

RESOLVED: Prevention AND Caring Well

Sexual Abuse

MinistrySafe and the Georgia Baptist Mission Board
June 2019



At the beginning of each new year, many of us make New Year's Resolutions: evaluating our past year or present circumstances and resolving to improve on a particular matter (i.e., more time with the kids, less coffee, more exercise). For the Southern Baptist Convention, the 'new year' comes each June, when the SBC, likewise, evaluates the year just past. In June of 2018, the Southern Baptist Convention clearly understood that the largest issue crying out for attention related to sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse in ministry contexts is an issue that skips no paradigm or denomination. For Southern Baptists, the issue is front-and-center.

RESOLUTION NO. 2

In June 2018, the Southern Baptist Convention wrestled with the issue of child sexual abuse. That struggle gave rise to Resolution No. 2, which resolves (in part) as follows:

RESOLVED, That we call on pastors and ministry leaders to foster safe environments in which abused persons may both recognize the reprehensible nature of their abuse and reveal such abuse to pastors and ministry leaders in safety and expectation of being believed and protected; and be it further

RESOLVED, That church and ministry leaders have an obligation to implement policies and practices that protect against and confront any form of abuse.

CARING WELL

The first part of Resolution No. 2 listed above essentially calls on pastors and ministry leaders to care well. Why was a resolution necessary? Historically, SBC ministry leaders have not 'cared well'. Child victims and adult survivors have been ignored, blamed, minimized, marginalized and patronized. Clearly, that must change.

In Fall of 2018, SBC President J. D. Greear commissioned a Sexual Abuse Advisory Group and tasked the Group to outline efforts to correctly respond to allegations of abuse.

As part of this initiative, Greear and the Advisory Group developed ChurchCares.com. ChurchCares provides resources to help ministry leaders understand how to care well, create ministry environments that *receive well*, and develop ministry cultures where victims and survivors are believed and protected. In addition, Greear and the Advisory Group outlined the [Caring Well Challenge](#), inviting all Baptist ministries to embrace this call to action.

Caring Well is critically important. *Prevention* is equally important.

PREVENTION

The second element of Resolution No. 2 relates to prevention.

“Ministry leaders will never be *accidentally excellent* at sexual abuse prevention,” says Gregory Love, co-founder and Director of [MinistrySafe](#). “We cannot reduce a risk we don’t understand, and ministry leaders must first understand the risk. This is why we believe training and awareness *must* be a priority.”

When it comes to prevention, MinistrySafe is the nation’s leader in preventative tools and resources addressing the risk of child sexual abuse. In addition to working with dozens of Baptist state conventions, organizations, camps, other denominations and mission organizations, Love and his wife/law partner Kimberlee Norris serve as Faculty at Dallas Theological Seminary – teaching the first seminary-level course specifically addressing sexual abuse in ministry contexts.

Four key concepts form the foundation of MinistrySafe preventative tools and trainings:

1. The Approach Must Be Victim-Centric

Prevention isn’t simply the WHAT (an effective safety system), but also the WHY (a ministry’s motivation).

Preventative efforts must be child-centered. “When we protect the child, we have protected the church,” says Love. “It does not work the other way around.”

Any response to child sexual abuse risk requires a *victim-centric* approach, rather than an approach that is *organization-centric* or *abuser-centric*. Learn more about a *victim-centric approach* here: [Article – Lessons from the Ditch](#).

2. What We Believe Shapes What We Do

Ministry leaders commonly hold inaccurate **beliefs** about child sexual abuse and how it might manifest. As a result, ministry leaders **act** in a wrong manner. If this *known risk* is to be properly addressed and children properly protected, ministry leaders must understand the common misconceptions about sexual abuse and sexual abusers. If not, the church will continue to repeat the errors of the past thirty years.

3. Background Checks Are NOT a Stand-Alone Solution

Because less than 10% of sexual abusers will *ever encounter the criminal justice system*, more than 90% of those who sexually abuse children have no criminal record ... *and they know it*. The criminal background check is the single largest ‘security blanket’ churches hold onto, and this must change. Criminal background checks have become a standard of care, and must occur, but a background check – standing alone – does not provide an adequate safety system.

4. Sexual Abusers Have No Visual Profile

We cannot recognize the abuser *by sight*; there is no visual profile. Instead, we must recognize this risk *behaviorally*. Abuser behavior is predictable and recognizable. The abuser’s *grooming process* and *common grooming behaviors* should be known by ministry staff members and addressed in ministry policies.

“Our mission at MinistrySafe is to equip ministry staff members and volunteers with an understanding of the grooming process: the behaviors an offender employs to prepare a child for inappropriate sexual interaction, then keep that child silent,” says Kimberlee Norris. “When staff members and volunteers have ‘eyes that see’ and the ‘ears that hear’ offender behaviors, prevention is possible.”

MinistrySafe addresses the offender’s grooming process and common grooming behaviors through its foundational training: Sexual Abuse Awareness Training. Currently, MinistrySafe trains over 35,000 ministry staff members and volunteers online each month. In April of 2019, MinistrySafe issued its 1,000,000th Certificate of Completion.

Five-Part Safety System

As an outgrowth of more than two decades of law practice addressing child sexual abuse risk, Love and Norris developed the MinistrySafe Five-Part Safety System, implemented through an online Control Panel. Every child-serving ministry should employ an effective safety system protecting children from sexual abuse, including:

- Sexual Abuse Awareness Training
- Skillful Screening Processes
- Appropriate Criminal Background Check
- Tailored Policies & Procedures
- Systems for Monitoring and Oversight

The MinistrySafe Safety System is easily implemented and sustainable through the MinistrySafe online Control Panel. [Learn more](#) about the MinistrySafe Five-Part Safety System and online tools and resources.

