

# **BGCT sexual misconduct policy replaces file with prevention**

February 23, 2016

DALLAS—The Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board voted Feb. 23 to change the convention's focus on clergy sexual misconduct. It will implement a sexual abuse prevention program and will eliminate its confidential file of clergy charged with misdeeds.

The board will provide training opportunities and web-based resources to strengthen Texas Baptist churches' ability to avoid clergy sexual misconduct and to extend compassion when misconduct is alleged or proven true.

Resources and training initially will focus on protection for children. Later, the scope will expand to include adult-to-adult abuse.

## **Grew from internal review of policy**

The recommendation from the board's administration support committee to discontinue the clergy sexual misconduct file and to expand educational resources grew from an internal review of the BGCT policy and its effectiveness, said Rollie Richmond, BGCT director of human resources.

The review assessed the rationale behind development of the longstanding sexual misconduct policy, Richmond added. It also examined best practices of other Baptist conventions, difficulties and challenges with the old policy, and the technical ability to access updated information on sexual misconduct convictions.

For nearly two decades, the convention has depended on churches to provide information about clergy sexual misconduct, based on a confession

by the minister, a legal conviction or substantial evidence of abuse.

The BGCT Executive Board staff's human resources office maintained the confidential file and made information about specific individuals available to church officials—such as chairs of search committees or personnel committees, deacon chairs and trustees—if they submitted a notarized request.

The Texas Baptist web page related to information about clergy sexual misconduct received 1,100 clicks in two years, Richmond said. But churches requested no information from the clergy sexual misconduct file during that period.

### **Revised policy approved**

“Clergy sexual misconduct is a serious problem in church life,” the revised policy approved by the board states. “While the vast majority of ministers serve with great integrity, some engage in inappropriate behavior that impacts members of the flock who are in need of their spiritual guidance.

“Clergy sexual misconduct occurs when a person in a ministerial role engages in sexual contact, threats, or inappropriate sexual behavior with oneself, a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, child, co-worker or volunteer. The betrayal of trust involved creates ripples of grief and mistrust that do damage far beyond the specific situation.

“In accordance with our belief in the autonomy of the local church, the responsibility for directly and effectively dealing with the issue of clergy sexual misconduct falls directly on the local congregation.”

Areas of congregational responsibility include selecting and hiring employees; understanding relevant laws; creating policies and guidelines, including procedures for handling complaints; conducting timely, fair and responsible investigations; reporting to authorities when appropriate;

taking appropriate actions; and offering support to everyone involved in keeping with Christian faith.

During discussion with the Executive Board, Richmond confirmed church sexual misconduct involves laity as well as clergy. Training and resource materials will cover the broader topic of preventing sexual misconduct by lay volunteers, he said.

**The board approved a commitment for the BGCT to help churches by providing:**

- Educational and awareness material on relevant topics, processes and procedures.
- Sample policies and guidelines churches can use to help them structure their clergy sexual misconduct process.
- Reference to resources to help churches meet their responsibilities.
- Help with counseling for the victim, the victim's family and others when needed and requested.

The board set aside \$100,000 of income from a trust fund for three years to provide sexual misconduct training conducted by MinistrySafe, an organization that works with several denominations and Baptist state conventions in preventing child sex abuse. The training will include Internet resources and regional training events.

Executive Board leaders hope to conduct the first regional training session this year and then multiple sessions in coming years.

In other business, the Executive Board also approved three years funding from a trust fund for a western-heritage and church-starting consultant and for a missionary to Muslims in Texas. The board also modified the formal internal grievance policy to provide employees anonymity when bringing a complaint.

**The board also filled several vacancies on boards and councils:**

- Randy Pullin from First Baptist Church in Houston to the Baylor University board of regents.
- Linda Templin from First Baptist Church in Arlington and Mark Boucher from Valley Grove Baptist Church in Stephenville to the Baptist Student Ministries Council.
- Dan Turner from Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas and Mark Davis from Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas as at-large members of the Missions Funding Council.
- Gary Gramling from Coggin Avenue Baptist Church in Brownwood to the BaptistWay Press Advisory Council.
- Micaela Camacho from Iglesia Bautista Genesis in Fort Worth to the Texas Baptist Missions Foundation Council.

*With additional reporting by Editor Marv Knox.*