

An Open Letter to Southern Baptist Leadership
Roger S. Oldham
May 27, 2022

To: Dr. Ed Litton, President of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)
Rev. Rolland Slade, Chair of the SBC Executive Committee
Dr. Willie McLaurin, Interim President and CEO of the SBC Executive
Committee
Members of the SBC Sexual Abuse Task Force
Members of the SBC Executive Committee

Dear Leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention,

I was invited to meet with Krista Tongring and Russell Holske, representatives of Guidepost Solutions, on March 25, 2022. When we met, Baptist Press had reported that the Guidepost final report was already being written. I raised this question with these two representatives. Ms. Tongring replied they had already reviewed 5 terabytes of information, so had enough material to begin developing the report.

Little did I suspect that the final report would lead with a brief email I sent to Dr. Ronnie Floyd after he was elected president and CEO of the Executive Committee and that the report would extrapolate from that email a nefarious intent of a secret database of sexual offenders.

The meeting with these two Guidepost representatives was cordial and they presented themselves as consummate professionals. Unfortunately, neither Ms. Tongring nor Mr. Holske asked me about the May 11, 2019, email I sent to Dr. Floyd.

We discussed the SBC Executive Committee decision to post the Department of Justice's Dru Sjodin National Registry of Sexual Offenders on SBC.net as the most comprehensive registry of note.

I shared that Mr. August Boto, executive vice president and general counsel of the SBC Executive Committee for most of my tenure with the Executive Committee, had been assigned by the presidents under whom we worked as the point person on all matters related to sexual abuse.

I told them that, among other things, I developed the practice of forwarding to Mr. Boto reports of published news stories about individuals who had been arrested for some type of sexual crime who had a connection with a Baptist church. They indicated they knew this information.

At one point, Mr. Holske asked if I was aware that another EC staff member told them Mr. Boto had, at some point, considered creating an SBC-specific database, to which I responded no. I speculated to him and Ms. Tongring that if it had been considered, it may have been because of the question I raised and the news stories I forwarded to Mr. Boto.

Had these two representatives of Guidepost Solutions asked specifically about the four-sentence message in that May 11, 2019, email to Dr. Floyd, or any follow-up questions about the context of the Google Alerts I routinely forwarded to Mr. Boto, I would have been able to share the following with them.

When SBC Voices ran a six-part series on clergy sex abuse of children in early 2010, I raised the question with Mr. Boto, asking if we could do something similar, creating a web page or hosting a story collection of published news articles on Baptist2Baptist, a website the Executive Committee managed at the time. This February 16, 2010, email should be in the 5 terabytes of information gathered by Guidepost.

I thought such a collection of published news stories could be an additional resource to help churches in their hiring practices while avoiding the potential liability issues of creating a database of convicted or credibly accused sexual offenders that, as general counsel for the SBC Executive Committee, Mr. Boto had often expressed concerns about.

I sent Mr. Boto a few articles I had come across in our Meltwater News collection, an aggregator of news articles about Southern Baptists that we subscribed to and received each day. Each of the published stories I sent was of an individual whose arrest by law enforcement was already in the public domain. I wanted him to see that news stories about Southern Baptists were being aggregated electronically and could provide a source for this kind of posting.

Mr. Boto responded that anything we put together would be incomplete and undependable since it would be based on an electronic search by a third-party vendor and would not reach hundreds of small-town newspapers that were not, at the time, posted online. He pointed out that my idea would not provide the same breadth of coverage the Department of Justice Dru Sjodin National Registry of Sexual Offenders offers, which was already linked on our webpage.

Over a period of several years, as technology continued to expand, I re-asked the same question from time to time, but always with the same response.

At some point, Meltwater became an unmanageable resource since it picked up so many news stories about all things Southern Baptist. I created a Google Alert with the search terms "Baptist" and "arrested" in the search feature to see if that would generate similar stories of individuals who had been arrested by law enforcement.

This generated a great many hits, most of which were unrelated to any action by a Baptist church volunteer or minister. For example, if someone were arrested in St. John the Baptist parish in Louisiana, that would show up. But, from time to time, there would be an article which dealt with a person being arrested for some type of sexually-based crime who was in some way connected with a Baptist church of some type.

