

# Minister charged with repeated counts of indecent exposure

By Brenda Cannon Stancil  
Staff Writer

First Baptist Church of Winnie's minister of music and education has been accused of lewd sexual acts and charged with indecent exposure to an adult. Bernie Johnson allegedly exposed himself, openly masturbated and fondled a co-worker on the church property during his tenure as a staff member of First Baptist Church in Hamshire. The co-worker at the Hamshire church, Charline Hargraves, initiated the charges against Johnson and the case is under investigation, according to Brent Weaver of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department. Her allegations were substantiated by the evidence caught on videotape of the minister committing sexual acts on the church property.

Johnson has not been indicted by a Jefferson County Grand Jury at this time.

Hargraves, whose former name prior to a divorce was Jones, is 52 years old has been an active member of the church for more than a decade and a full-time employee for more than five years. She is in charge of custodial matters and often helps in other areas of the large ministry as needed. Her co-workers speak well of her character and her work ethic.

Johnson, who has a wife and son, had been on the staff approximately two years when the first incident occurred. Johnson came to the church from a position at the East Texas Baptist Encampment located in Newton. He also served as an evangelist, spoke in other churches and related ministries and is known as charismatic, engaging and extremely talented.

Beverly Martin, chair of the personnel committee for First Baptist Church of Hamshire, said, "The church personnel committee follows the standard protocol for investigation of background for all new employees. References are checked and the resume is considered for unexplained time gaps and inconsistencies. Mr. Johnson's employment was handled in the same manner and nothing unusual came to light during

this investigation."

Hargraves said in a formal affidavit given to retired Beaumont Police Officer Bill Jordan, who is also a member of the church in Hamshire, "Bernie began making sexual comments to me, more or less in a joking manner. He later got bolder and bolder and even though other people would be in other parts of the church, he started saying them more often. I began to be fearful of being in any place in the buildings alone." Hargraves testifies that on one occasion, Johnson called her into his office where he asked her to hold some computer wires to be fed through a hole in the corner bookcase. "He was on the floor under the bookcase and he reached up with his hand and grabbed me on the crotch. I backed away from him as quickly as I could." Hargraves remembers another

guess my self-esteem was pretty low, too, and I ended up seeing the doctor. I thought here I am a divorced woman who needs this job badly. I had no real marketable skills and here he was a staff member, a good musician and singer, excellent with people. He even told me that if I told anyone about what had happened, they would not believe me over him." Hargraves added, "But the main reason I did not tell anyone or report Bernie's actions to Brother Constantine, the pastor, is that I did not want to have any part in hurting my church. I love this ministry and I dearly love these people. I was so frightened."

The affidavit states that Hargraves was in the church secretary's office separating Sunday school material one day when Johnson entered the room and sat down to help her. The secretary's desk has a big

touch his penis or to rub it. I said no and fled as best I could without calling attention to what was happening."

Hargraves said, "The thing that probably is the sickest of all is that he would often come to me after one of these incidences and apologize profusely. He would say how sorry he was and admit to having a severe problem. He told me he needed help and I even quoted 1 Corinthians 10:13 to remind him of God's help. The verse says, 'There hath no temptation taken you but such is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.' It did not stop. In fact, it got worse."

Another incident Hargraves recounts is one day on Johnson's regular day off, he showed up at the church. "He was dressed in some type of stretchy shorts. The church secretary asked me to hand him some papers in his office. When I attempted to hand him the papers, he lifted up one leg of his shorts and exposed his erect penis and laughed."

Hargraves said in the last months of Johnson's employment at the church, he started masturbating in various parts of the building. "He would sometimes use toilet paper or paper towels to catch his semen when he ejaculated. Other times, he would just ejaculate on the countertop and leave it to be cleaned up. Several times, he got a styrofoam cup from the coffee stand and ejaculated into it. He would sit it down and tell me that he left it for me."

Hargraves, who is talented musically and often sang solos and participated in the choir, dropped out and refused to attend anything that Johnson was in charge of at the church. "He is a very popular figure and people love him," said Hargraves. "I just did not know what to do. When I did tell Brother Joe what was wrong, he was completely in shock and disbelief."

Pastor Constantine said that he prayed about the matter and called in Bill Jordan, a retired Beaumont police officer and a member of the church. "I

needed help in knowing how to handle this very complex matter," said the pastor.

Jordan installed a hidden video camera in the air conditioning ductwork of the choir practice room with the lens facing the men's bathroom Johnson often used.

Hargraves said, "The camera was installed on September 23rd, which was a Tuesday. On Tuesday, a week later, the 30th of September, Bernie came back to the church from a funeral and was still wearing his dress shirt and pants. I was outside near the new family life center and he immediately said that it was such a pretty day that it would be a good one to be lying naked somewhere. In a few minutes, Bernie went to the bathroom and disrobed. His pants were completely off and as I walked by, he opened the door exposing his erect penis. He was playing with it and he begged me to 'come and touch it.' I said no. He then asked me to 'come over and perform oral sex on him.' I said no again. Bernie reached over and picked up a cup and ejaculated into it. The cup and its contents were given to Brother Jordan. All of this is on the videotape that has now been turned over to the sheriff's department."

The alleged incidents started taking place in 2003. When questioned about the length of time between the incident and the reporting to the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, Hargraves said, "The pastor reported the incidents to the church personnel committee and they met with Bernie. He chose to resign and leave the church and I was satisfied. He was out of the ministry and not in a position to hurt anyone else, at least, in the church and in the role as a minister. He took a job at Grainger Industrial Supply, according to mutual friends, and moved. However, when he accepted a position as music and education minister at First Baptist Church of Winnie, I felt compelled to file formal charges. I did not want to see him do the same thing to other people as he did to me at our church."

Johnson is employed by First Baptist Church in Winnie at the present time and is

---

**"Ministers and church leaders must be held to a higher standard of conduct. Their lives affect the lives of so many others."**

---

— Beverly Martin, chair of personnel committee for  
First Baptist Church, Hamshire

---

incident that she said is indelibly printed on her mind. "I was wiping down tables in the fellowship hall and Bernie came up behind me and wrapped his arms around me with his body pressed up against my rear. He began to grind on my rear and said, 'This is what you want, isn't it?' He also grabbed both of my breasts through my clothes." According to Hargraves, Johnson grabbed her breasts and attempted to fondle them on several other occasions.

Hargraves said she was experiencing a bad time in her life and became severely depressed over what happened. She was going through a divorce from her husband, had a daughter about to be married in the same church, had a sister battling cancer. Hargraves felt she needed her job at the church and depended on it for financial support. "I

partition above it and Johnson was on the side away from the secretary and the door. She said that after they had worked for a while, he made a noise to get her attention and when she looked over at him, Johnson had unzipped his pants and his penis was erect and exposed. "Another time, Bernie was in his office and I was in Brother Joe's office folding church bulletins for the service. He got my attention and when I looked, he was standing up with his erect penis out so that anyone could see it. He was so brazen with his acts."

Hargraves swore that at other times she would walk down the long hallway and Johnson would be standing in the doorway to the bathroom by the church kitchen. "He would either be completely undressed or his pants would be down around his knees or ankles. He would ask me to come and

See MINISTER on page 7 A