

# Sexual predators often fly under the radar at church

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## Sexual predators often fly under the radar at church

**By Hannah Elliott**

*Associated Baptist Press*

EW YORK (ABP)—Most people think they can spot a sexual predator. He's the pale loner with greasy hair and quivering lips or the grinning lech who hugs too long and slowly rubs the backs of female co-workers—or church members.

Could be. But for every overt pervert, there are plenty more who go unnoticed—and unsuspected.

Predators gravitate to vulnerable people. They move into places where they are the highest authority and where that authority remains unquestioned. In some cases, that place is the local church.

Experts say there is no standard profile of a predator, no personality trait or background history that would link them in one group. Rather, predators have similar behavior patterns and desires, no matter whom they victimize. Pastors who have affairs, for instance, are much different from those who molest children. The former are morally wrong but usually not criminals. The latter are both.

Some experts insist philandering men typically fall into two categories. The “wanderer” gets emotionally involved with a woman, crosses boundaries, gives in to temptation and regrets it later. The “predator” actively looks for vulnerable women, takes advantage of them and moves on to other victims.

Whether with a vulnerable woman or a naïve child, however, the abuser always breaks a bond of trust. And while there’s no unique predator profile, in the end, they’re all the same— abusers rarely offend once, whether or not they planned the event and whether or not they regret it.

“We have this feeling that we could pick out a child molester in the crowd, but they look like your average, normal, trustworthy person. Sometimes they look more-than-average trustworthy,” Dave Mallinak, pastor of Berean Baptist Church of Ogden, Utah, said. “Another thing is we have this conceit that we could pick out a liar from a crowd—that I would know if someone is lying to me.”

Mallinak should know. He is working on a book for pastors counseling sex-abuse victims and has spent years tracking a former pastor whom he said molests teens in local churches before church leaders find out and fire him. Mallinak recently outed the accused pastor on his blog, [sharperirony.blogspot.com](http://sharperirony.blogspot.com).

The naiveté of people who think they can discern a liar coupled with the trust people give to pastors can be a dangerous combination, Mallinak said.

“They become good liars,” he said. “Of course, we naturally want to trust our pastor and believe him, but once they’ve crossed that line, telling a lie is certainly not a hard thing.”

Gregory Sporer, an author and founder of Keeping Kids Safe Ministries, has spent almost 20 years counseling both abusers and the abused.

Staff or church member sex-offenders have two weaknesses, he said. The

“give-away categories of behaviors” are boundary violations and generally suspicious behaviors. Most church offenders have months of boundary violations, or “grooming,” prior to the first sexual offense. They’ll choose children who seem emotionally vulnerable and gain their trust with seemingly innocuous contact. For most, he said, it’s a gradual spiral down from there.

“Pastor sex-offenders are not mentally ill, and they rarely have a criminal history,” Sporer said. “Christian men and women do not become sex-offenders overnight. For many, it starts with porn or an emotional bond with a teen or child, and over a period of time, a secret sexual sin with the teen or child emerges.”

Many predators start out as men or women addicted to porn or inappropriately attached to specific children, Sporer said. And according to *Sexual Abuse, a Journal of Research and Treatment*, church attendance and religious practices in sexual offenders is positively related to the number of their victims and the number of their sexual offense convictions.

Sporer said in his 35,000 hours of sex-abuse counseling, he has seen that dynamic multiple times.

“Some use adult porn, which may lead to teen porn,” he said. “Eventually, the porn doesn’t meet their sexual needs, and they look for teens or kids. Some pastors ... develop emotional attachments to kids. Eventually the emotional attachments become sexual, and a child is molested.”

The cycle of pornography leading to abuse grows darker and deeper on a gradual basis, Sporer said, noting many offenders reported hating sex offenders before they became one.

What’s more, many predators report that after each offense, they would go weeks avoiding their victims, have intense self-loathing, increase Bible reading and beg God to “take their sin away” so they don’t go to jail.

And contrary to popular opinion, many sexual abusers were not themselves abused.

In the 1980s, Sporer said, several reports claimed most sex offenders were molested as children. It was used as an excuse for the chain of abuse, he said, but times have changed since then, especially with increased use of the polygraph test.

