



SEXUAL ABUSE TASK FORCE

REPORT

Submitted to the messengers of the ABSC Annual Meeting

OCTOBER 2022



A NOTE FROM THE TASK FORCE

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TO THE MESSENGERS OF THE ABSC,

On May 22 of this year, our Southern Baptist Convention was greatly affected by the release of the Sexual Abuse Task Force Report. The result of this report is that our denomination would never be the same. The report revealed much and caused much debate. However, amidst an assortment of reactions, there was a strong agreement across our denomination that we must learn and do better. Southern Baptists are imperfect people, but we have been a people historically and rightly defined by our commitment to the inerrancy of the Bible and the task of The Great Commission. Abuse of anyone, especially the sexual abuse experienced by survivors is opposing to everything we hold dear about the gospel and the call of Christ on our lives to love and cherish one another, as those created by God in His image. Our ABSC Task Force was given a simple charge. To ensure the policies and procedures of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention are above reproach in handling sexual abuse allegations. The task force was also charged with reporting back best practices and steps taken within the ABSC. While we understand that the ABSC has no authority over the local church, our prayer is that this report will compel churches to take appropriate steps to ensure they are prepared to handle such issues. This response is only the beginning of the work we all have to do.

TASK FORCE MEMBERS



Brad Lewter – Chairman

Senior Pastor

Grand Avenue Baptist

Megan McFerron – Vice Chairperson

Social Worker

Member of Mt. Vernon Baptist Church

Matthew Duran – Secretary

Senior Pastor

Indian Springs Baptist Church

Larry White – ABSC President

Ex Officio Task Force Member

Senior Pastor

Woodland Heights Baptist Church

Stephanie Davis

Sexual Abuse Survivor

Member of First Baptist Benton

Betsy Danielson

Attorney

Member of First Baptist Boonville

David Mitchell

Senior Pastor

Mount Carmel Baptist Church



OUR PRAYER:

At the October 2021 annual meeting, the messengers unanimously voted to approve the formation of a Sexual Abuse Task Force purposed with the task of ensuring the policies and procedures of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention are above reproach in handling sexual abuse allegations. Our efforts will prayerfully accomplish three things:

1. Create a culture within all our entities that places a high priority on protecting those most vulnerable in our society. That culture is shaped by:
 - Godliness as the highest priority
 - Clear and concise policies and procedures
 - Accountability in following those policies and procedures
 - Robust training and education
 - A Strong Trustee and Executive Committee System
 - Leadership
2. Develop better strategies to assist and equip our local churches
3. Send a message to survivors that we care and that we are committed to best practices.

OUR PLAN:

We assigned each member of our team to an entity or agency. Those agencies and institutions are:

- Arkansas Baptist State Convention: includes camps (Super Summer and Camp Siloam), and Baptist Collegiate Ministries
- Ouachita Baptist University
- Williams Baptist University
- Arkansas Baptist Foundation
- Arkansas Baptist Children & Family Ministries



Each task force member was given the task to:

- Gather all documents relevant to our scope
- Study each document and provide recommendations
- Present his/her findings to the entire task force for discussion
- After all recommendations were agreed upon by the entire task force, those recommendations were given to the agency or institution for consideration

We also worked to develop a list of recommendations to be employed by the ABSC to ensure best practices in regards to sexual abuse response, training, and resourcing the churches it serves.

OUR PROCESS:

The task force met several times throughout the year both in person and on Zoom.

November 19, 2021- Task Force Meeting #1

December 3, 2021 – Task Force Meeting #2

April 8, 2022 – Task Force Meeting #3

May 19, 2022 – Task Force Meeting #4

July 22, 2022 – Task Force Meeting #5

August 29, 2022 – Task Force Meeting #6

October 4, 2022 – Task Force Meeting #7

October 12, 2022 – Task Force Meeting #8



ABSC EXECUTIVE BOARD

MISSIONS TEAM CRISIS SITUATION RESPONSE

Dr. Sam Roberts, Team Leader

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that all abuse response protocols follow the legal guidelines for mandatory reporting procedures.

Rationale: The current Missions Response Guide protocol for reporting abuse is to contact the team or event director. If the abuse is reported to a mandatory reporter, the guidelines for reporting indicate that first contact should be the child abuse hotline for minors or local authorities for adults.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that a clear definition of who is considered a mandatory reporter and who is not should be outlined in the Missions Team crisis response guide and any other policy manual as it pertains to the Missions Team.

