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July 26, 2004

Dear [REDACTED]

Your letter of July 6, 2004 to Dr. Bobby Welch, President of the Southern Baptist Convention, on behalf of Ms. C [REDACTED] Brown, was sent to me by Dr. Welch. We serve as general counsel to the Convention and so we respond to communications to the Convention's President from attorneys.

We are saddened by Ms. Brown's account of abuse. Abuse of a child by anyone is deplorable. Abuse of a child by one in a ministerial position is especially troubling.

While hierarchical bodies, most noteworthy Roman Catholic orders, bishops and diocese, have a role in the selection, supervision and discipline of ministers, the Southern Baptist Convention does not. Baptist ministers are selected, supervised, and are subject to the discipline of local churches. These churches are autonomous. That is, in the Baptist congregational polity, the church is controlled only by its own individual congregation. The Convention has no control over the church, who the church selects as minister, who supervises him or how he is supervised. The Convention does not ordain or otherwise certify persons as minister. The Convention has no right to and does not discipline ministers. The Convention has no spiritual right to defrock a minister.

This ecclesiology is based on our understanding of the nature of the church. The Convention carefully disavows any control right over a church. The Convention is careful to avoid even the appearance of control. Therefore, the Convention does not have the means or the right to investigate and adjudicate charges of misconduct by ministers of churches and does not purport to have the right to advise churches on who is or is not fit for ministry.

I saw that your letter was also sent to the President of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention. We would know nothing about employment by LifeWay.

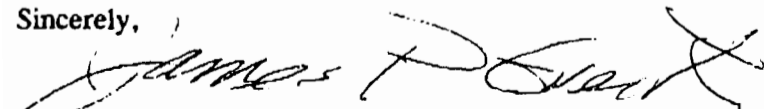
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In the most current annual accumulation of church statistics available to me, an accumulation done on a voluntary basis with those churches who wish to report, we do not see that Tommy Gilmore's name appears as being reported to be in a ministerial position in any church.

We deeply regret and grieve over every instance of sexual abuse of children. We appreciate the life-changing effect such abuse can have for the victim. We regret the pain Ms. Brown expresses. We pray that Ms. Brown can find peace.

Sincerely,



James P. Guenther