

Questions & Answers 4-24-2015

Q What has the church been accused of and why address it in a public manner?

- Everyone has freedom to express their disagreement and criticism of our church and our leaders, and we typically ignore rumors and false accusations. We realize that as leaders, we have chosen a path that exposes us to criticism. However, these are not run of the mill accusations. Our leaders have been falsely accused of having knowledge of Brandon Milburn's despicable acts and failing to report the crimes. We have investigated this accusation and found clear evidence that this is simply not true.
- Specifically, the accusation concerns a 2012 conversation between a former member of the church and our senior pastor and executive pastor. Our senior pastor and executive pastor initiated the conversation and approached the former member to address her concerns that they heard that she had about Brandon. Although Milburn no longer worked for the church, he did serve as a volunteer, so our senior pastor and executive pastor decided to look into these concerns. Fully cognizant of issues that other churches have had with the abuse of children, our senior pastor and executive pastor explicitly asked the former member if she had any concerns about sexual abuse. She emphatically stated, "He would never do anything like that."
- Two months ago and over three years after this conversation, this former member started claiming that she reported allegations of sexual abuse during this 2012 conversation. This is not a true account of the 2012 conversation, and we have gathered affidavits from witnesses and a 2012 written message from the individual, all of which contradict this false charge.
- The church leaders were first made aware of sexual abuse allegations against Brandon Milburn with his arrest in early 2014. Not before that time.

Q Why have we invited the civil courts into this matter?

- Quite simply, these accusations are false, and we have attempted to resolve this situation. Our elders repeatedly responded to the accusers privately. The accusers responded by publicizing this original accusation to a wider audience and the media, and made additional accusations against other First Christian pastors and our elders. Persons unknown also began creating fake Facebook accounts to harass elders and promote this false accusation. As these false accusations have not ceased, we have taken public action to address these claims and clear our name.
- Because of the harassment, slander and false accusations, we contacted law enforcement and retained an attorney for legal counsel. Throughout, we have provided full disclosure of all communications between us and our accusers to the police.
- As elders, we did not lightly make a decision to proceed in this manner, but we do believe that a church can use civil courts to respond to criminal accusations. We are offering an important Bible study on this subject (see below). Though "trivial" and spiritual matters ought to be handled within the church without law suits, civil law and the courts were used by the Apostle Paul on more than one occasion as described in the New Testament.

Q Why have we invited the civil courts into this matter? (continued)

- The goal of our civil action is to publicly address these false charges. In order to reserve all of our rights, we included claims in the lawsuit for damages. But at this time, we are seeking zero financial penalties. We only want to clear our name. We are also currently reaching out to meet with our accusers to see if we can resolve this matter without additional litigation in the courts.

Q What about the current safety of our children and teen students?

- We believe that Brandon Milburn's actions were a terrible, yet isolated, occurrence. We pray that we will never experience anything like this in the future. However, we have learned and have taken additional steps to prevent such acts in the future.
- Safety of children as we teach them about God's perfect love will continue to be a top priority of our ministry. Training and background checks have been required for those who work as staff or volunteers in our children and student ministry. Our check-in systems provide additional safety and security for every child and young person learning about Christ in our building. We will continue to develop even stronger policies to honor the trust that is placed in all who lead by serving. We welcome any feedback, expertise and suggestions that you may have.
- Though the criminal acts that took place in 2007 did not occur in our facility or as part of our programming, we will work to develop even stronger training programs for our youth sponsors. These will include guidance encouraging healthy boundaries for limiting the interaction of ministry volunteers outside of church programming. We are determined to learn from this. We encourage parents to openly share any concerns they have and offer opportunities for improvement of our ministry with our pastors.
- We want our church to be a place of healing for victims of sexual abuse of any kind. We are seeking to add additional counseling options for those who desire that spiritual help.
- If anyone has yet to come forward who is a victim of Brandon Milburn or any other predator, we encourage you to contact legal authorities. In addition, we are here to provide spiritual counseling and license family counseling to anyone who desires it. We continue to believe in the recovery that Christ can bring and are prepared to help in any way possible.
- Contact information:
 - 314-264-7700 St. Louis County Police – Child Abuse
 - 314-837-2269 ext. 34 Dennis Hounshell, Family Life Pastor (Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist)

Q How will we move forward as a church family and what do your elders ask of you?

- We assure you that we seek to use all financial offerings for ministry and missions. Though legal counsel is part of the cost of doing ministry in our current world, we will continue seek opportunities to avoid litigation. And we thank you for showing your support of this, your church family, through generous giving through First Christian.
- As elders, we ask for your prayers for our amazing church family here at First Christian that is described in scripture as the “bride of Christ”. The sin of one has been used to hurt many!
- We ask for you to work with us to be part of restoring those you recognize who are hurting, unsure, or even sources of division. We ask that you stand with us as leaders in the spiritual battle, continuing to worship, serve, and support God’s work here at First Christian. We ask for your expressed trust as we continue to do our very best as elders, responding to this concern in a way that honors God and fulfills our responsibility to guard the flock which God has made us overseers.

The Elders, First Christian Church