Rationale: Best practice is that everyone is aware of his or her status as a reporter to ensure the appropriate response is taken in the appropriate amount of time.

COLLEGE + YOUNG LEADERS

Bruce Venable, Team Leader

Recommendation 1: Safe practices that are not written in policy, but are a standard rule and govern practices should be written into policy. Ones that were sent via email are as follows:

- *All of our BCM campus ministers who are full time and our part-time/volunteer campus ministers undergo the same screening and training. Background checks, an orientation from the Assoc. Ex office are standard rule, and ministry safe training.*
- *We do not allow any minors to attend our on campus ministry programming, events or trips unless accompanied by an adult parent and/or church staff member who brings them for a single event.*
 - a. *If a student pastor desires to bring a few graduating seniors to an event, they are under his/her supervision during the event.*
 - b. *If a minor desires to attend any overnight trips, a parent MUST accompany him / her.*
- *We do a few overnight events within our programming. Most of them are planned and carried out locally (i.e., retreats, mission trips, etc.). Each trip requires the campus minister to provide adequate and clear guidelines for behavior, adequate travel, and adequate separate sleeping arrangements.*

RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendation 2: List appropriate referral to counseling services, i.e., campus counseling, services available in area, church staffed counselors, etc. (Current policy as follows)

- *Collegiate ministers are NOT long-term counselors. If any student needs long-term counseling, the minister shall refer the students to a trained professional. Collegiate ministers are given training to assist in assessments of the need for professional counseling.*

Recommendation 3: Add a clear statement of safety as a top priority of the BCM at the beginning of the Policy and Procedures for crisis/mandatory reporting.

Recommendation 4: Statement on following university/college's Title IX policy if BCM is located on campus and where to locate such policy/Title IX point of contact.

List appropriate phone numbers for agencies for mandatory reporting, as well as contact information for Executive Team at ABSC, and detail how to document report. (Current policy as follows). Also, parents do not need to be notified if victim is not a minor. Order of how to proceed should be better ordered to insure that reporting to proper authorities are above documentation.

- *All Employees and volunteers are mandatory reporters as required by Universal Citation: AR Code § 12-18-402 (2019)*
- *On any incident, employee notifies immediate supervisor of incident in addition to filing a mandatory reporting report to the appropriate agency.*
- *Team leader notifies Executive Team of the ABSC regarding incident.*
- *Parents of victim are notified immediately.*
- *Documentation of report is kept in the Business Office of the ABSC.*
- Include clear instructions on appropriate follow up/resources (emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual). If report was made, set up a follow up appointment with student, refer to counseling services, etc.
- Consider including other checks for staff and volunteers beyond just background checks, i.e. child maltreatment registries, sex offender registries, etc. (Statement on background checks as follows)
The Arkansas Baptist State Convention Executive Board (ABSCEB) requires that all paid and volunteer workers in camps and activities involving minors undergo a criminal background check. Some leadership positions may require additional background information. All background checks will be stored by the camp/event for seven years. The ABSC also requires that participating churches run background checks on all of their participating adult volunteers. Additionally, all organizations and churches who recruit and approve workers and volunteers should perform criminal background checks prior to their participating in ABSCEB events.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Include appropriate mandated training for employees and volunteers (i.e. ministry safe, guidepost, GRACE, etc), as well as training on how to appropriately report sexual abuse allegations.

**The words in *italics* are notes directly from Bruce Venable, Team Leader, College + Young Leader Team or current polices from organization.



SUPER SUMMER

Warren Gasaway, Church Health Team Leader (Interim)

Recommendation #1: It is recommended that all abuse reponse protocols must follow mandatory reporting procedures.

Rationale: The current Super Summer protocol for reporting abuse is to contact the Camp Director. If the abuse is reported to a mandatory reporter the guidelines for reporting indicate that first contact should be the child abuse hotline.

Recommendation #2: It is recommended that a clear definition of who is considered a mandatory reporter and who is not should be outlined in the Super Summer policy manual.

Rationale: Best practice is that everyone is aware of his or status as a reporter to ensure the appropriate response is taken.

