

## **Baptist Leaders Silent at Start of Murder Trial**

Stop Baptist Predators

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<http://stopbaptistpredators.blogspot.com/2010/01/baptist-leaders-silent-at-start-of.html>



The murder trial of former Southern Baptist pastor Matt Baker began today, January 12, in Waco, Texas.

Baker is accused of having killed his wife, allegedly so that he could more easily pursue “his latest conquest” -- a young woman in his church.

In anticipation of trial, prosecutors recently gave notice that they intend to present evidence that, during the course of his career, Matt Baker made sexual “advances,” “assaults,” and “approaches” on at least 13 young females, including 4 minors.

The prosecutors’ notice comes as no surprise because private investigators had previously made known their own conclusion that Matt Baker spent years leading “a secret life as a sexual predator,” “harassing, and groping unsuspecting teenage girls and women.”

At every stage of Matt Baker’s ministerial career -- during those many years when he was allegedly groping and assaulting teen girls and women -- Matt Baker was working in churches, schools and organizations affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Yet, from that Baptist organization, we hear only a deafening silence.

Some of the allegations were reported to Baptist leaders, but no one warned anyone else. Matt Baker moved with ease from church to church, and no one ever stopped him.

This is something that Baptist officials should explain.

How could a man with so many reported abuse allegations nevertheless remain as a Baptist minister?

It's a question that probably won't be answered by the murder trial. But it's a question that does deserve an answer.

Look at this recap of Matt Baker's career, and ask yourself: Doesn't the Baptist General Convention of Texas owe some explanation?

Matt started out as a ministerial student at Baylor University, which is affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Matt was also a trainer for the football team. A freshman girl, who had a part-time job cleaning locker rooms, reported that "inside the locker room, he pinned her arms behind her back...spread her legs...forced her onto a bench..."

According to the girl's account, Baylor officials "asked her not to contact police." They "let him walk away." They typed up a report and put it in a file.

The girl dropped out of school, but Matt continued to move up the Baptist ladder. He got a prized internship at First Baptist of Waco, a church affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He ran their summer youth camp and worked in the church's recreation center.

A "minister at First Baptist received a report that Matt had grabbed a female custodian in the bathroom..."

"Around the same time, the pastor received a separate report that Matt had cornered a teenage girl in a small room where roller skates were stored."

But the church simply allowed Matt to move on and "said nothing about the

allegations when other churches later called, interested in hiring Matt.”

“I didn’t want to be known as the man who ruined his career,” explained the pastor to a Texas Monthly reporter. (Incidentally, this career recap is gleaned from information gathered and reported by Texas Monthly, not from any information provided by any Baptist officials.)

In fact, Matt’s career moved upward after the allegations. He got a job at Columbus Avenue Baptist Church, one of the most prestigious churches in Waco. It’s a church that is also affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Next, Matt got a job at First Baptist Church of Robinson. Yes, it’s also affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

To supplement his income, Matt ran an after-school youth program at the YMCA. The director received written statements from 4 young female employees, all of whom claimed Matt had sexually propositioned them,” and one said Matt “touched her pants near her genitalia and put her hands on his crotch.” The YMCA fired Matt.

After that, Matt was accepted into Baylor’s renowned Truett seminary, which is affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas. But even though Truett seminary is under the same Baptist umbrella organization as First Baptist of Waco, where Matt was twice-reported for sexual abuse, and even though Truett seminary is part of Baylor, where Matt was reported for sexual assault, no one connected the dots. The fact that they were all affiliated with the same Baptist General Convention of Texas made no difference. Apparently, the information wasn’t shared. Matt Baker was admitted into the Baptist seminary.

Next, Matt got a job as pastor at Pecan Grove Baptist Church, which is also affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

A woman told Matt’s wife that her 16-year-old daughter said Matt had “grabbed her and kissed her” in a parking lot.

Matt then became the pastor at Williams Creek Baptist Church, and from there he went to First Baptist Church of Riesel, and to Northlake Baptist in Dallas. All are churches affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of

Texas.

In 2005, Matt moved his family back to Waco and accepted a job as chaplain for the Waco Center for Youth, a residential treatment facility for emotionally disturbed adolescents. He also became the pastor of Crossroads Baptist, a church affiliated with – guess who -- the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

In 2006, still more stories from teenage girls surfaced: “...a hand on a leg”... “his hand against her breast”... asking “if she was wearing panties.”

After his wife’s death, and as talk began to circulate in Waco, Matt moved to Kerrville to work as a director for the Baptist Student Union at Schreiner, a small West Texas college. His position was funded by the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Thus, even with so many allegations of abuse and assault on teens and young women, Matt Baker was able to get still another job working with students. And the Baptist General Convention of Texas even paid for it.

Didn’t anyone check his background? How could they have overlooked so many accusations?

Why couldn’t the Baptist General Convention of Texas find out about the string of sexual abuse allegations in its own affiliated churches and its own affiliated university (or about the fact that he was fired from the YMCA)?

An ordinary person might look at this obvious institutional failure and ask the obvious question: “With such a string of sordid allegations, how could Matt Baker keep getting new jobs?”

But with Baptist ministers, it’s easy. Baptists have no effective system for even keeping records on clergy abuse allegations, much less for telling anyone about them. And they sure as heck don’t have any system for actually doing anything about them.

Many experts say that a sexual predator can become emboldened by a lack of consequences. Maybe. Maybe not. Matt Baker denies all allegations.

But wholly apart from the murder trial, doesn’t the Baptist General

Convention of Texas owe some explanation to the young women and girls who made reports about Matt Baker? To the young women and girls who may have unduly suffered even after others had reported Matt Baker? To the families in the many churches where Matt Baker worked -- families whose teens and young women were left at risk by the do-nothing system of the Baptist General Convention of Texas?

For a CBS "48 Hours" video on this story, see my prior posting: "Baptist leaders must consider possible consequences."