

# Former seminary professor pleads guilty to lying to FBI

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(RNS)—A former professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary pleaded guilty Oct. 16 to lying to the FBI during an investigation into sexual abuse.

Matt Queen, the pastor of Friendly Avenue Baptist Church in Greensboro, N.C., had pleaded not guilty earlier this year when charged with obstruction of justice for actions taken when he was a professor and interim provost at Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth



Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth (BP File Photo)

As part of an investigation into the Southern Baptist Convention and its entities, federal officials have been looking into alleged sexual abuse that occurred in 2022 at the seminary. School officials were required to turn over any documents related to abuse to the Department of Justice.

However, an unnamed seminary official, known as “Employee-2,” allegedly ordered that a report on the 2022 abuse case—which detailed that the

seminary had known about the alleged abuse but failed to act on it—be destroyed.

According to federal officials, Queen heard Employee-2 order “Employee-1,” the staffer who wrote the report, to destroy it and then allegedly lied to federal officials about it. Queen was also accused of creating fake notes about the conversation surrounding the report.

Queen’s story changed under oath.

“On or about June 21, 2023, MATTHEW QUEEN, the defendant, testified under oath that on January 26, 2023, he had in fact heard Employee-2 instruct Employee-1 to make the Document ‘go away,’” according to a court filing.



Matt Queen in a video for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in November 2022. (Video screen grab via RNS)

On Oct. 16, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York filed court documents charging Queen with falsification of records and providing false information to law enforcement. As part of an arrangement with federal officials, Queen pleaded guilty to the second charge.

“I understand that if my plea is accepted, my sentencing will take place before the United States District Judge who is assigned, or who is to be assigned,” Queen said in a court filing.

A trial on the earlier charges had been scheduled for November.

Queen’s attorney said that the guideline for this offense is zero to six months and hopes Queen will not be incarcerated. Sentencing currently is set for February.

Sam Schmidt said prosecutors approached Queen about a plea deal and said his client admitted to making a false statement.

“And for the past year and a half, he has regretted, repented and tried to make himself a better person for making that mistake,” he said.

Since 2022, the Department of Justice has been investigating the SBC and its entities, in response to the Guidepost report that year, which found SBC had long mistreated abuse survivors and downplayed the issue of abuse in the nation’s largest Protestant denomination.

But aside from the charges filed against Queen, few details about the investigation have been made public.

The SBC admitted the investigation—along with other lawsuits filed in the wake of the Guidepost report—has led to a fiscal crisis for the SBC’s Nashville-based Executive Committee. That committee recently announced plans to put its office building on the market in part because of its strained finances.

The identity of the seminary official who ordered the report destroyed has not been made public. However, Terri Stovall, the seminary’s dean of women, has come forward as the person who wrote the initial report on the 2022 abuse case. Stovall, according to school officials, refused to destroy

the report.

“I am grateful for the diligence of the Office of the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York for holding Queen accountable for his criminal actions while serving as interim provost at Southwestern,” Stovall said in a statement.

“My hope is that the full truth and extent of his actions—and the actions of others who are no longer employed at Southwestern—will one day come to light.”

Southwestern officials said they will continue to cooperate with the DOJ investigation.

“We pray for victims of sexual abuse. Southwestern Seminary remains committed to doing everything possible to protect all members of the seminary community from sexual abuse and harassment,” the seminary said in a statement.

“Our prayers continue for Matt Queen and his family, as well as for others who have been involved in this process.”

After he was charged this past spring, Queen was placed on leave by Friendly Avenue Baptist Church. Church leaders currently are working on a response to his guilty plea, according to a statement on the congregation’s Facebook page.

“We stand firmly against any behavior that undermines trust and integrity,” the church said in its statement, which noted that Queen, who has been on leave since May, had admitted to a “serious crime.”

“Our church leadership is reviewing these recent developments as it works to complete its investigation and submit a recommendation to the church membership concerning Dr. Queen’s status and relationship with Friendly

Avenue Baptist Church, all in accordance with the church's governing documents."