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Christa Brown: No more church secrets about sex abuse

She calls on Southern Baptists to open files on clergy offenders

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Earlier this month, the U.S. Supreme Court rebuffed Cardinal Roger Mahony's attempt to keep secret the files about Los Angeles priests accused of sexually abusing kids. Thank God the court had more good sense than the church. How could anyone possibly believe that the right course of action was to keep such information secret?

Perhaps leaders at the Baptist General Convention of Texas could explain such bizarre thinking. They, too, keep a confidential list of individuals who are reported by a church for sexual misconduct, including ministers who are accused of sexually abusing kids.

By written policy, the Baptist Convention places a minister's name in that file only if the report is made by a church and only if there is a confession, a conviction or "substantial evidence that the abuse took place." A Baptist brochure refers to it as the file of "known offenders."

DallasNews.com/extra

Victims urge BGCT to release list (*The Baptist Standard*)

Lawsuit charges sexual abuse (snapnetwork.org)

The *Baptist Standard* published an article about the list – and the call by a support group for abuse victims to the Baptist Convention to publish the list – in its March 6 edition. In the article, a Baptist leader justified the fact that it is kept secret by explaining that congregations report such information "in confidence" because they are reporting "something that is very troubling."

Yes, this sort of information is "very troubling" indeed, and that is exactly why it should *not* be kept secret. Yet, like Catholic leaders in Los Angeles, that is what Baptist leaders in Texas are doing.

Why do I know all about this? Because I was sexually abused by a married, adult Southern Baptist minister when I was an adolescent church girl in Farmers Branch. Although another minister knew about it at the time, the perpetrator was simply sent on his way to a different church, and I was told not to speak of it.

Years later, when my own daughter reached adolescence, I resurrected the horrific memories and began to deal with them. I reported the abuse to numerous church and denominational leaders, assuming that leaders would be better educated nowadays and that they would take action to assure other kids' safety. But though my report could be readily substantiated, no one even thought it mattered enough to help me locate the perpetrator.

After a year of trying to get some action from Baptist leaders and after finding out that the perpetrator was still working in children's ministry

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in Florida, I filed a lawsuit as a means of bringing attention to the matter.

Only when an *Orlando Sentinel* reporter wrote about my lawsuit and made the information public was the man finally removed from ministry.

Court documents include evidence that the Baptist General Convention of Texas had placed this minister's name into its secret file of "known offenders." Yet that information simply sat there while the man continued in ministry in Florida.

How many other molesting ministers' names are in that file, and how many kids have they hurt? Why aren't the parents of Southern Baptist kids entitled to know which ministers' names are in that file?

In settlement of my lawsuit, the Farmers Branch church recently distributed a written apology. Some might think that should end the matter, but as a mother, I cannot keep quiet when I believe kids are at risk.

Sexual abuse by a trusted religious leader has a soul-murdering impact. If Southern Baptists are serious about saving souls, they should start by disclosing the secret files and ridding their ranks of clergy predators.

Christa Brown is an attorney, wife, mother and survivor of Southern Baptist clergy abuse. Her e-mail address is christa@stopbaptistpredators.org.

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