Early on, when reviewing Meltwater News reports, I forwarded maybe 4 or 5 news stories each year. With the Google Alerts, that number increased slightly, maybe in the 8 or 9 range per year. Of the forwards I sent, most were not Southern Baptist-related churches; but some were.

I sent these to Mr. Boto for his awareness since he ran point on matters related to sexual abuse and would be the one to follow up if a follow up was warranted. I also sent them as a routine reminder that sexual predation was an ongoing problem. I was initially hopeful that, at some point, the decision would be made to post such stories on a web page. I finally realized we would likely not change the policy of posting the stories; but I continued to follow the same practice if for no other reason than to be reminded of the wickedness of the human heart and to pray for the victims.

When I would receive an alert, I would open it to see if it were related to a Baptist church, would read the story, would feel deep sadness, would pray for the victims, would check to see if it were in our network of churches, and then forwarded it to Mr. Boto. Again, the majority of those I checked were not Southern Baptist; but some were. Of those that were, several were stories that received broad national media coverage and were covered through Baptist Press as well.

As noted earlier, I forwarded a small number of stories each year during those first few years, then a slightly greater number as the national news media, including Baptist Press, began publishing a larger number of stories. The number increased significantly during my final two years at the Executive Committee, perhaps one or two each month in 2018 and into 2019. In all, I may have forwarded 75 or more stories to Mr. Boto over the course of about 10 years; I don't know the exact number since I did not maintain a list.

At some point in one of our conversations, I learned that Mr. Boto was keeping my emails. I was initially encouraged that we may somehow be able to use them as I had envisioned and that they would serve as a base of stories that had already been discovered through these internet search terms. But that hope faded over time since the decision to use the Dru Sjodin database of sexual offenders was repeatedly affirmed.

This is the context of the very brief email I sent to Dr. Floyd at the beginning of his presidency to alert him that sexual predation was a continuing problem. It was not a secret email. I copied the entire executive leadership team on that email, including Dr. Floyd and Mr. Ed Upton, special assistant to Dr. Floyd, for their awareness of this

ongoing tragedy, as well as Mr. Boto, and the other three members of the ELT at that time. Mr. Boto responded, confirming to Dr. Floyd that this was the case.

In summary, my objective in sending each published report to Mr. Boto was to help keep our attention focused on what was, and is, a continuing problem in our society and specifically in our Southern Baptist network of churches. Initially, my hope was that we could host a page that contained published news reports of individuals who had been arrested for criminal sexual assault. Though that hope went unrealized, the emails served as a continual reminder that this problem is ongoing and as a spur to pray for the victims of sexual abuse in each story.

I specifically deny being a knowing participant in creating an alleged secret database of sexual offenders. I did not know that such a list existed. I had no knowledge that my email forwards were being folded into a larger list of alleged sexual predators. I do not know the reason such a list would have been developed. I do not know the process used to create such a list. I did not have access to such a list.

That said, I rejoice today, with countless others, that this vision, birthed in my heart through the groundbreaking work of the editors of SBC Voices more than twelve years ago, has now become a reality and the names of individuals whose stories had been published in numerous media outlets across the country have been released by the Executive Committee. I hope this release is only the starting point of a continuing process.

To that end, I deny the allegations made by Guidepost Solutions in its report to the SBC Sexual Abuse Task Force, released to the public, and now carried forward through numerous media outlets, that Mr. Boto and I collaborated to create a secret database of sexual offenders. I formally request that the email I sent Mr. Boto in 2010, along with other similar emails that may be in the Guidepost collection, be added to the appropriate sections of the Guidepost report and that the report be amended to reflect the testimony in this statement.

Sincerely and In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roger S. Oldham". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Roger S. (Sing) Oldham

C: Brandon Porter, *Baptist Press*
Lonnie Wilkey, *Baptist and Reflector*
Jennifer Rash, *The Baptist Paper*
John Tedesco, *Houston Chronicle*
Sarah Pulliam Bailey, *Washington Post*