

# Guidepost Solutions to run SBC abuser tracking database

February 22, 2023

NASHVILLE (RNS)— For years, Southern Baptist leaders told members of affiliated churches setting up a database to track abusive pastors was impossible. Now, that impossible task is one step closer to being a reality.

Charleston pastor Marshall Blalock, chair of a Southern Baptist task force charged with implementing abuse reforms, announced Feb. 20 the task force had recommended hiring Guidepost Solutions, an international consulting firm, to set up the database.

The Southern Baptist Convention's credentials committee, which works in partnership with the task force, concurred with the recommendation.

The announcement was made during a regular meeting of the SBC's Nashville-based Executive Committee. Once a contract with Guidepost is finalized, the president of the Executive Committee will be tasked with signing it.

Known as the Ministry Check website, the database will include the names of pastors, denominational workers, ministry employees and volunteers who have been credibly accused of abuse.

According to the task force, being credibly accused means those who confessed, those who have been convicted of abuse or those who have had a civil judgment against them for abuse. It also would include those who have been investigated by a "qualified, independent, third-party investigative firm."

Blalock said the committee looked at 18 different firms before choosing

Guidepost, which previously worked on a major abuse investigation for the SBC. The report from that investigation led the SBC's 2022 annual meeting to approve a series of reforms—including the Ministry Check website.

## **Cannot let barriers 'stop needed reforms'**

Before announcing the selection of Guidepost, Blalock made an impassioned plea about the necessity of abuse reform, saying action and not words were needed. He also condemned those who covered up abuse in order to avoid public controversy.

"Handling things quietly has often been the practice, but it only perpetuates the abuse, leaving victim after victim silently suffering," he said. "Churches are often well-intentioned. Even some of the worst mistakes our churches have made have been well-meaning actions that did more harm than good."

Making reforms like the Ministry Check database a reality will be costly and complicated, said Blalock. But it is necessary.

"We can't let threats of lawsuits stop needed reforms," he said. "We can't let the potential costs stop needed reforms. We can't let uninformed opinions, even well-meaning but uninformed opinions, stop reforms. We can't let speculation and misinformation stop reform."

Hiring Guidepost to run the Ministry Check website could reignite a smoldering conflict over the denomination's future. In recent years, leaders of a group known as the Conservative Baptist Network, along with some of their allies, have claimed the SBC has become too liberal and strayed from its biblical roots.



Pastor Tom Ascol, the Conservative Baptist Network's candidate for Southern Baptist Convention president, speaks at a floor microphone during the SBC annual meeting in Anaheim, Calif. (Photo by Justin L. Stewart/Religion News Service)

Among those allies is Florida pastor and failed SBC presidential candidate Tom Ascol, who has been critical of Guidepost in the past because the consulting firm supports LGBTQ rights. Last year, several state Baptist conventions cut ties with the consulting firm after a Guidepost staffer posted a pro-LGBTQ message during Pride Month. Ascol also believes local churches, not the denomination, should deal with issues of abuse.

Ascol called Blalock's announcement "madness" on social media and asked pastors to call the Executive Committee to protest.

"Otherwise," he said on Twitter, "prepare to explain to the members of your church that their offerings will be going to a 'proud ally' of those committed to the sexual perversion of our society.

Mike Stone, a Georgia pastor and former CBN-backed candidate who narrowly lost the 2021 SBC presidential election, also was critical of the

announcement.

## **Task force considered Guidepost best-qualified firm**

Blalock said Guidepost's pro-LGBTQ tweet from 2022 was "disappointing." But he said Guidepost was still the best-qualified firm to run the Ministry Check website. He also said the database will be overseen by a new division of Guidepost that works specifically with faith-based groups.

He said the head of the faith-based division, senior managing director Samantha Kilpatrick, has a master's degree from an SBC seminary and is a member of an SBC church.

"She is godly, capable and trustworthy," he said. "I could not be more grateful that she is willing and available to come alongside us in this process."

Kilpatrick was named head of the Guidepost faith-based division in November.

"With Samantha's extensive legal background and involvement in her own community faith-based organizations, she is well-positioned to lead our Faith-Based Organizations practice," Julie Myers Wood, CEO of Guidepost Solutions, said in a statement at the time.

"Guidepost Solutions is committed to working with faith-based communities and frameworks to conduct independent investigations and enhance compliance."

After Blalock's report, the Executive Committee heard from SBC President Bart Barber as well as Executive Committee interim President Willie McLaurin. A search committee looking for a new Executive Committee

president had hoped to bring a recommendation to the meeting but announced it was not able to do that.

The meeting concluded with prayers for the victims of recent earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, as well as for former United States President Jimmy Carter. A longtime Baptist Sunday school teacher, Carter went into hospice care recently.

“We want to pray for President Carter and his family as he has been placed on hospice and as he is taking his last breath,” said Executive Committee Chairman Jared Wellman in his closing prayer. “Lord, we pray for him not to be in any pain. We pray for his family as they stand beside him.”