

Former seminary staffer ordered assault report destroyed

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FORT WORTH (RNS)—Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary released more details about the attempted cover-up of a report about a sexual assault on campus that landed a former seminary staffer in federal court, charged with obstruction of justice.

In a statement May 29, David Dockery, president of Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, said Terri Stovall, the school's dean of women, learned in November 2022 about an alleged sexual assault by a student.

She reported the assault to campus police—who took no action on the report, according to Dockery—and kept a record of her response.

A few months later, the student accused of the assault was arrested by an outside police department.

Make the report 'go away'

Heath Woolman, then Dockery's chief of staff, learned about Stovall's document from November and allegedly told her to make it "go away," according to Dockery's statement.

At the time, all staff had been informed that the U.S. Department of Justice was investigating the Southern Baptist Convention's handling of sexual abuse and any documents about sexual abuse had been subpoenaed, Dockery said. The alleged assault was not reported to federal officials.

Dockery said Woolman denied telling Stovall to destroy the document, a claim initially backed up by Matt Queen, another seminary staffer.

“In a follow-up conversation concerning what was said to Stovall, Woolman provided me assurance that he did not instruct her to make the document ‘go away,’” Dockery said.



Matt Queen preaches at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in March 2023. (Video screen grab via RNS)

When Queen changed his story in the summer of 2023, he was placed on administrative leave. He has been charged with allegedly lying to the FBI and creating false notes to back his initial claim that he knew nothing about an order to destroy the document.

Woolman left the seminary in the spring of 2023 and is now pastor of Fruit Cove Baptist Church in St. Johns, Fla.

Queen, who was [suspended by his church](#) this weekend, has [pleaded not guilty](#) and denied any wrongdoing. Woolman did not respond to a request for comment at Fruit Cove Baptist.

Dockery commends Stovall

Dockery praised Stovall for her actions and said the school is continuing to cooperate with federal officials. He also said the school's chief of police from 2022 is no longer at the school.

"This episode is a matter of deep regret to me. I am, however, grateful that several employees in whom I placed great trust acted responsibly, especially Terri Stovall," Dockery said. "I commend the service and integrity of these employees."

Woolman's alleged actions were first reported by *The Tennessean* newspaper. *The Tennessean* reported Woolman had boasted about the thoroughness of his church's vetting of him as a candidate when he was first hired in 2023 as pastor.

"They have looked for every skeleton in every closet," Woolman told the congregation, according to *The Tennessean*. "I don't have any skeletons in any closets, and I was still scared they would find skeletons in closets."

In his statement, Dockery said he had recommended Woolman as a pastoral candidate last year.

"If asked to provide the same recommendation today, and based on information received subsequent to that time, I would not be able to provide the same recommendation," he said.

Latest episode of bad news for seminary

Few details have been made public about the scope of the Department of Justice's investigation into the SBC and its entities. That investigation was

launched after the release of a report from Guidepost Solutions showing SBC leaders had mistreated abuse survivors for years, denied responsibility for the actions of local churches and downplayed the number of sexual abuse cases in the nation's largest Protestant denomination.



(Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Photo)

SBC leaders have pledged in the past to cooperate with the investigation. The denomination's Executive Committee also cited the Justice Department investigation for helping drive up its legal costs in recent years.

Earlier this year, the SBC's Executive Committee announced the Department of Justice investigation into the committee was ended, leading to confusion. The Executive Committee later issued a statement saying the DOJ's investigation into the SBC and its entities remains open.

[Queen's indictment](#) and Dockery's subsequent statement are the latest episodes of bad news for Southwestern, once one of the nation's largest seminaries and now a struggling institution.

The school's former president, Adam Greenway, is currently suing the school for defamation.

Greenway's predecessor, Paige Patterson, was fired in 2018 after allegedly mishandling sexual abuse at another school.

Last year, officials at the Fort Worth seminary announced past leaders had overspent by \$140 million over two decades, putting the school's finances in a precarious spot.