Recommendation #3: It is recommended that Super Summer would identify a qualified point person, either employed or volunteer, to serve as a point of contact for anyone who has or is experiencing abuse and would like to report.

Rationale: 1000+ students enjoy Super Summer every year. The chances that a student is being abused or has been abused is extremely high. The hope is that Super Summer would offer a safe and clear path for victims and survivors to report his or her abuse.

RECOMMENDATIONS



ARKANSAS BAPTIST ASSEMBLY - CAMP SILOAM

Jason Wilke, Director

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that Camp Siloam amend their 2022 Trustees policy to include protocol for reporting sexual abuse allegations. While these are adults, some direction would help a victim know where to start and that reporting is the right thing to do.

Rationale: Every person who is involved with Camp Siloam in a leadership capacity needs to understand how to handle events of sexual assault allegations. At any moment a trustee could receive a report from a victim and must be able to execute the proper policy and procedure.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that Camp Siloam amend their operating policy to include requirements for mandatory reporting and aftercare for victims (i.e., mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual support).

Rationale: Every person who works for Camp Siloam, with minors, is considered a mandatory reporter. Therefore, employees need to understand their role and responsibility should an incident occur.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that Camp Siloam identify a qualified point person (either hired or volunteer) to serve as a point of contact for reporting past or present abuse.

Rationale: Camp Siloam, like other camps, either employs or has a volunteer nurse available for medical needs. Therefore, it is best practice to have a person identified as the primary contact for reporting sexual abuse.



RECOMMENDATIONS



ARKANSAS BAPTIST FOUNDATION

Bobby Thomas, President/CEO

Through the course of our research and meetings with the leadership of the Arkansas Baptist Foundation, the leadership took it upon themselves to update their policies and procedures. The Sex Abuse Task Force believes the amended policy and procedures of the Arkansas Baptist Foundation meet the criteria for best practices. There are no further recommendations at this time.

Policy Changes made by the ABF:

- Provide training regarding sexual abuse prevention and survivor care as part of trustee orientation and selection. We are awaiting word on whether the Convention Nominating Committee will complete background checks for every trustee nominated. Most all of our current trustees have had background checks due to their service through their local church.
- Provide training regarding sexual abuse prevention and survivor care to our staff, as well as background checks, as part of their on-going employment and future selection of potential new staff.
- Participate in the SBC sexual abuse assessment once made available.

RECOMMENDATIONS



ARKANSAS BAPTIST Children & Family MINISTRIES

ARKANSAS BAPTIST CHILDREN AND FAMILY MINISTRIES

Dr. Derek Brown, Executive Director

Through the course of our research and meetings with the help of the leadership of the Arkansas Baptist Children's Home, the Sex Abuse Task Force has determined that the Arkansas Baptist Children's home policies and procedures meet the criteria for best practices.



RECOMMENDATIONS



WILLIAMS BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

WILLIAMS BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

Dr. Stan Norman, President

Recommendation #1: It is recommended that Williams Baptist University have a clear point person for reporting sexual abuse allegations for all students, faculty, and staff.

Rationale: Currently the institution's sexual abuse allegations coordinator is Provost and Executive Vice President for Campus Life Marvin Schoenecke, Ph.D. From our understanding, students are briefed on this during orientation, but the coordinator's contact information is only found in the title IX document from the school as it relates to this topic. Even on the school's website, a clear contact person is not listed; however, the link to the Title IX document is provided. Furthermore, it is recommended that the school undergo a regular campus-wide marketing campaign to ensure students are familiar with the reporting procedures and their on-campus advocate.

Recommendation #2: It is recommended that Williams Baptist University consider appointing a female faculty/employee to be the sex abuse allegation advocate under the direction of the provost, who will also ensure proper follow up aide is offered to alleged victim.

Rationale: In a recent study conducted by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, it was discovered that 1 in 5 women and 1 in 16 men are sexually assaulted while in college. Perhaps a more alarming number that surfaced from that same study is 63.3% of men at one university who self-reported acts qualifying as rape or attempted rape admitted to committing repeat rapes. It is clear from the studies that women are more likely to be sexually assaulted on college and university campuses. It is the recommendation by this committee that the school provide a female faculty/staff member to deal directly with females who have an allegation. We believe this will help women on campuses develop more trust in the reporting process and feel more empowered to come forward with credible allegations.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendation #3: It is recommended that Williams Baptist University consider enhancing on campus lighting, cameras, and security stations on campus.

