

# Baylor students plan prayer vigil for victims of sexual violence

February 7, 2016

WACO—Baylor University students—in response to a rapidly unfolding series of reports about sexual violence on campus—planned a candlelight prayer vigil Feb. 8.

Students plan to meet outside Allbritton House, the home of Baylor President Ken Starr, at 9:30 p.m. for what organizers' call "[Survivors' Stand.](#)"

"Baylor University's administration repeatedly promises justice to students raped at Baylor and fails to provide it. Ken Starr repeatedly issues emailed platitudes while students still suffer," a notice on the group's Facebook event page said.

"If you are a sexual assault survivor, or know a sexual assault survivor, or have been affected by this breach in justice in any way, please come, stand with us and light a candle. We hope to show in a visible way just how much rape affects us, those we hold dear and our community in a peaceful effort to incite change."

At about 10 p.m., the group will move to Powell Chapel at Truett Seminary to continue the prayer service at the invitation of Todd Still, seminary dean and interim university provost.

"We want to provide the university community a place to gather and pray," Still said. "Our steadfast hope is that healing and understanding will begin to take place."

## **Open letter**

More than 1,000 Baylor alumni, students, faculty, parents and supporters also [signed](#) “An Open Letter on Responses to Sexual Assault at Baylor University.”

The letter asserts the “pattern of response (to reports of sexual assault) does not represent the distinct Christian identity on which Baylor prides itself, nor does it keep Baylor students, faculty and staff safe.”

“Baylor students deserve more than mere assurances by administration officials that the university is doing its part,” the letter states. “Accordingly, we respectfully insist that the university promptly take action to improve its response to sexual assault—and publicly state what those will be.

“This is about more than compliance with the university’s regulatory obligations. Baylor University strives to be an institution where parents can be confident that their children are in a safe environment and where students can be confident that the university will act with their best interests in mind.”

On Feb. 2, ESPN televised an “Outside the Lines” [report](#) about five women who asserted Tevin Elliott, at the time a defensive end on the Baylor football team, sexually assaulted them in incidents from October 2009 to April 2012. Two years ago, Elliott was convicted of two counts of sexual assault. But ESPN asserted Baylor officials failed to investigate adequately the allegations of sexual violence, and news media outlets around the country picked up the ESPN report.

## **President provides update on Title IX**

In an open letter to students posted Feb. 3 on the [Baylor Lariat website](#), Starr offered a response to the ESPN report and subsequent media coverage and an update on the university’s Title IX efforts.

Title IX is the law that states, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

Starr noted Baylor cannot provide commentary about the university’s response to specific reports of sexual assault, because the information is protected by federal student-privacy laws.

He also noted the Pepper Hamilton law firm, enlisted by Baylor after the rape conviction of another Baylor football player, defensive end Sam Ukwauchu, is continuing its investigation and review of policies and practices regarding sexual assault. He also pointed to “broad and significant improvements” in Baylor’s Title IX program.

“Our Title IX office is committed to responding quickly, compassionately and appropriately to reports of interpersonal violence by students or third-party reporters,” Starr said. “In addition, there are campus resources available to all students to seek help and access confidential medical or counseling assistance.”

Starr insisted on-campus interpersonal violence “is of great concern to me and to all of us who serve on Baylor’s faculty and staff.”

“The well-being and success of our students are the university’s first priority, and on that foundation are built all of the academic and student-life services on our campus. Acts of sexual violence contradict every value Baylor University upholds as a caring Christian community.”

### **First-person testimony by rape survivor**

But the day after Starr released his statement, Baylor graduate Stefanie Mundhenk—who grew up in Papua, New Guinea, as the child of missionary parents—posted a [blog](#), “I Was Raped at Baylor and This is My Story.”

In the detailed first-person account, she asserts another Baylor student raped her on March 12, 2015, and in spite of university statements to the contrary, “Baylor’s internal functions don’t always live up to its own proclaimed standards.” While she described individuals at Baylor who cared about her trauma, she asserted the institution cared more about protecting its image.

The *Baptist Standard* interviewed Mundhenk, submitted a list of questions to Baylor University officials and requested an interview with the Title IX coordinator. A complete story will follow later this week.