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Subject: Fwd: How Now Shall We Live?: NAMB President's past choices and current threats
Date: February 11, 2019 at 6:49 PM
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From: Will McRaney <will@willmcraney.com>
Subject: How Now Shall We Live?: NAMB President's past choices and current threats
Date: February 10, 2019 at 12:22:27 PM EST
To: State Baptist Editors
Cc: State Exec. Directors, Select EC staff & officers, Select news sources

Journalists,

I read late last night the Houston Chronicle story on sexual misconduct in the SBC after receiving advance notice of its publication. Because sexual misconduct from clergy has impacted my own family of origin, I am particularly sensitive to this subject. As well, I have 33 years serving SBC churches and the denomination as a pastor, church planter, 11 year professor, consultant, denominational leader etc. Like you, I am concerned on multiple levels.

A friend and former colleague of yours, Joni Hannigan has her own experience of sexual assault involving a Baptist deacon. On June 10, 2018 prior to the SBC in Dallas, she shared "My Own #MeToo Story and How Southern Baptist Should Do More". In a subsequent article on June 26, 2018 she analyzed the newly SBC adopted Resolution on Abuse. Interestingly, Resolutions Committee Chairman Jason Deusing clarified by interview that the Resolution's Committee did not intend to provide an "Exception Clause" in the resolution for clergy/penitent privilege. So, in Joni Hannigan's analysis, she included 5 sentences recounting the choices of NAMB President Ezell to not testify in a child molestation case and not inform his church while he served as pastor at Highview. Her story does not end there, but provokes Ezell (through Ebert) to accuse Mrs. Hannigan via private text of lying and in the "strongest possible way to remove what you (she) have posted about Kevin".

WOW! Not only does she have her own #MeToo story, but now she has been victimized once again. This time with the full force of the North American Mission Board. Ezell threatened Mrs. Hannigan for reporting documented facts about his choice to not help the prosecution with his testimony in a child molestation case. The "Menacing Message" comes to her through NAMB PR Director Mike Ebert.

In NAMB's first communication with her, she is both accused of being a liar and threatened by the power and resources of NAMB with what would be a costly lawsuit defending herself over false libel claims by Ezell. Is what happened to Joni Hannigan why most SBC journalists and reports reflect more public relations and branding, than the telling of the real facts. No one wants to be attacked like Mrs. Hannigan. **Is there an unwritten law out there somewhere to only print good stuff about the "cool" kids?**

Ezell told the *Louisville Courier-Journal* that "the leaders of the congregation (one of the largest in the state) did not plan to tell members of the congregation about the predator's arrest or conviction." Who is to protect the children, advocate for justice, and demand truth if not those entrusted with leadership (including journalists & trustees)? Choices were made in favor of perpetrators over justice for the victims. Choices were made to protect the image and branding of a pastor and the church over trusting the painful truths to a congregation. Parents of all the children deserved to have their spiritual leaders tell them the truth, even hard truths.

This is a character flaw, not an isolated misstep. I have firsthand experience as do others. Most of you saw this type of behavior last year in the State Editor's meeting when Ezell made reckless false accusations against LA Message editor Will Hall. You likely know of other similar behaviors. This bullying and threatening behavior using SBC Mission dollars is reproachable.

Who will speak to protect the victimized children and their parents or for the twice victimized Joni Hannigan?

Victims deserve more than additional victimization through silence. Wolfgang Gerlach quotes Lutheran minister and early Nazi supporter Martin Neimoller's famous remarks in *The Confessing Church and the Jews*, regarding the Nazis.

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a socialist.
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.

You can make a difference. You owe it to Joni Hannigan and she will talk with you. You owe it to Southern Baptists and even yourselves as journalists. I trust Southern Baptists will hear from their journalists, not have to wait on the Houston Chronicle or other secular newspaper. Truth, not silence and cover-up, sets us free AND can make a difference for the future.

In light of the #MeToo movement, greater awareness of misconduct, and biblical commands to speak the truth in love, silence cannot be the order of the day, any day and for any leader. There is not an **Entity Head Privilege**, no more than there is a **Senior Pastor Privilege**.

Joni courageously shared. Ezell responded with a repulsive, graceless cowardly threat. What will you do?

