



June 8, 2020

From the Directional Elders of The Summit Church:

Below is an explanation of the transparent and thorough process that led The Summit Church to call Pastor Bryan Loritts to serve as executive pastor of teaching and development at The Summit Church.

Our hearts have been and continue to be heavy for victims of sexual abuse in the church. At every step, Pastor J.D. Greear has modeled for The Summit Church—and for the entire Southern Baptist Convention—how to care well for the abused. Not only do we want to see better practices for prevention, reporting, and care normalized among Southern Baptist churches, we want to ensure that the leadership of The Summit Church is committed to these things as well.

Pastor Bryan freely admits that he has learned a lot over the last 10 years (as we all have). As he explains below, looking back now, he sees things he could have done better. This commitment to biblical self-evaluation and humility is exactly what The Summit Church expects of our leaders.

Among the changes Pastor Bryan would have made in hindsight is a more careful process of documentation that ensured greater accountability. Moreover, he wishes he had done more to prevent any future ministry assignment for his brother-in-law. He affirms The Summit Church's position that some crimes—particularly those that involve abuse—remove a man or woman who commits them from any potential future church office.

Despite these reflective assessments of Pastor Bryan's leadership in this matter, it became abundantly clear to The Summit Church that Pastor Bryan had not attempted in any way to cover up the incidents of abuse that occurred at Fellowship Memphis in 2010, protect the abuser, or

discourage victims from seeking justice for their abuses. In fact, The Summit Church's thorough background check, interviews, and examination revealed quite the opposite.

Here is a statement Pastor Bryan gave to The Summit Church on the matter:

*"This was one of the most painful times in my life, and the pain still deeply affects my family today, 10 years later. It was especially devastating because both the perpetrator and a victim were part of my family. At the time, I did everything I knew to do, informing the elders, immediately firing the individual, instructing my team to contact the authorities, and I encouraged any victims I spoke to to pursue prosecution if they chose.*

*Since the matter was affecting me deeply on a personal level (an adult member of my family was a victim, and I was struggling with rage), and to avoid the appearance of nepotism (since my brother-in-law was the perpetrator), the church elders removed me from dealing with the case early in the process. Prior to that removal, I never discouraged any victims from choosing to prosecute the individual. In fact, I encouraged two victims I spoke to directly (both my family member and one other) to prosecute. I was very angry and believed the perpetrator belonged in jail.*

*I was devastated to learn a few years later that the perpetrator had repeated these crimes at another church, Downtown Church. Although I was at all times fully forthcoming with Downtown Church regarding this person's grievous actions at Fellowship Memphis (meeting with them to tell them what I knew), I wish I had done even more privately and publicly to discourage any of the perpetrator's future work in ministry. In 2015 I supported the perpetrator's worship leadership at a conference I was a part of, which I deeply regret. I assumed at the time that since he was not being put in a position of pastoral oversight, and since he appeared to be doing better after rehab and he and my sister were reconciled, merely being onstage would be an acceptable use of his gifts. I realize now how wrong that was, sending a terrible signal to victims that caused tremendous and unnecessary confusion and pain. I deeply regret this.*

*I have learned much in the process. I wish I had pushed for documentation to ensure follow-through on the directives I had given about what to do. I understand why the elders removed me from the case, with two family members being involved, and I still believe that was the right decision on their part, but I have to wonder if I could have been*

*more explicit in instructing them in what they were to do and demanding they get documentation for all of it. I wish I had done more to ensure the perpetrator did not have another chance to continue his crimes in another place. My heart breaks for any victims harmed and grieved by my brother-in-law's actions.*

*Because a member of my family was a victim, this was devastating and deeply painful for our family. Even talking about it back then was difficult. But I realize that as leaders we have a responsibility toward all victims. I know that each victim is precious to God, and for their sake we need to ensure that not only is justice served but that mistakes are owned and all parties involved commit themselves to best practices for prevention, reporting, and care.*

*I look forward to learning more and seeing what J.D. has done at Summit in his initiative to provide better care for and protection from sexual abuse in our churches. Each survivor is a precious soul who matters deeply to God. I believe we must better extend grace as a people, but we also recognize that those who use their sacred position of shepherd to prey on the sheep should not be given opportunities to do so again.”*

The following is an explanation of the major steps of the process The Summit Church followed in this matter and follows in all such matters when examining candidates for ministry leadership within The Summit Church. To note, The Summit Church's intention in this was only to review how Pastor Bryan handled the 2010 matter at Fellowship Memphis as best as possible. It was not to investigate Fellowship Memphis' handling of the matter.

- The Summit Church conducted a comprehensive background check of Pastor Bryan through a qualified outside provider and engaged legal counsel to assist with our investigation.
- For four months The Summit Church did extensive character interviews with individuals in leadership at the churches where Pastor Bryan has served from Fellowship Memphis forward—including references he had given The Summit Church and some we selected ourselves, as well as some who were critical of Fellowship Memphis' handling of the 2010 situation—to confirm that Pastor Bryan is a man of integrity, trustworthiness, and reliable

character who leads with a Christ-like spirit, honesty, and who stewards the family of God well.

