

# **BGCT executive director urges prayer for Baylor in wake of sexual violence**

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DALLAS—David Hardage, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, used social media to issue a call to prayer “for healing, restoration, redemption and harmony” in the wake of incidents of sexual violence at Baylor University.

“Honestly, I wish such a call had come from the board of regents or the administration,” Hardage wrote on his Facebook page May 23. He posted the item one day before multiple news sources reported Baylor’s regents fired Ken Starr as university president, although university officials later clarified Starr remains as president at this time.

In mid-May, Baylor’s board of regents received a “[comprehensive briefing](#)” from Pepper Hamilton, the Philadelphia law firm regents retained last September to investigate Baylor’s response to reports of sexual violence. However, the university has not released information from the investigation.

## **Instances of sexual violence**

The [regents hired](#) the law firm to conduct an independent external investigation soon after Sam Ukwuachu, a former Baylor Bears football player, was convicted and received a 180-day jail sentence and 10 years’ probation for sexual assault.

The assault, reported by a then-18-year-old soccer player, occurred in October 2013—about five months after Ukwuachu transferred to Baylor

from Boise State, where he was dropped from the football team after an earlier act of violence involving a female student.

Two years ago, defensive end Tevin Elliot was convicted of sexual assault and sentenced to the maximum of 20 years in prison. In February, ESPN televised an “Outside the Lines” [report](#) in which five women asserted Elliott sexually assaulted them between October 2009 and April 2012. The “Outside the Lines” report asserted Baylor officials failed to investigate adequately the allegations of sexual violence.

Last month, Shawn Oakman, an All-Big 12 defensive end, was arrested for an alleged sexual assault at his Waco apartment.

### **Call to prayer**

“As most of my friends know, I’m a Baylor guy and always have been,” Hardage wrote. “Therefore, it won’t surprise you to know these past few months have been troubling for someone like me.”

While driving back to Dallas from a speaking engagement at First Baptist Church in Mertzon, about 30 miles southwest of San Angelo, Hardage said, “the Lord put it on my heart to ask the Baylor family, my fellow Texas Baptists ... and other believers of good will” to join in prayer.

“This is not an attempt to condone wrongdoing or to remove consequences of wrongdoing,” he said. “It is a humble and simple call to prayer. In the midst of all the stone-throwing, I believe the better approach is to cast my burdens on the Lord.”

### **Facebook posting draws comments**

Rick Carroll, a banker from Rockwall, reposted Hardage’s entry, commenting: “As a lifelong Bear-backer, this has been a crazy, confusing, frustrating, heartbreaking time. So many unanswered questions, so much

stone-throwing. ... Honestly, I don't know what has or hasn't happened or who is or isn't to blame, and I individually can't do a darn thing about that. But what I can do is pray. And I am."

One reader, Hank Laywell, a self-described Aggie, wrote: "This should not be about a scandal ruining Baylor football. But what it should be about is the lives that have been forever changed by these events. Let God judge the actions of the events that occurred. Pray that Baylor makes the right decisions to improve their system of dealing with these types things as a university."

Another reader, Chris Moore, posted a comment: "I think the fact the board of regents and the administration didn't make this call for prayer puts a finger on the pulse of the problem."

On Feb. 8, about 250 Baylor students, faculty, staff, alumni and others held a [candlelight vigil](#) in front of Starr's home.

That same week, more than 1,700 people signed an [online open letter](#) that asserted the "pattern of response (to reports of sexual violence) does not represent the distinct Christian identity on which Baylor prides itself, nor does it keep Baylor students, faculty and staff safe."

Starr—who was not present at the candlelight vigil or the prayer service that followed in Powell Chapel at Baylor's Truett Theological Seminary—issued a public statement: "We hear your voices loud and clear. You want us to continue to improve. And you want definitive, responsible actions after we receive the insights and recommendations from Pepper Hamilton. You have my word on both."

In March, Baylor [announced](#) it would increase Title IX staff and resources, expand its counseling center and enhance public safety. Title IX is the law governing universities that prohibits discrimination based on sex and deals with issues of sexual harassment and sexual violence.

***Editor's Note:*** *The second paragraph was edited after the story originally was posted May 23.*