

**The following statement was released by the Baptist General Convention of Texas Wednesday, in response to the announcement of Dr. Larry Reynolds' retirement from Southmont Baptist Church in Denton. Reynolds was named in a lawsuit filed this year by a woman who alleged that he molested her when she was a teenager at the church.**

The Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) is concerned about the increasing number of incidents of clergy sexual misconduct. We are concerned for the individuals, families, and communities who have been victimized. The BGCT wants to be proactive in increasing awareness of the issue and in helping churches learn how to screen potential ministers.

Texas Baptist churches are independent organizations with full responsibility for hiring their own ministers. Because these churches are free from convention control, the BGCT does not select or appoint ministers. Neither is the BGCT an investigative agency. The BGCT can only serve in a resource and consultative role for its churches and encourages all of its affiliated churches to do background investigations of potential ministers which would bring to light any sexual misconduct in the minister's background. Again, this responsibility is assumed by the leadership of each church.

In order to assist churches in screening potential ministers, the BGCT has established a file of incidents of clergy sexual misconduct. The majority of records in the BGCT file involve instances of behavior deemed inappropriate for ministers, but where no illegal activity has taken place.

This file was established after careful consideration by a task force in consultation with the BGCT attorney who provides ongoing consultation to ensure the file is maintained to the highest legal standards. While this file is confidential, it is **NOT** secret. Confidentiality is maintained through a process that protects victims and those who report incidents of misconduct.

This process in no way protects perpetrators. Contents of the file are not secret and information regarding those who have been convicted of sexual misconduct is published as public information via other information sources. The file established by the BGCT is just one of many resources churches can access to discover a background of sexual misconduct for a potential ministerial candidate.

In addition to providing information to churches about the importance of screening potential ministers, the Baptist General Convention of Texas provides counsel regarding liability issues to churches that have previously employed a minister who has become involved in sexual misconduct. The BGCT also provides resources to assist with counseling for churches and families that have been victimized.

We encourage churches to be thorough and diligent in their review of potential ministers and are willing to provide the counsel and resources necessary for churches to conduct a thorough screening of any potential Texas Baptist minister. In the wake of reports about inappropriate behavior by ministers, the BGCT is taking an active role to protect both churches and the public from experiencing the tragedy of clergy sexual misconduct.

