

Victims urge BGCT to release list

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DALLAS—A support group for abuse victims has asked the Baptist General Convention of Texas to publish its list of ministers involved in clergy sexual misconduct.

Miguel Prats, Texas coordinator for the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests and Other Clergy, said the convention is allowing ministers who have committed child abuse in one congregation to serve in other churches by not publishing its list of clergy members involved in sexual misconduct.

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The BGCT keeps a confidential list of individuals who are reported by a church for sexual misconduct, including child molestation and extramarital affairs. Designated individuals from churches can write and find out if specific people are on the list, but they cannot find out why a person was reported.

BGCT staff members have publicized how the list works at numerous conferences and meetings across the state and on the Internet. The overwhelming majority of people on the list are there because of sexual misconduct between two adults, not for inappropriate action with minors, said Jan Daehnert, BGCT congregational leadership team interim director.

Prats cited the plight of one current Austin resident who was molested in 1969 by a youth minister serving in the Dallas area. The minister left the congregation shortly after the incident was discovered and went on to serve at several other Baptist churches.

The BGCT has produced several materials that detail the ills of clergy sexual misconduct, Daehnert said. The convention advises every church to report incidents of child abuse to the local authorities and urges congregations to ask whether someone is in the file before hiring him or her. It is doing as much or more than any other Baptist body to prevent child abuse, he asserted.

“The Baptist General Convention of Texas takes issues of clergy sexual misconduct very seriously,” Daehnert said. “We grieve when any minister takes inappropriate actions, especially toward a minor. It is an abuse of authority and power, but it is also shameful to the body of Christ.

“We are doing all we can to prevent sexual misconduct from occurring in our churches. The Baptist General Convention of Texas is the first state convention to my knowledge that has taken a strong stance to help churches report predators and help victims. We are encouraging churches

to report issues of misconduct and urging search committees to check with us before hiring anyone.”

But Prats said his organization wants more. It wants the convention to share openly the list with other Baptist conventions and with the public. Doing otherwise, he said, is “hiding” the problem. “We find the BGCT has an obligation to protect other people.”

Daehnert agreed that protecting children is of highest importance, but unlike other denominational bodies, the convention has no authority over local congregations. It cannot investigate activities or remove pastors because every local congregation is autonomous.

At this point, the most the convention can do is keep the list it will share with churches that inquire, Daehnert said.

“We’re not hiding. We’re glad to help. We’re just sticking to our process,” he said.

Churches provide information about clergy sexual misconduct in confidence, Daehnert said. Removing that confidence would make churches less likely to report abuse because many times congregations try to protect the identity of victims as much as possible.

“We don’t publish the list because the list is given to us in confidence by congregations that have had ministers confess or where substantial evidence has been uncovered,” Daehnert said. “Those congregations have reported something that is very troubling. They share with us in confidence their experience.”

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