

Church forgives pastor serving molestation sentence

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SHARON, S.C. - At tiny St. John Baptist Church, the congregation was faced with a pastor who confessed to molestation, and it decided to let others cast the first stone.

It voted to forgive the Rev. John T. Brown and allow him to return to the pulpit after he finishes serving a four-year sentence for sexually assaulting two teenage girls who attended his previous church.

"We're just trying to be the church that God has come back looking for," said Debra Wade, who's been a member of St. John for 33 years. "He says don't judge and forgive others so that you won't be judged harshly."

Brown's supporters point out the crimes didn't happen in this town 30 miles southwest of Charlotte, they occurred 90 miles away in Bennettsville, S.C. And some members of the independent, predominantly black church say the judicial system cannot always be trusted to get things right.

Brown pleaded guilty Feb. 10 to criminal sexual conduct with a minor and committing a lewd act on a minor.

According to police, a 16-year-old girl said Brown sexually assaulted her in her home in 2002 while her mother was away. Also in 2002, a 13-year-old girl said Brown sexually touched her while in his home and in his car.

Brown's lawyer, Michael Stephens, said the pastor begged forgiveness from the victim's families and they responded by asking the judge to have mercy.

"Everyone said he was a very gifted speaker and a very talented musician and they were shocked at these allegations," Stephens said. "One of the victim's fathers said it shook his relationship with the reverend but it also shook his faith."

On a recent Sunday, about half of the 100-member congregation gathered in the white-column sanctuary on a wooded hill and listened as the interim pastor told them the issue should be no one else's concern.

The Rev. Perry Oliver said the church was going through a time of tribulation, like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. And just as Jesus faced Satan in private, the church must also.

"Let all the newspaper articles come out. You can't fight the devil in public," he boomed. At the end of the two-hour service, church deacons and members refused to comment.

Wade, who spoke earlier, said Brown had been a good pastor since he took over St. John's last year. Attendance and baptisms had increased. She said only about 10 people left after the vote in February to retain Brown.

State prison officials don't allow media interviews with inmates. But the congregation still hears from its pastor through his correspondence from behind bars. A letter that Sunday said he had joined the choir and Bible

study in prison and thanked the members for their unconditional love and his wife for support.

"The battle has been fought. Don't let anybody put you down," he wrote.

While he's in prison, leaders at St. John say the church is giving half of Brown's salary to his wife, Tonya, and the other half to the interim pastor.

Tonya Brown attends services at St. John. She said her husband is doing fine and she appreciates all the support and love from the church.

"We can't do anything without God," she said, holding her young daughter's hand. "God is still in control."

Member Dorothy Cobb is still attending services at St. John, but does not support keeping Rev. Brown as pastor.

"As long as I'm living, a child molester will not be leading that church," Cobb said.

She made copies of the police reports and tried to distribute them to members during one service, but someone got rid of most of the papers.

"They thought, 'Well, he just touched,' but they didn't know the whole truth," she said.

The incident reports describe Brown's actions in detail. Cobb said the information was so explicit, she stapled the sheets of paper closed. She said the information should have been given to church members before the vote.

Several members that read the reports regretted voting for Brown, Cobb said.

"The man is mentally ill," she said. "The man came up here knowing he had already admitted to this."

Brown was hired by St. John in June. A letter from Deacon Joe Jamison in February to Brown's lawyer said the church knew Brown was involved in a legal matter when he was hired.

Donna Scott, a Protestant specialist with www.advocateweb.org, which counsels people who are sexually exploited by professionals in positions of power, said the church is taking a potentially dangerous stand.

Scott understands the church's need to forgive the pastor, but she reminded members that God told the Israelites in the Old Testament that he forgave them but there were consequences for their actions.

She said the practice of keeping clergy after they have abused is "insane" but happens far too often because Protestant churches are unaware of the risks. If more abuse occurs, churches can be held liable for negligent hiring if they knew about the misconduct.

"They have set themselves up for a lawsuit," Scott said. "I would not hire him. He can be a deacon, a lay leader, but he cannot be a pastor. This man should not be put in a position of public trust."

