

# **REALITY CHECK: Child sexual abuse can occur in Southern Baptist churches**

PENSACOLA, Fla. (BP and local reports) – While the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and many of its affiliated state conventions and local churches grapple with how to handle sexual abuse incidents, a number of ministers identified as Southern Baptist have been arrested in the past year for alleged unlawful sexual acts involving minors.

David Nims, 37, was arrested June 7 by the Escambia County Sheriff's Department in Florida after a hidden video camera discovered at Calvary Church, Pensacola, contained an image of him allegedly installing the recording device in a bathroom located on the youth ministry hallway.

After deputies searched his home, he was arrested again June 11 and charged with 20 counts of possession of child pornography after two computer hard drives were confiscated.

Nims was a volunteer youth director, according to the Pensacola News Journal, which also reported that according to the initial arrest report, he “often worked with children ranging in age from infants to those in elementary school.”

In Tennessee, a minister was among 18 men arrested during a human trafficking sting July 8-9. Matthew Brewer was charged with solicitation of a minor, according to a news statement from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation.

Brewer was listed online as the minister of students at Fairfield Church, Centerville, until July 12 when his name and photo were removed. According to a report on Nashville television station WSMV, Brewer was also a chaplain with the Tennessee National Guard.

T. Elliott Welch, pastor of First Church, Stanleyville, N.C., was arrested in April and charged with one count of second-degree sexual exploitation of a minor. According to a news release from the Forsyth County Sheriff's Office, investigators received a tip from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that someone at Welch's address was allegedly uploading child pornography to the Internet.

Valley Ranch Church in Coppell, Texas, dismissed associate minister of worship Jason Thomas last year after the Mesquite (Texas) Police Department arrested him for alleged sexual abuse of a minor that occurred before the church employed him. He is charged with one count of aggravated sexual assault of a child, whom police said was under age 14.

Also last year, pastor Jayson Rowe apparently committed suicide while being investigated for a "credible" sexual abuse accusation involving a 17-year-old male church member, according to deacon chairman Tom Collins at Conway Church, Conway, N.C.

Messengers to the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting in June in Nashville directed newly-elected convention president Ed Litton to appoint an independent task force to look into allegations that the SBC Executive Committee has been hesitant to address sexual abuse issues.

Litton announced the task force members on June 14. Included on the task force is John Damon, a graduate of Baptist-affiliated Mississippi College in Clinton and chief executive officer of Canopy Children's Solutions in Jackson.

For information on reporting child sexual abuse in Mississippi, [click here](#).