“Offenders thought they gained more sympathy if they lied about being molested as a child,” Sporer said. “There are some offenders with a history of being molested as a child, but it is not as significant a number as once thought.”

What is significant is that all clergy predators seem to desperately need what they abuse their position to get—power, pleasure, admiration and autonomy.

Mallinak, who became outraged when he saw a former pastor grope teen girls, said the pastor was obviously taken with the pursuit of pleasure and idle amusement. He also loved to be admired, Mallinak said.

“There was something intoxicating about the adoring eyes of his followers,” Mallinak said, adding that even he looked up to the pastor as a hero. Sadly, Mallinak later wrote on his blog, the pursuit of admiration “is like a tapeworm. It is always eating and never filled. A man who craves admiration, no matter how much he gets, will never be satisfied.”

The root of that commonality is sin, Mallinak tells his congregants. It’s not a “fundamentalist” problem or an organizational problem, he said. “It comes from (the predator’s) own flesh.”

Even though the cause of the abuse comes from within, historic Baptist autonomy can be a problem in tracking predators, experts agree. For Mallinak’s Utah congregation, which is an Independent Baptist church,

“ultra-autonomy” is something of which to be proud. Predators take advantage of that, he said.

That tension between Baptist autonomy and accountability is one factor in learning to profile predators. Another is the question of whether predators can be rehabilitated.

Mallinak said all predators should spend the rest of their life in jail or “something more severe than that.” In his opinion, predators must never be allowed back in the pulpit in any capacity, since they have “violated a trust and are incurable.”

“Repentance—genuine repentance as opposed to the kind that demands that everybody forgive me right now—would involve a confession that what he did has limited his future,” Mallinak said. “In other words, if he really repented, then he would never seek another pulpit.”

Sporer, on the other hand, has called the idea that sex offenders do not change a “myth.” According to him, many of the 550,000 registered sex offenders in the United States attend church. Most of the church-attenders claim to be Christians with a strong desire to serve Christ, and most offenders who have been convicted and are registered are successful at not re-offending, according to a 2001 report by the Center for Sex Offender Management. The report said the average sex-offence recidivism rate, defined as re-arrest or reconviction, was 12 percent for child molesters over a five-year period.

Mallinak tells embittered victims that clergy predators are counterfeits who stand in the place of a real pastoral shepherd.

“When a pastor violates their trust ... I think we have to remember that this is why we need Jesus Christ. This is exactly the reason. We have to rest on his grace and rely on that,” he said. “If it weren’t for the grace of God, none of us would make it.”

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# **Sex-abuse victims speak up to help others and find healing themselves**

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## **Are atheists now becoming the new fundamentalists?**

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## **Are atheists now becoming the new fundamentalists?**

**By [Benedicta Cipolla](#)**

*Religion News Service*

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Despite its minority status, atheism has enjoyed the spotlight recently, with several books that feature vehement arguments against religion topping bestseller lists.

But now even some secular humanists are saying they should embrace more than the strident rhetoric poured out in books like [Richard Dawkins'](#) *The God Delusion* and [Sam Harris'](#) *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*.

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# **East Texas cousins keep Bible Drill competition all in the family**

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Cousins  
Tanner  
Shirley and  
Jessie Price,  
both from  
First Baptist  
Church in  
Atlanta, were  
scheduled to  
compete at  
the National  
Bible Drill  
competition  
in North  
Carolina June  
8. Shirley, a  
sophomore,  
won the  
Texas Bible  
Drill senior  
high  
competition,  
and Price, an  
eighth  
grader, won  
the Texas  
junior high  
Bible Drill  
division.  
(Photo by  
Ferrell  
Foster/BGCT  
)



# East Texas cousins keep Bible Drill competition all in the family

By **Barbara Bedrick**

*Texas Baptist Communications*

ATLANTA—A family legacy took two East Texas teenagers to the national stage.

Fulfilling a commitment they made to their great-grandmother, cousins Tanner Shirley and Jessie Price from First Baptist Church in Atlanta advanced to the national round of Bible Drill competition in North Carolina June 8.

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## Book Reviews

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## Book Reviews

[The AIDS Crisis](#) *By Deborah Dortzbach and W. Meredith Long (InterVarsity Press)*

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Baptist churches in Texas, as elsewhere, are becoming more open in talking about AIDS. Twenty years ago, we discovered how the virus is

spread. But we haven't yet discovered a cure. Worldwide, 8,000 people are dying every day. By 2010, it is estimated, 25 million children will have been orphaned.