Evidence of Jesus' existence confirmed outside of the Bible

Continued from page 8B

Jesus would have been lost during the devastating Jewish rebellion that began in A.D. 66, Sanders figures.

It took time for awareness of this tiny religious movement to reach other Romans, but three early references have survived:

- Pliny the Younger was sent as imperial legate to Bithynia (in present-day Turkey) starting in A.D. 111. One of his reports to the Emperor Trajan described a policy of executing Christians who refused to curse Christ and worship Roman gods. He said believers would sing an antiphonal hymn to Christ as God, followed by a meal.

- Tacitus, who loathed the Christian "plague," recorded around A.D. 115 in "Roman

Annals" that Jesus "was executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius."

- Suetonius wrote about A.D. 120 that the Emperor Claudius banished all Jews from Rome because they were continually rioting "at the instigation of Chrestus."

Historians think this misspelling of "Christ" means Suetonius mistakenly thought a troublemaker with that name lived in Rome. The comment indicates that by A.D. 49, belief in Christ had reached Rome and was dividing Jews.

Nickell cites support for his skepticism from "Incredible Shrinking Son of Man" by humanist colleague Robert Price, a member of the left-wing Jesus Seminar who

teaches at the Universal Foundation for Better Living seminary in Carol City, Fla.

Price's seminary, founded by a Unity School minister, promotes the sort of New Thought spiritual healing Skeptical Inquirer might debunk and treats Jesus as though he actually existed.

ADVERTISEMENT

THE PROPHET'S COLUMN INC.
9626 FELDBANK DRIVE
CHARLOTTE, NC, 28216-2131
"LET THEM ALONE" - PART FIVE
J. M. LITTLE - TEACHER

You are not saved because you are a preacher's wife. And you are not saved, because you are a Bible teacher's wife. You may say you have more education than your husband. That does not put you over your husband because God laid down the law in Genesis 3:16 and you are going to subject yourself to your husband's authority or go to hell for all your trouble. I know, you have been taught that you have equal rights in the home and church. Those who teach such lies have been left alone by God.

Did you know that over 60% of our marriages end up in divorce or separation. Why? Because men and women will not bow to and have the Lord Jesus Christ to rule over them. We have to build our marriages and homes on God's Word! Not on what Dr. King or Dr. Spock taught! Who ordained marriage? The Lord. Then why turn away from what the Lord said and believe what Dr. Spock and Dr. King said? Because you don't want Christ to rule over you.

The bornagain believer fears the Lord. Do you fear the Lord? I do. Did you know that the Lord has left our homes alone? That is why we have the violence and bloodshed worldwide today! Man has tried every way to dethrone God! In the early sixties during the time of our late president, Mr. Kennedy, who was assassinated, the United States Supreme Court threw the Bible out of our schools and in so doing the government was saying: "we will not have God to rule over us, we'll do it our way!" And since that year back there in the very early sixties, when that decision came down, our schools have gone to the dogs! When you turn your back on God and His Word He leaves you alone! I'm trying to get you to face the truth, my friends! Our whole world is gone! God has given up on the world as a whole!

1 3 1 0

**Your
Inspirational
Leader**

**To Advertise
or Become A Partner Call
704-442-7277**

Grier Funeral Service
- Since 1930 -

"SERVING THE FAMILY WITH DIGNITY AND PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING"

Mr. John A McCarroll, President & General Manager
Mr. J.B. Humphrey, CEO

| | |
|--|---|
| 115 N. Cloudman St. Charlotte, NC 28216 (704)332-7109 Fax (704)332-5273 | 704 Walkup Ave. Monroe, NC 28110 (704)283-5423 Fax (704)282-4197 |
|--|---|

THE PARK MINISTRIES

Spring Revival

May 17 - May 19, 2004
Beginning at 6:30 PM

Pastor Claude R. Alexander, Jr.

With Guest Speakers:

| | |
|--|---|
| Dr. Walter Malone Canaan Christian Church, Louisville, KY | Dr. Walter Scott Thomas New Psalmist Baptist Church, Baltimore, MD |
|--|---|

University Park Baptist Church
6029 Beatties Ford Road - Charlotte, NC 28216
704-392-1681 - www.theparkministries.org