Rationale: While Williams Baptist University currently has campus lighting and cameras, it is recommended that the school expand its capabilities. Although Williams has a beautiful campus, it has many dark areas on its campus. Furthermore, while the school has many cameras inside buildings, it is recommended that the school utilize more security cameras throughout the campus. The final recommendation is that the school consider placing security stations throughout the campus. While it is true that every student has a cell phone, security stations are good for a couple of reasons: 1. Security stations can act as a visible deterrent to someone wanting to cause harm; 2. Security stations are easy to use for students and can immediately alert the authorities.



**OUACHITA
BAPTIST UNIVERSITY**

OUACHITA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

Dr. Ben Sells, President

Through the course of our research and meetings with the help of the leadership of Ouachita Baptist University, the Sex Abuse Task Force has determined that the school's policies and procedures meet the criteria for best practices.



FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ABSC

Recommendation 1: The Sexual Abuse Task Force recommends that the ABSC President form a Standing Sexual Abuse Response and Resource Team annually.

Rationale: One of the primary functions of the ABSC is to support and resource the 1,500 churches that make up the Arkansas Baptist State Convention. The SATF recognizes that the need for support and resources regarding sexual abuse response and care is great. We believe a standing response team could prove to be an invaluable resource to the local church.

Purpose: The Sexual Abuse Response and Resource Team will provide support to any ABSC church or agency or institution in the handling of a crisis situation as it relates to sexual abuse.

Support includes but is not limited to:

- Training of staff and lay leaders in proper procedures for handling sexual abuse allegations
- Guidance with follow up and care for survivors
- Assist churches and agencies with reported sexual abuse

Members: The team is to be made up of at least three members qualified in the area of Sexual Abuse response and training and at least two Arkansas Baptist Pastors. Members may serve a two-year term with no limit on how many two-year terms he or she can serve. The team should be appointed annually by the president of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention.

Recommendation 2: The Sexual Abuse Task Force recommends that all trustees of the Executive Board, agencies, and institutions shall undergo criminal background checks as a condition of service. These background checks shall be conducted and evaluated by the Convention Nominating Committee (CNC) prior to the CNC report at the ABSC annual meeting.

Rationale: Each member of the Executive Board serves in a leadership position on the Arkansas Baptist State Convention and therefore shoulders a certain amount of liability. Furthermore, the Arkansas Baptist State Convention also shoulders liability for every person installed on the Executive Board. Therefore, it is best practice that Arkansas Baptists do all they can to ensure those in leadership are above reproach in sexual abuse and criminal behavior. While we understand the limitations of background checks, we recognize their helpfulness in determining eligibility to serve.

FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ABSC



Recommendation 3: The Sexual Abuse Task Force recommends that the standing Credentials Committee of the ABSC review all churches, plants or established, that petition to join the ABSC to ensure there are not issues with mishandled sexual abuse allegations or ongoing issues as it pertains to sexual abuse.

Rationale: The Task Force desires to create a safety net for the ABSC to ensure churches, planted or established, are coming into the ABSC above reproach as it pertains to sexual abuse. The intent is not to withhold membership from churches or plants who have followed proper procedure as it pertains to sex abuse allegations in their local churches, but to ensure churches with patterns of neglect or abuse are properly screened and identified.

Recommendation 4: The Sexual Abuse Task Force recommends all agencies and institutions of the ABSC participate in the SBC sexual abuse assessment once made available.

Rationale: The Task Force desires to see as all agencies and institutions equipped to handle cases of sexual abuse allegations. This tool, once available, will assist our agency and institutions in understanding their readiness and preparedness. This tool will assist in response, training, and policy development.

Recommendation 5: The Sexual Abuse Task Force recommends that the Executive Board allocate funds from the annual budget to support the efforts of the Sexual Abuse Response and Resource Team.

Rationale: At this time, the Sexual Abuse Response and Resource Team will be comprised of volunteers. Should the team need funds to do the tasks they will be called upon to do, those funds should come from the budget of the ABSC Executive Board. The SATF recognizes that the development and approval of budgeted funds must follow Executive Committee policies and procedures.



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