Speak the truth boldly AND call for the immediate voiding of all Non-disparagement clauses in agreements by NAMB and across the SBC.

Will McRaney

-----**Summary, Related Links, Summary Points, and Related Questions**-----

Summary Statement: Experienced female SBC journalist, who is sexual abuse victim by a SBC deacon, now has to deal with being called a liar in a secret threat from an SBC entity head and his PR director, while she is under employed in journalism and underused as journalist for telling the truth.

RELATED LINKS...

Below are the links to articles with facts. [Joni is willing to talk with a reporter if they would like to talk with her.](#)

1. Joni Hannigan tells her own story of being abused by a Baptist deacon

<https://truthisincrisis.wordpress.com/2018/06/10/the-metoo-movement-deserves-more-than-the-sbc/>

2. Then Hannigan raises concerns for MeToo in SBC, with 5 sentences about Ezell and clergy/penitent privilege and telling reporter(s) that he would not be telling his church about these matters of molestation by a church member.

<https://truthisincrisis.wordpress.com/2018/06/26/news-analysis-was-sbc-metoo-resolution-on-abuse-a-band-aid-for-larger-issues/>

3. Then Ezell's spokesman (PR - Mike Ebert) threatens Hannigan with a costly lawsuit of libel and asked her in the strongest possible terms to remove what she reported on Ezell.

<https://truthisincrisis.wordpress.com/2019/02/03/a-menacing-message/>

Summary Points... (from Original and *Current links to related articles to support the summary*)

- A top denominational entity leader once CHOSE to NOT help prosecution with his testimony in a child molestation case involving one of his church members. When subpoenaed by the courts, he CHOSE to successfully exercise the clergy penitent privilege.
- Perpetrator and child molester pled innocent when current entity leader (former pastor at that time) did not testify, but was charged by grand jury and later pled guilty to 10 felonies involving 7 men who were boys at the time of their molestation.
- A highly respected SBC female journalist was sexually assaulted by a Baptist deacon some years ago. She published part of her story on this on June 10, 2018.
- In a June 26, 2018 story she published an article about the SBC and the MeToo movement. She had 5 sentences about the entity leader's refusal to testify as reported in Louisville papers in 2003 and 2004, a bare bones summary, and reports that the pastor had chosen to NOT inform his congregation on these matters.
 - Subsequent to her publication, the female journalist was threatened (called a liar) by the name entity and its PR Director. WHY?
- Some six or seven months later she published the actual text where she was threatened with libel (accused of lying) and asked "in the strongest way possible to remove what you have posted about (entity head), which was an additional red flag.
- To date, she nor I are aware of Baptist Press or State Baptist press writing on the entity head's CHOICE to not protect a woman, but instead threaten her and sought to censor her writings. Nor is there an article on why the entity head CHOSE as a pastor to not inform his congregation. OR why in the entity's first communication with the female journalist, that she was accused of lying and threatened with a costly legal battle defending the false claim of libel instead of a professional and appropriate response to her?
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Multiple questions arise, among them...

1. Why did the former pastor of a mega church and current entity head CHOOSE to not testify under court subpoena and CHOOSE to exercise clergy penitent privilege?
2. Should a pastor's unquestioned priority be to the abused children or former children as victims and their families or is their priority the abusing church member even if he has demonstrated repentance?
3. Did the law REQUIRE him to not testify or did he in fact CHOOSE to not testify? Could he have lawfully refused to exercise clergy / penitent privilege? Could he have testified if he wanted to?
4. If the current entity did not have anything relevant to share with grand jury, why would he need to have exercised clergy/penitent privilege?
5. Since the entity leader is responsible for the training of SBC church planters, is the path he took the path he would encourage church planters to take when faced with similar decisions? Is he training pastors/planters to be silent and then attack the tellers of truth in matters of sexual misconduct?
6. Do church members and parents have the right to know and does a Pastor have the responsibility to share the public matters related to the child molestation, the legally alleged abuse by a church member, and then the guilty verdict?
7. Does the entity head recommend threatening a female journalist with libel for telling unwanted truths, when she has been sexually assaulted, instead of protecting her? Why did he CHOOSE to damage her instead of protecting her?