

December 21, 2006

Dear Mid-America Family:

As you know, our stated mission is to train people for ministry as pastors, church staff leaders, and missionaries to believe the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, to be personal soulwinners and to be mission minded. What we teach must have a direct effect on what our students do in ministry.

On Thursday, December 14, James Dowd, a reporter from the Commercial Appeal called to interview me concerning several aspects of church life around the country and some doctrinal issues such as baptism. We met Tuesday, December 19 at the Seminary because he had also requested a tour of the new MABTS campus.

After touring the campus and meeting students and faculty we met in my office and began a general discussion about the items that he had mentioned on the phone. After an hour, the subject of ministry ethics came up and the reporter asked me a general question, "If a minister knows of child molesting and does nothing about it what should happen?" My answer was that, "If a minister has first hand knowledge of child molesting and does nothing about it then that minister should resign." He sat back in his chair and said, "You just made tomorrow's paper." I knew he was referring to the Bellevue situation because between the time we made the appointment and the interview, Dr. Steve Gaines, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, announced that a staff member was placed on paid leave of absence due to a past moral failure. The reporter applied my statement to Dr. Gaines. When he did so, I told him that he was making a connection that I had not made. I also told him that I did not know all of the details of the situation in question so there was a big "if" there. He asked if he could quote me on my belief and I told him he could.

After my lunch appointment I talked with Roland Maddox, and told him about the interview and what happened at the interview with James Dowd. I next talked with Gene Howard and shared with him the same information.

On Wednesday, the Commercial Appeal published the story on the front page and the seminary began to receive calls. The number of calls and emails were overwhelmingly positive but some negative responses were received. Three responses of note were James Dobson, who I spoke with at length, a vice president with the International Mission Board, and a Baptist college president. All expressed support and appreciation for someone taking a stand on ministry ethics and the wrong of child molestation. Dr. Dobson emphasized to me that "When prominent leaders have no accountability and make these kinds of decisions, other prominent leaders must stand up and hold them accountable."

My friend from the IMB said, "Mike, thank you for your stand in this matter of child sexual abuse. I deal with this matter far too often, and feel that we must take very strong stands against such abuse, and the coverups that far too often accompany it." These men reflect the teaching of our school. We must follow Scripture and obey God no matter what the cost.

Brothers and sisters, at this time of year I have no greater desire than to focus on the real reason for the season, the Lord Jesus. But let me ask you the question that was asked to me: "If a minister knows of child molesting and does nothing about it what should happen?" Biblically, I can see no other response than the one I gave.

Sincerely,

Michael R. Spradlin
President