faith group. I have had all sorts of ugly things said about me, and even said publicly by some of the SBC's highest leaders. My character has been repeatedly maligned. By contrast, no SBC official has ever publicly said one negative word about him.

I blame Tommy Gilmore for the bottomless hell of what I experienced, *and* I also blame the entirety of the SBC system, which includes the SBC Executive Committee. It is a system that never took what he did seriously, that enabled him to continue in ministry despite others knowing, that fostered secrecy and heaped on shame, that actively worked to silence me, that left on me the burden of trying to warn others, and that, to this day, has never imposed any consequence on him, not even the slight consequence of being institutionally named. Nor has it

imposed any consequence on those who covered for him or who treated me in such miserable dehumanizing ways.

This is not just a matter of a few bad apples – or even of several hundred bad apples. It is the whole of the institution that not only fails SBC abuse survivors but flat-out betrays us. The trauma and terror of THAT will last a lifetime. It would have been one thing to come to terms with the reality of an individual who did terrible things, but it is quite another to try to come to terms with an entire system that enabled these horrific abuses, turned a blind eye, covered them up, did nothing about them, and treated survivors like dirt.

I feel the weight of what I have written in this memorandum, and though I have done my best, I know how inadequate it is. The actions and inactions of the Executive Committee have traumatically affected the lives of so very many clergy sex abuse survivors, and what I have recounted is only a tiny portion that I could readily document. For me personally, the very process of writing this has taken a toll; it is weighty indeed.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I pray that the stories of people sexually abused in Southern Baptist churches and entities will split your hearts wide open. I pray that you will make recommendations for truly meaningful structural reforms that will better assure the safety of kids and congregants in Southern Baptist churches, and that will protect SBC clergy abuse survivors from the re-traumatizing hell of reporting into a do-nothing system without safeguards. I pray that your efforts may help to restore honor and dignity for many SBC clergy abuse survivors and that your work may bring forth a small measure of justice.

The Southern Baptist Convention has a moral obligation to protect the lives, bodies and humanity of kids and congregants in its affiliated churches, to provide care and validation for ALL who have been sexually abused by Southern Baptist clergy, to ensure accountability for abusers and enablers, and to create systems that will ensure these inhumane and unconscionable travesties do not persist into future generations.

“Follow justice and justice alone.” – Deuteronomy 16:20