- Pastor Bryan reported to The Summit Church that he spoke to only two victims at the time of the incident before being removed from the case by the elders of Fellowship Memphis. He was removed by the elders due to his familial relationship with both the perpetrator and a victim. The Summit Church spoke directly to the other victim (who was not a family member), and that person confirmed that Pastor Bryan did indeed encourage them to prosecute, going as far as to say that Pastor Bryan told them that he would pursue prosecution if he was in this person's shoes. This victim also confirmed that Pastor Bryan was removed from the matter early in the process.
- Pastor Bryan told The Summit Church that he turned over the phone to Fellowship Memphis' elders the day after it was given to him, he never saw it again, and because he was subsequently removed from the matter, he has no knowledge as to what Fellowship Memphis' elders did with the phone thereafter.
- The Summit Church connected with both current and former pastors at Fellowship Memphis to attempt to confirm matters as to Pastor Bryan's involvement in the 2010 matter. The Summit Church wanted to see if there were any significant discrepancies in the story. While the pastors contacted could not verify all the details (due to passage of time, personnel changes, and poor documentation), they did not dispute any part of Pastor Bryan's statement. Pastor Bryan left Fellowship Memphis in 2015 to pastor Trinity Grace Church in New York City.
- The Summit Church confirmed that the perpetrator was not only fired from his job, he was placed under church discipline, and his membership from the church was revoked. After going through rehab, the perpetrator asked to confess his sin to Fellowship Memphis later that year. The pastors of Fellowship Memphis required he read a written statement. He appeared before two campuses of Fellowship Memphis and confessed to his sin. Pastor Bryan recalls being present at only one of these services. The perpetrator's "restoration" in each service was a restoration to membership and fellowship, not to ministry leadership. This was verified to The Summit Church by two staff members and a church member and victim, each present at one of the services. The perpetrator was told he would never be employed by Fellowship Memphis again.
- We confirmed that Pastor Bryan was forthcoming with Downtown Church when asked about the perpetrator. The perpetrator began contract work for Downtown Church nearly

two years (20 months) after being fired from Fellowship Memphis. The Summit Church understands that the perpetrator was hired on staff as a pastor by Downtown Church a few years later.

- Out of concern that minors may have been involved, Pastor Bryan instructed the staff of Fellowship Memphis to call Child Protective Services (CPS) and reported that he received oral reports from a Fellowship Memphis staff member that CPS had been contacted. The Summit Church also spoke with an additional Fellowship Memphis staff member, who served at Fellowship Memphis at that time and confirmed that CPS was contacted. The Summit Church contacted CPS to find out what reports they had received. CPS told The Summit Church that they would not release information except to a victim and their attorney, and that if any such records exist, they likely have been destroyed due to CPS' policy of keeping information on file for only a fixed amount of time.
- A Fellowship Memphis staff member from 2010 confirmed to The Summit Church that they contacted appropriate authorities based on Pastor Bryan's instructions to do so.
- The Summit Church's legal counsel contacted the Memphis Police Department and their central records office to inquire if a police report, or any documentation, on this matter existed. They advised that no such report or documentation existed regarding this matter, in-part because they no longer retain such records due to the passage of time.
- The Summit Church and our legal counsel confirmed with Fellowship Memphis that neither Fellowship Memphis nor Pastor Bryan hired Peter Newman in 2009 or 2010 as an employee or independent contractor.

Again, Pastor Bryan acknowledges there are several things he should have done better. It is frustrating to The Summit Church that a member of the Memphis Police Department said years ago that no report was filed when both Pastor Bryan and Fellowship Memphis say they contacted the police, and when Pastor Bryan believes he had given clear instructions that they should be documented. In the last few years it has been made clear that a phone report is often not a full and official report, and that may explain what happened in this matter. Pastor Bryan regrets not ensuring a written report was filed or that records were kept, something both Pastor Bryan and The Summit Church know to do today.

However, even with that unresolved question, it was clear to The Summit Church that, for his part, Pastor Bryan did not attempt to protect the abuser or discourage victims from pursuing justice. It was clear that Pastor Bryan not only communicated openness to prosecuting the offender, he desired it and encouraged it. Furthermore, Pastor Bryan has expressed not only his regret for not doing more to ensure that Fellowship Memphis was ready to deal with such an event but also an eagerness to learn more about what best practices are for prevention, reporting, and care, and to help promote them in churches so that churches are safe from abusers and places of safety for the abused. Pastor Bryan has learned, as have many pastors over the years, that while God's grace and mercy are vast beyond measure, those who abuse their position of spiritual authority to prey on the sheep should never have the opportunity to do so again.

The Summit Church has gone into this process with Pastor Bryan with our eyes wide open to these things. Pastor Bryan was forthcoming on all of them, and he has come to The Summit Church with his eyes wide open about The Summit Church also. Pastor Bryan knew fully where The Summit Church stands and how outspoken we are about the importance of proper practices in regard to sexual abuse. Pastor Bryan expressed his desire to be here in support of that. The Summit Church would not bring any pastor here whom we were not convinced was fully supportive of the direction we believe churches need to go in the prevention of and reporting of abuse and care for survivors.

May God help us!