

Investigating people of trust

Music minister charged with deviant acts in church

By Brenda Cannon Stancil
Staff Writer

In an article that brought a great deal of controversy to The Examiner, a local music minister was alleged to have committed multiple deviant sexual acts including indecent exposure, masturbation in the buildings, lewd language and fondling of an employee, in the church where he served.

Bernie Johnson denied the claims and proclaimed his innocence up to within an hour of his court date in a Jefferson County courtroom. Shortly before his trial was to begin, he chose to accept a plea bargain. Johnson appeared in Judge John Paul Davis' Jefferson County Court of Law No. 3 on Wednesday, July 13, and instructed his attorney to accept the plea bargain agreement for the charge of indecent exposure to an adult. According to court records, Johnson pleaded "no contest" and received a judicial conviction.

Judge Davis then sentenced Johnson to 90 days in jail or 18 months probation, an \$800 fine, plus court

costs and fees, 100 hours of community service and a special admonition not to be within 100 feet of Charlene Hargraves, his accuser, who had been a coworker at the First Baptist Church of Hamshire.

Judge Davis asked Hargraves if she preferred seeing Johnson go to jail or serve probation. Hargraves replied that she did not think jail would help Johnson and she hoped that the probation where he would be carefully monitored would be sufficient to help both Johnson and his family begin to recover.

Johnson was the minister of music for First Baptist of Hamshire when the incidents that led to the indictment against him were reported. Johnson was accused of perpetrating the acts against Hargraves, a 52-year-old coworker. Hargraves is a lifelong resident of Chambers County and was in charge of the custodial duties at the large church plant as well as helping in other areas of the ministry.

The pastor of the church, Joe Constantine, said that neither he nor any members of his church were aware of



Bernie Johnson continues to serve as the minister of music at the First Baptist Church of Winnie.

the misbehavior until Hargraves reported it. Once the pastor became aware of the incidents, he called upon

the help of a retired Beaumont police officer Bill Jordan, who is also a member of the church. Jordan was instrumental in getting a video camera placed in the church building and within one week of the camera's installation, Johnson was captured on tape performing an act of masturbation in the church hallway. This videotape was turned over to the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department and remains a viable part of the file.

The personnel committee of the church, led by Beverly Martin, met with Johnson and after he was faced with the testimony backed by evidence, accepted the opportunity presented to him to resign and seek counseling for both he and his family. Constantine said that as a part of the solution to the problem, the local church agreed to send both Johnson and his wife for counseling and rehabilitation in Colorado at the church's expense. A part of the further counseling agreement was that Johnson was not to seek employment in a

See MINISTER on page 27 A

TEACHER

from page 22 A

a piece of luggage in her daughter's closet, she saw movement out of the corner of her eye towards the floor. (She) stated that she then looked down and observed a male, who had rolled himself up into a little ball and was trying to hide."

UPDATE: Parker was arrested and charged. He is currently out on bond awaiting his trial, which is scheduled to begin in March 2006. Parker was also terminated from his position at BISD when the new charges were made public.

Sexual assault of a child and improper educator student relationship charges are both classified as second-degree felonies. If convicted, Parker could face up to 20 years in prison and a fine of up to \$10,000 or both.

Jerry Jordan can be reached at 409-832-1400, ext. 225, or at jerry@theexaminer.com.



Beaumont Health & Fitness Membership:
\$1.00 a day

Good health & the peace of mind that comes with it:
\$\$\$Priceless\$\$\$

Introducing...

Stress Solutions

Beaumont Health & Fitness is now offering a full line of massages, body wraps and facials. Call for details and appointment.

"WE HAVE THE SOLUTION TO YOUR STRESS!!"

BEAUMONT HEALTH & FITNESS FOR SINGLES, COUPLES & FAMILIES

6282 PHELAN BLVD. • BMT • 409.860.5111