

Court documents shed light on allegations against Pressler

March 29, 2023

[Correspondence obtained by the Texas Tribune](#) reveals leaders at First Baptist Church in Houston knew in 2004 about alleged “morally and spiritually inappropriate” sexual conduct involving Judge Paul Pressler and at least one young man.

In an article posted March 27, *Texas Tribune* reporter Robert Dowden also reported on recent sworn testimony by Jared Woodfill—Pressler’s longtime law partner, former chair of the Harris County Republican Party and “family values” advocate.

In it, Woodfill acknowledged he had known since 2004 about a separate allegation Pressler had sexually abused a child.

Even so, Woodfill continued to work with Pressler for nearly 10 years, and his firm provided Pressler a series of personal assistants—typically young men who worked out of Pressler’s River Oaks home, Dowden reported. Two of those young men have accused Pressler of sexual misconduct or assault.

“Released over the last few weeks, the thousands of pages of new court records show how Woodfill leaned on his Pressler connections to bolster his political and legal career—despite warnings about his law partner’s behavior,” Dowden wrote.

“And they shed new light on how Pressler, a former Texas Court of Appeals judge and one-time White House nominee under George H.W. Bush, allegedly used his prestige and influence to evade responsibility amid repeated accusations of sexual misconduct and assault dating back to at least 1978, when he was forced out of a Houston church for [allegedly](#)

[molesting a teenager](#) in a sauna.”

The court records pertain to a six-year-old [lawsuit Duane Rollins brought against Pressler](#), Woodfill, First Baptist Church and leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention. Rollins accused Pressler of luring him to his home and to a private club where he repeatedly was sexually abused.

Letter from deacon committee to Pressler

Among the documents the *Tribune* cited was a Nov. 12, 2004, email Charles Poor, former minister of counseling at First Baptist in Houston, sent to Pastor Greg Matte.

The email includes a letter Poor said a committee from the church hand-delivered to Pressler on Aug. 23, 2004.

The letter to Pressler from Poor, Jay Brown and Kenneth H. Pearce concerns an allegation Pressler “had groped and undressed a college student at his Houston mansion,” Dowden wrote.

The letter—redacted to remove the name of the young man—indicates a committee from First Baptist in Houston met separately with Pressler and the young man from the church who accused him of abuse.

The committee concluded “there is no way for us to know what did or did not transpire between the two of you on the night in question” since the accounts by the two individuals differed at key points.

“However, we can reach conclusions and form opinions based on your individual accounts that are in agreement,” the letter stated. “Both of you told us there was a period of time when, following your suggestion, you and [redacted] were together and naked in your home.”

The letter states “what individuals do in their privacy of their own home (including being unclothed) is their business and of no concern to outsiders.” However, the committee told Pressler, “we do find it unacceptable your being naked with [redacted], a young man about a third of your age.”

The committee noted both were members of First Baptist Church in Houston, their relationship began at the church, and Pressler was seen by the young man “as a leader/mentor whose behavior was worth emulating.”

“Our subjective opinion is that the vast majority of [Houston’s First Baptist Church] members would deem the naked behavior between you and [redacted] to be morally and spiritually inappropriate,” the letter stated.

The committee also concluded Pressler had violated a deacon document he had endorsed, which called on deacons to abstain from “any personal conduct or activity that would distort his testimony to the lost or cause another believer to stumble.”

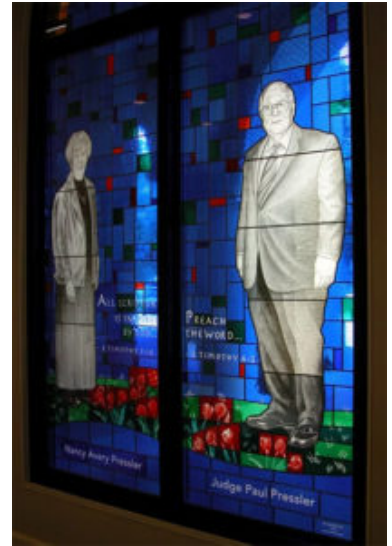
“In light of the above, we believe it is biblical and consistent with the culture of [Houston’s First Baptist Church] to hereby communicate an expectation that you no longer engage in behavior such as occurred with [redacted] on the night in question,” the letter stated. “Furthermore, assuming your willingness to sincerely do so, we would appreciate receiving a commitment from you that you will abide by this expectation.”

Appeal to ‘stature’ and SBC leadership

The letter also urged Pressler to abstain from similar behavior with other young men, regardless whether they are members of the church.

“Given your stature and various leadership roles in our church, the Southern Baptist Convention and other Christian organizations, it is our

considered opinion that this kind of behavior, if brought to light, might distort your testimony or cause others to stumble,” the letter stated.



Paul Pressler (right) is depicted in a stained glass window that has been removed from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. (RNS Photo courtesy of Don Young Glass Studio)

Pressler and Paige Patterson were the acknowledged architects of what their supporters now call “the conservative resurgence” in the SBC and their disenfranchised opponents call “the fundamentalist takeover” of the convention.

During Patterson’s time as president at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Pressler and his wife Nancy were depicted in a stained glass window in MacGorman Chapel. In 2019, the seminary’s board of trustees determined removing the stained glass windows honoring key figures in the “conservative resurgence” was “in the best interest of the institution.”

Barry Flynn, attorney for First Baptist Church in Houston, told [Baptist Press](#) the church “was not aware of any claims or incidences or any alleged inappropriate behavior by Paul Pressler before summer 2004, when it first received notice of the affidavit described in the article.”

Flynn also maintained Pressler “did not teach a youth Sunday school class or lead any youth group while at FBC.”

He said the three-person deacon committee met twice with the young man who made the accusations against Pressler, as well as meeting with Pressler.

“They did hear two different sides of the story. They did take action,” Flynn said.

“Paul Pressler’s position as a teacher was eliminated immediately. His role as a deacon was lowered to the lowest stature possible as a deacon. And he was eliminated from any committees of the church.”

About two and a half years later, Pressler moved his membership to Second Baptist Church in Houston.