

# Seminary president urges neighboring pastor to resign

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**By Hannah Elliott**

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CORDOVA, Tenn. (ABP)—The president of [Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary](#) called for the senior pastor at one of the largest Southern Baptist congregations in the United States to resign.

Michael Spradlin, who leads the seminary situated across the street from [Bellevue Baptist Church](#) in suburban Memphis, said Steve Gaines should relinquish the church's pastorate because of his deliberate silence about sex-abuse allegations against a Bellevue minister.

On Dec. 18, Gaines announced to the 25,000-member Bellevue congregation Paul Williams, a 34-year employee at Bellevue, had gone on paid leave pending a church investigation regarding "moral failure."

Specific details of the case have not been released to the public, but claims of sexual abuse of an underage male 17 years ago have been posted on the Internet. Williams, who was unavailable for comment, has not been officially charged with any criminal activity.

Spradlin called for the resignation after Gaines admitted he knew about the

sexual abuse at least six months ago but took no action against Williams. The seminary has close ties with the school.

Gaines defended his action by telling the church he thought “the issue was settled.”

“Some people have questioned why I waited for several months. It’s simply this: I acted out of a heartfelt concern and compassion for this minister because the event occurred many years ago, he was receiving professional counseling, and I was concerned about confidentiality,” Gaines said in a statement. “In light of the events that have unfolded, I realize now that I should have discussed it further with this minister and brought it to the attention of our church leadership immediately.”

Gaines has been under pressure from some church members since he took over Bellevue after the retirement of famed conservative stalwart Adrian Rogers, who has since died. Rogers’ widow said her husband had no knowledge of the abuse allegations, although they occurred during his tenure.

Gaines also told the church the personnel committee would conduct an investigation of the situation and issue a statement after the inquiry. Williams will continue to receive Christian counseling and financial support from Bellevue. He will not be allowed on the church campus during the investigation.

Spradlin told the Commercial Appeal of Memphis Gaines has “spent all his credibility, and people are losing trust in him.” Gaines was unavailable for comment.

“If Steve Gaines found out that a child had been sexually molested by one of his ministers, and if he did nothing to address it, then he needs to step down immediately,” Spradlin told the newspaper. “We cannot take chances with other people’s children. If he knew about this and kept quiet, then he’s

put Bellevue in a very dangerous position and possibly put children and the emotionally vulnerable at risk.”

Michael Reagan, host of a conservative radio talk show by the same name, said in his Dec. 18 show that pastors like Gaines must be held accountable for not reporting sexual-abuse allegations.

“God forbid that, in fact, someone stands up in that church and says, ‘Oh by the way ... my child was sexually molested by this pastor Williams,’ because that church, which is a 25,000 member church, is going to go bankrupt too,” Reagan said. “And well it should.”

Reagan also blamed Gaines for the current “turmoil” in the church.

“It should have been dealt with the moment he found out,” he said. “But instead, he waited six months.”

Gaines took the pulpit at Bellevue Sept. 11, 2005. As a pastor for 14 years at Gardendale First Baptist Church, in Birmingham, Ala., Gaines became one of the leading fundamentalist voices in the SBC.

A group of longtime church members, who run the website [savingbellevue.com](http://savingbellevue.com), say Gaines is receiving an inappropriately high salary, is pushing the church toward an elder-led system, and uses intimidation and arrogance to get his way. Gaines has denied those charges.

Mid-America Seminary sits on 51 acres donated by Bellevue Baptist. The school has 450 students and receives some funding from the church. Spradlin is also the interim pastor at Germantown Baptist Church in Memphis.

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