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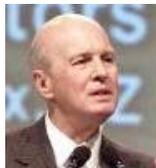
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Former SBC president encourages local churches to prevent sexual abuse



Vines

Allie Martin and Jenni Parker OneNewsNow.com February 28, 2007

issue of abuse.

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Twice in recent weeks, SNAP held protests outside the [SBC](#) headquarters in Nashville, Tennessee. The first of these was attended by two of the group's members and a press representative, and the second on February 19, by fewer than five people. Media reports of the protests have caused church members some concern, and official reaction has been swift.

At the second protest, [Baptist Press News](#) reports, SNAP members distributed a press release stating they had delivered a letter five months ago to SBC president Dr. Frank Page, Executive Committee president Dr. Morris H. Chapman, and Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission president Dr. Richard Land -- a letter the group they claimed was "met with silence." But former SBC president Dr. Jerry Vines says the protesters' claim was proven unfounded.

"I'm afraid the people who went to Nashville recently were not really forthright," Vines observes, "because the denomination headquarters had responded, and [SNAP] said they had not. I think they have since apologized." The abuse victims advocacy group did indeed withdraw its false charges, which had been repeated a number of times in the media.

The retraction came after SNAP was shown two letters from SBC Executive Committee members, addressed to the group last year. On viewing the letters, SNAP official Christa Brown expressed surprise, saying she never received them and extending her apologies to the Executive Committee's attorney and to SBC officials.

But despite the SBC leadership's genuine concerns over the issue, Vines points out that individual Southern Baptist churches are autonomous and are allowed to handle issues of abuse locally. "The denomination has no authority over local churches but can provide resources to help us face this problem and deal with it," he says. "As a denomination, we do make resources available."

However, Southern Baptist officials emphasize that although the denomination does not have the legal authority to create an independent board to investigate complaints, the abuse issue is being addressed.

"It's always a terrible, terrible thing when children are abused or anyone is abused," Vines says, "and we must stand against it. We must preach against it, we must have standards against it, and there's a lot going on now -- you need screenings, you need training, and people need to know what the laws are in these areas."

Several years ago, messengers at the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting approved a resolution that called for churches and law enforcement officers to hold clergy members accountable if they were found guilty of sexual abuse. SBC president Frank Page says the denomination also plans to teach churches how to conduct background checks.

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