PROGRESS REQUIRES INVESTMENT AND COMMITMENT

The Georgia Baptist Mission Board is one of several state conventions that has taken the topic of sexual abuse seriously and has committed to educating its staff and Georgia Baptist churches on prevention. The Georgia Baptist Mission Board and MinistrySafe have partnered since 2013 to provide Church Safety Workshops, Skillful Screening Trainings, employee training/certification and more.

Georgia Baptist Mission Board efforts include:

- Beginning in 2013, MinistrySafe has been engaged to train all GBMB staff regarding sexual abuse prevention and reporting; this includes camp and retreat centers.
- The professionals at MinistrySafe have been engaged to provide over 40 regional Church Safety Workshops over the past several years. In a Church Safety Workshop, ministry leaders are trained to understand facts about sexual abuse and sexual abusers, the grooming process, common grooming behaviors, peer sexual abuse, impact of abuse on child victims and adult survivors, Georgia reporting requirements, and more. Three such workshops were just provided in Georgia last week – and are open to all denominations.

- In addition to equipping Georgia churches, the Georgia Baptist Mission Board employs a robust system to screen and train all staff and volunteers that participate in organization-related programs (camps, disaster relief, retreats, and more).
- Together with First Baptist Church Atlanta, the Georgia Baptist Mission Board hosted the first-ever Sexual Abuse Summit – an all-day event providing in-depth instruction to ministry leaders, including understanding sexual abuse risk in ministry, creating an effective safety system, how to identify an abuser through an effective screening system, changes in the law, and the importance of reporting.
- Both live and online, the Georgia Baptist Mission Board has provided Sexual Abuse Awareness Training to over 6,000 leaders that serve churches, camps, disaster relief efforts, schools, daycares, and other ministries.
- The Georgia Baptist Mission Board provides ongoing live webinar training by legal experts to Baptist Collegiate Ministry personnel in correctly understanding and following State of Georgia abuse reporting requirements, most recently in December of 2018.
- The Georgia Baptist Mission Board is the only major religious denomination in Georgia to support the passage of HB 479, the Hidden Predator Act. This bill will hold abusers accountable and provide victims access to the justice system in Georgia.
- The financial investment from the Georgia Baptist Mission Board is approaching \$250,000 since 2013; the staff time invested cannot be measured.

“Gregory Love and MinistrySafe are helping us change the mindset of Georgia Baptist church leaders,” states Kevin Smith, COO of the Georgia Baptist Mission Board. “Prevention first must be made an organizational priority and a cultural shift in focus. It is also an ongoing process of testing, refining, and enforcing policy. MinistrySafe has been invaluable with their expert training and guidance, as well as keeping us abreast of the latest trends and legal developments.”

The Georgia Baptist Mission Board also recognizes that to get all churches and associations trained, it’s an ongoing, long-term commitment. This September the Georgia Baptist Mission Board will be sponsoring additional Church Safety events in the Metro Atlanta and Athens areas.

In addition to Georgia Baptist, MinistrySafe founders have provided live and online training for Baptist state conventions across the United States, including Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, North Carolina, Alabama, Montana, California, Nevada, Colorado, Indiana, Kansas/Nebraska, South Carolina and Alaska. MinistrySafe also provides training and preventive resources to Southern Baptist seminaries and universities (SBTS, SWBTS, MBTS, NOBTS, Gateway, DBU, ETBU, Liberty and BJU), as well as other Southern Baptist entities and related organizations (NAMB, IMB, Lifeway, and GuideStone Resources).

SUMMARY

It is appropriate (and long overdue) that the Southern Baptist Convention resolve to correctly address and respond to child sexual abuse. All ministry leaders should take advantage of *ChurchCares* resources to compassionately care for child victims and adult survivors of abuse.

With respect to prevention, don't miss the training opportunities made possible by Baptist state conventions and organizations, as well as preventative tools and resources created by MinistrySafe.

ABOUT MINISTRYSAFE

Our mission is to protect children and those who serve them.

MinistrySafe was created by legal professionals who are sexual abuse experts. After decades of litigating sexual abuse cases, Gregory Love and Kimberlee Norris founded [MinistrySafe](https://ministrysafe.com/) to help ministries meet legal standards of care and reduce the risk of sexual abuse by creating preventative measures tailored to fit the needs of churches and ministry programs. With over 50 years combined experience in sexual abuse litigation, consultation and crisis management, Love & Norris understand the risk of sexual abuse and how it unfolds in children's programming.

Since MinistrySafe's inception, more than 15,000 organizations have trained over 1,000,000 staff members and volunteers, on six continents in various languages.

On average, MinistrySafe trains around 35,000 people each month—live and online. The mission at MinistrySafe is equip ministry leaders to prevent child sexual abuse in ministry contexts.

“At MinistrySafe, we help you protect children and those who serve them.”

Links to referenced resources in document:

- ChurchCares.com: <https://churchcares.com/>
- Caring Well Challenge: <https://caringwell.com/>
- Lessons from the Ditch: https://ministrysafe.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Lessons-from-the-Ditch-Part-1_MS_7.22.2016.pdf
- MinistrySafe “Learn More”: <https://ministrysafe.com/the-safety-system/>
- MinistrySafe: <https://ministrysafe.com/>