How will we respond? The authors, working with World Relief, are experienced in the attempt. They tell stories about victims in Africa and Asia, and these people do not seem far away. Then they encourage American Christians to get proactive in our own communities, locking arms with any organization concerned with ministry to AIDS victims.



What are you reading that other Texas Baptists would find helpful? Send suggestions and reviews to [books@baptiststandard.com](mailto:books@baptiststandard.com).

Abstinence from sexual relations before marriage is championed. Yet the book faces the fact that education must go further. "Our youth have to know now. Our strategies in youth groups and our instructions in homes and churches need to be fresh and relevant."

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## **Baptist Briefs**

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# Baptist Briefs

**N.C. colleges may elect trustees, lose funding.** Five colleges affiliated with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina would be able to elect their own trustees under a plan adopted by the convention's board of directors, but the schools will lose the convention's direct financial support. The plan, which would be phased in over four years, is intended to avoid a showdown over how much control the Baptist convention should have over the schools—Campbell University, Chowan University, Gardner-Webb University, Mars Hill College and Wingate University. The board overwhelmingly approved the proposal from the state convention's council on Christian higher education. To become policy, messengers to the Baptist State Convention must approve it two consecutive years.

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**N.C. state paper set to elect editor.** Norman Jameson has been recommended as the new editor of the Biblical Recorder, the North Carolina Baptist state newspaper. The paper's board of directors was expected to vote June 7. Jameson, executive leader for public relations for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, would succeed Tony Cartledge, 55, who has announced plans to become a professor at Campbell University Divinity School in Buies Creek, N.C. Cartledge will remain editor through July 31. Jameson, 54, graduated from Oklahoma Baptist University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He worked for the Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph, was feature editor of Baptist Press, associate editor of the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger and communications director for Baptist Children's Home in North Carolina before joining the North Carolina state convention staff. Jameson and his wife, Sue Ellen, have three adult children and are members of Hayes Barton Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C.

**Kentucky paper names news director.** Drew Nichter, an associate

director and news producer for a television station in Louisville, Ky., has been named news director of the Western Recorder, the Kentucky Baptist newspaper. Nichter, 30, succeeds David Winfrey, who resigned after 10 years to accept a position as a marketing strategist. He is a graduate of Indiana University Southeast, where he was assistant editor of the university's campus newspaper.

**Asian Federation changes name.** At the recent Asian Baptist Federation Congress in Chiang Mai, Thailand, the group voted to change its name to the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation. Officials said the new name more accurately reflects the composition of the regional body, which includes countries in the South Pacific such as Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand. The federation consists of 60 conventions and unions in 20 countries with about 30,000 churches that claim more than 5 million members.

**Princeton Review recognizes Mercer.** The *Princeton Review* has named Mercer University in Georgia one of the nation's best value undergraduate institutions. Mercer is featured in the 2008 edition of America's Best Value Colleges. The guide profiles 165 colleges chosen for their excellent academics, generous financial aid packages and/or relatively low costs of attendance. Mercer was one of only 75 private institutions to be named a "best value." The Princeton Review selected the schools based on data obtained from administrators at more than 650 colleges during the 2005-06 academic year and surveys of students attending the schools.

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# **Buckner seeks supplies for international orphans**

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## **Buckner seeks supplies for international orphans**

DALLAS—Humanitarian aid supplies are rapidly decreasing from the Buckner Center for Humanitarian Aid in Dallas, leaving orphanages without basic personal, medical, infant and educational supplies, officials with the agency reported.

Around 1,200 people will travel with Buckner on mission trips this year, and many of them fill backpacks or suitcases with supplies from the warehouse to distribute to the orphanages in which they will serve.

“Many bags are going to orphanages empty because our supplies are rapidly depleting,” said Matt Asato, Buckner humanitarian aid coordinator.

Buckner needs supplies for:

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## **Harral to begin term as CBF**

# **moderator**

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## **Harral to begin term as CBF moderator**

ATLANTA—Harriet Harral, a member of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth and an organizational consultant, will begin her one-year term as moderator of the national Cooperative Baptist Fellowship at the conclusion of the Fellowship's general assembly in June.

