

SNAP

P.O. Box 6416
Chicago, Illinois 60680

August 2, 2006

Dr. Frank Page
President, Southern Baptist Convention
Taylors First Baptist Church
200 West Main Street
Taylors, SC 29687

Via Certified Mail Return Receipt Requested

Dear Dr. Page:

Congratulations on your election as president of the Southern Baptist Convention. We know you face many issues within your denomination, but we urge you to give special attention to the devastating problem of clergy sexual abuse. We want to help.

SNAP is an organization of men and women who were sexually abused and sexually assaulted by clergy. For 17 years, SNAP has worked to assist clergy abuse survivors in healing and to protect others against such abuse. For many of us, working to stop abuse in the future is an essential part of our recovery process. We want to assure that what happened to us will not happen to others.

SNAP was founded by survivors of abuse committed by Catholic priests, but we have been receiving more frequent calls about abuse committed by Southern Baptist clergy. We are very concerned. No faith group is immune from this crime. Predators are known to seek out positions that provide power over and access to the young and vulnerable – and the ministry is such a position. Your own Southern Baptist scholars have reported that clergy sex abuse is as prevalent among Protestants as among Catholics. Yet they point out that Southern Baptists have “no national policies,” that abuse is “routinely covered up,” and that “church officials largely have not been responsive.” These statements are not merely academic words. Their accuracy is reflected in the actual, documented experience of one of our members, Christa Brown. The horror of her experience rests not only in the crime of what a Southern Baptist minister did to her years ago as a kid, but also in the hostile, hurtful, and inadequate responses that were made in the present day when she reported the abuse.

The man she reported was a prominent Southern Baptist children’s minister. In fact, he was the minister in charge of child care arrangements for the 50,000 delegates who gathered in Atlanta for the Southern Baptist Convention’s annual meeting twenty years ago. A Dallas church recently issued a stark apology for the “very serious sexual abuse” that this minister inflicted on Ms. Brown when she was a girl. Another Southern Baptist minister has made a sworn statement showing that he knew about the abuse even years ago, and yet the man was allowed to move on to other churches in Texas, Georgia and Florida. His name was placed in the secret file of

“known offenders” at the Baptist General Convention of Texas. According to the BGCT’s published policy, this means that a church reported him and that there was “substantial evidence the abuse took place” or else a confession. But even with his name in that file, and even though Ms. Brown’s report could be readily substantiated by another minister, and even though she notified 18 Southern Baptist leaders in 4 different states, the man was still able to continue in ministry at a prominent church in Florida. Finally, Ms. Brown gave up on Baptist leaders and filed a lawsuit. Only then, when a Florida reporter wrote about Ms. Brown’s lawsuit and the matter became public knowledge, was the man finally made to resign.

When 18 church and denominational leaders can be informed of a substantiated report involving a minister’s sexual abuse of a minor...and the man remains in ministry...then this, the largest Protestant denomination in the country, has a serious problem. When victims come forward, others are protected, and yet how many victims will come forward when a Southern Baptist church threatens to sue a victim who reports the crime? And how will such abusive ministers be made known when, rather than reaching out to warn others, a Southern Baptist church tries to get the victim’s signature on a contract for secrecy?

We urge you to learn from, and not to mimic, the mistakes that have been made by so many Catholic leaders. If kids are to be safe, Southern Baptist leaders cannot maintain an ostrich-in-the-sand approach of ignoring the problem of clergy predators.

SNAP urges you to take action for the protection of the young and vulnerable in the future and to reach out to those who were wounded in the past. We ask you to meet with us at SBC headquarters in Nashville so that we may sit down together and see what can be done to make Southern Baptist churches safer .

Specifically, we ask you to launch an immediate investigation into the egregious denominational mishandling of Christa Brown’s report of sexual abuse and to institute accountability measures. Please use the mishandling of Brown’s report as a launchpad for change. Questions need to be asked. Why was Gilmore able to remain in ministry even after so many leaders knew of Brown’s substantiated report? At the national level, no one even bothered to assist Ms. Brown in locating the perpetrator. To the contrary, the SBC responded to her report by writing that it had no record the man was still in ministry – and yet he was at a megachurch in Florida. Surely this denomination can find a way to at least track its own ministers across state lines.

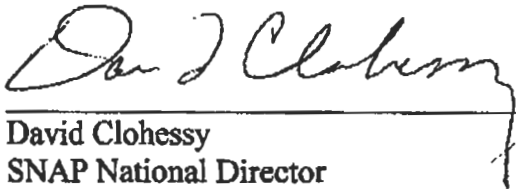
We ask you to institute a centralized location for receiving and recording reports of clergy abuse, to establish an independent denominational review board for investigating and considering reports of clergy abuse, and to implement a nationwide “zero tolerance” policy. We also ask you to establish a procedure for notifying people in the pews when a report of abuse has been made about a minister who worked in their congregation. In this way, the denomination can reach out to other possible victims, allow for the possibility of legitimate denominational investigations, and put parents on notice so that they can talk with their kids. Whether or not the SBC is capable of removing an abusive minister from ministry, it is at least capable of informing and warning.

Dr. Frank Page
 President, Southern Baptist Convention
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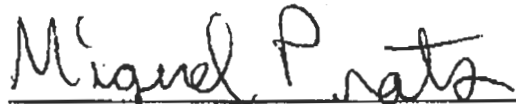
Without transparent procedures for reporting and accountability, how can anyone possibly know one way or the other about any Southern Baptist minister as to whether he might be someone whom a prior victim tried desperately to report only to meet with the sort of stonewalling and intimidation tactics that Ms. Brown met with? How many more will be wounded before this denomination takes action? We ask you to be a good shepherd. Surely a denomination that can make a united effort to send missionaries all across the globe can also make a united effort to protect the young and vulnerable against clergy predators.

We will look forward to your response and we hope to work with you in the future.

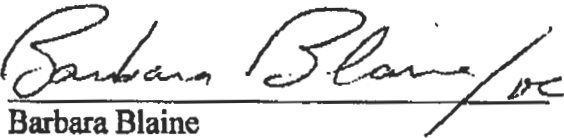
Sincerely,



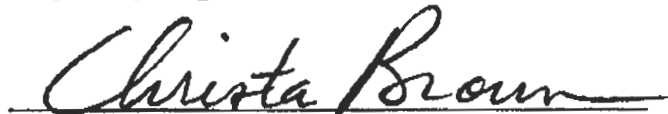
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Dr. Frank Page
President, Southern Baptist
Convention

Taylor's First Baptist Church
200 West Main Street
Taylors, SC 29687

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