

# Eubank to helm Sexual Abuse Task Force for Miss. Baptists

*By Tony Martin*

*Associate Editor*

Brad Eubank, senior pastor of First Church, Petal, recently agreed to serve as chairman of the newly-formed Sexual Abuse Task Force to help Mississippi Baptist churches in the fight against sexual abuse in church situations.



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In 2013, the late John Langworthy pled guilty to five of eight felony counts of gratification of lust involving young boys in the early 1980s. He allegedly targeted the minors by using his connections to Mississippi Baptist churches.

Eubank was one of Langworthy’s victims. “I am a survivor of sex abuse,” he said. “Because of my story, I believe that’s why Shawn and Lloyd asked me to head up our Mississippi task force.”

Shawn Parker is executive director-treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board. Lloyd Sweatt, pastor of Meadowood Church, Amory, is the current president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

The formation of the Task Force was prompted in part by revelations that Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) agencies and institutions for decades had ignored or marginalized sexual abuse allegations.

The recent publication of the heretofore-secret list of alleged sexual abuse perpetrators compiled by SBC Executive Committee staffers contains at least ten alleged instances of sexual abuse in Mississippi Baptist churches.

Eubank, a graduate of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala., has also been appointed to the SBC-level Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force by SBC President Bart Barber.

"The purpose of this task force is to assist the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention in our efforts to shut the doors of our churches to those who would act as sexual predators and to wrap our arms around survivors and those who love them," Barber said.

Eubank said he talked with Parker about some of the sexual abuse issues surrounding churches, back at the point when the SBC task force was in the works. "I felt like I needed to tell my story," Eubank said, "especially as to how it impacted us here in Mississippi.

"I spoke at the first Ministry Safe conference in the state at Morrison Heights Church in Clinton. We can only catch about 10% of the offenders in our churches, and we have to do better than that.

"Prior to that conference, all I'd ever heard was how to recognize when kids, teenagers, and adults have been sexually abused in church settings. There was nothing before then that would show us how to recognize potential predators before they act."

Eubank noted there is now an open door to speak about the issue. "If we tell our stories, whether about sex abuse or any other issue, we're following 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, which talks about how we comfort others with the comfort we receive from the Lord.

"If Christians hold back like we don't have any brokenness in our lives, I think lost people can't relate to us because we come across as perfect and that everything is so great. When we are willing to step out and say, 'I've got brokenness, I have heartache, I have pain,' [people will see in us that] God

can bring good out of bad.

"If a pastor can share his brokenness, his church members can say, 'My pastor understands me.' As a pastor, it makes me more relatable and I can minister to people I couldn't otherwise reach.

"God has prepared me for the last 40 years to live out what I quoted to John Langworthy in court that day, from Genesis 50:20: 'What you intended for evil, God meant for good.'

"The only way that happens, though, is if we tell our stories. That's my connection to the task force. I have a deep passion for doing that."

The Sexual Abuse Task Force can be contacted in care of Eubank at 992 MS-42, Petal, MS 39465.