“Harriet brings so many gifts of leadership to the responsibility of moderator,” said Daniel Vestal, the Fellowship's executive coordinator. “She also has a well of love and life wish for CBF that is contagious. I look forward to working with her next year.”

A native of Devine, Harral is the president of The Harral Group, a consulting firm that specializes in organizational effectiveness. As moderator, Harral will preside over the Fellowship's Coordinating Council, which meets three times a year, and the 2008 general assembly.

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## **2nd Opinion: Called to witness**

# Christ's peace

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## 2nd Opinion: Called to witness Christ's peace

**By Beth Newman**

A few nights ago, just at bedtime, my husband and I heard some kind of owl—at least we assumed it was an owl—announcing its presence among the oaks in our backyard. A little research on the Internet led us to believe it was a screech owl. I was excited, because I'm a budding bird enthusiast; my husband was excited, because he saw an end to his mole problems. According to what he read, once an owl establishes a territory, he will hunt it over until he exhausts the prey.

Unfortunately, as we waxed eloquent about the bloody demise of the rodents tunneling through our yard, our 6-year-old son overheard and burst into tears over the slaughter of his friends whom he pronounced "tiny and shiny black."

"Isn't there enough room for the owl and mole and us?" he wondered.

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It was the neighborhood version of Rodney King's "Why can't we all just get along?"

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# DBU students reach out to orphans in Guatemala

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## DBU students reach out to orphans in Guatemala

**By Blake Killingsworth**

*Dallas Baptist University*

ELA, Guatemala—Twenty-five Dallas Baptist University students shared the love of Christ with orphans during a recent 12-day trip to Guatemala—and fell in love with the children in the process.

For the last four years, DBU students have made the trek to Latin America under the auspices of Buckner International. Recently, DBU entered a formal partnership agreement with Buckner. In addition to the school's pledge to continue its hands-on involvement in Guatemala and Buckner's promise to facilitate the trips, DBU also established a scholarship for Buckner's Guatemalan staff to take classes through the school's online education program.

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Dallas  
Baptist  
University  
student  
Lindsay  
Springer  
blows  
bubbles  
with a  
child in the  
Xela  
orphanage  
in  
Guatemala.

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## **DOWN HOME: Who knew 28 is the ‘water’ anniversary?**

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### **DOWN HOME:**

### **Who knew 28 is the ‘water’**

## anniversary?

Well, that was a wedding anniversary we won't forget.

Late Saturday afternoon, I hopped in the shower after a day of yardwork and other chores. A moment later, Joanna ran into our bathroom.

My wife is not known for ecstatic utterances or glossolalia, but I immediately guessed she had taken to speaking in tongues. Couldn't understand what she was talking about.

She dashed away as quickly as she appeared. The look of fright and panic communicated the point of her message as I thought hard and translated three distinct words: "den," "floor" and "water."



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## **EDITORIAL: Hold churches accountable for abuse**

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### **EDITORIAL: Hold churches accountable for abuse**

We need another directory to document clergy sexual abuse. When we learn churches knowingly allow—or force—an abusing minister to move on without doing something to warn others, let's publish their names.

This sounds harsh. But it's nothing compared to the pain and anguish victims go through when their ministers violate their trust and abuse them sexually. So, churches that know about it but don't help stop it should be shamed as if they actually aided and abetted this heinous act. They did.



Because of our polity, Baptists have struggled with deciding how to report sexual abuse by their ministers. We don't have an ecclesiastical hierarchy to enforce rules and regulations, no bishop to render justice or warn other congregations. We don't require ordination for service, so we can't pull a clergy's credentials to block a job with a church after violating trust with another congregation. And, of course, we don't tell churches what to do, so we can't require them to report abuse, just as we can't tell them who or who not to hire as ministers.

Baptists also have been understandably cautious about reporting sexual abuse. Short of legal conviction or confession, making a claim of clergy misconduct is fraught with legal peril. Churches and convention officials have been reticent to risk charges of libel and slander in order to stop a perp from plaguing a new set of parishioners. And they have been appropriately reticent to publicize names of accused perpetrators unless the charges have been substantiated.