

Greear's church launches inquiry into past acts of staff minister

January 25, 2021

DURHAM, N.C. (RNS)—A megachurch led by the president of the Southern Baptist Convention will review allegations that a staff pastor mishandled a sexual abuse case at his previous church.

The Summit Church, in Durham, N.C., where SBC President J.D. Greear is senior pastor, announced it had hired Guidepost Solutions, an international investigative firm, to review the past actions of Bryan Loritts, Summit's executive pastor of teaching and development.

In 2010, when Loritts was pastor of Fellowship Memphis Church in Tennessee, the church discovered Rick Trotter, worship director at the church and Loritts' brother-in-law, had placed a hidden video camera in a women's bathroom and recorded church members, the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* reported.

The church later admitted it had fired Trotter after he confessed and sent him for three months of counseling and provided financial support. The church did not report him to the police. The church said in 2016 the women and girls who were filmed also had been offered counseling and that none had chosen to press charges, although at least one claimed they were discouraged from doing so.

In 2011, Trotter, who was also an announcer for the National Basketball Association's Memphis Grizzlies, was hired part time at Downtown Church in Memphis—after that church had contacted Fellowship and discussed his past. Trotter was later arrested after a Downtown Church member said she

caught him “upskirting”—shooting video and photos up the skirts of women at the church during prayer.

Trotter eventually pleaded guilty to “photographing or videotaping someone without consent,” according to local news reports. He served 60 days in jail and was placed on probation after that. He also was fired by the Grizzlies.



Sexual abuse in churches “is a gospel issue,” Southern Baptist Convention President J.D. Greear told the capacity crowd at Caring Well: Equipping the Church to Confront the Abuse Crisis. “The credibility of our witness and, even more importantly, the souls of our people are at stake.” (Karen Race Photography / BP)

Greear has been outspoken about the need for churches to take allegations of abuse seriously. In 2019, he called for the SBC to investigate churches that cover up abuse. He also set up an advisory panel to guide the denomination on dealing with abuse and helped lead a litany of lament for sexual abuse in the church in 2019.

When Loritts was hired by Summit in June, the church said it did a background check and looked into his handling of the incident.

“I was devastated to learn a few years later that the perpetrator had repeated these crimes at another church, Downtown Church,” Loritts said in a statement distributed by The Summit Church earlier this year.

No ‘open, safe channel’ for victims to report

Summit’s leaders said this week that their initial process was incomplete, as there had been no “open, safe channel” for victims to communicate with the church.

Summit posted a copy of its agreement with Guidepost on the [church website](#) and included an email link to the company. As part of the agreement, Guidepost will report for Summit, which will not be covered by attorney-client privilege.

The report will be made public, the church said in its announcement.

Church leaders hope this process will “provide a healthy example of churches handling abuse allegations with integrity.”

“The courage of current victims to come forward is strengthened when they see churches take the appropriate steps,” the church statement says. “Past victims deserve to know the truth about how their case was handled. Private steps do not assist either past or current victims. Until churches begin to take this step, the public trust the church has lost will not be regained.”