

Trial under way for former Baptist preacher charged with murder

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WACO, Texas (ABP) — Jury selection got [under way](#) Jan. 12 in a murder trial of a former Baptist minister accused of killing his wife.

Matt Baker, 38, a former pastor at several churches in central Texas, is on trial for the April 2006 [death](#) of his 31-year-old wife. Kari Lynn Baker's death was first ruled a suicide, but police now claim Baker drugged her with sleeping pills and smothered her with a pillow while their two daughters slept in a room nearby.



Baker

A judge in the 19th State District Court [denied](#) a motion for change of venue after Baker's attorneys argued that publicity about the case would make it impossible for him to receive a fair trial in Waco, Texas.

A Jan. 6 story in the *Waco Tribune-Herald* said prosecutors intended to show that Baker not only murdered his wife, but he made improper sexual advances toward at least a dozen other young women. One woman, who

allegedly was Baker's mistress, testified against him at a grand jury in exchange for immunity.

Baker, who has told his side of the story in various media outlets, denies having an affair with the woman, a former member at his church. He claims his wife was depressed and never got over the death of an infant daughter seven years earlier.

After her death Kari's parents convinced police to reopen the case. The body was exhumed, and Baker was charged with murder in September 2007, 18 months after his wife's death.

When his wife died, Baker, a graduate of Baylor University and Baylor's George W. Truett Theological Seminary, was a bivocational pastor of Crossroads Baptist Church, a 75-member congregation in Lorena, Texas, while working as a chaplain at a psychiatric treatment center for youth.

By the time of his arrest he had left the church and was working as Baptist Student Ministries director at Schreiner University in a part-time position funded by the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and as a substitute teacher in Kerrville, Texas.

The trial is [expected](#) to last about two weeks.

-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.