

July 2, 2019

TO: Church Network Leadership Team

FROM: Andrew Lumpe



RE: Questions about Background of Steve Morgan

Background

You are receiving this letter since you have official oversight within the church network. I will leave it to you to determine if it should also go to the Joshua Church Board.

My wife Torrey and I were originally part of Vine Community Church in Carbondale starting in 2002 and in the summer of 2004 were part of the original Bluesky Church plant team. Before moving to Seattle, I was appointed as a non-staff overseer/Vice-President of the board at Bluesky Church and served in that capacity for over seven years until the end of 2011. In the summer of 2016, Torrey and I moved to San Luis Obispo, CA as part of the Vista Church plant team. Except for some brief breaks, I have also served as a small group leader since 2004. Torrey served as the bookkeeper at BlueSky from 2004-2016 and also at Vista from 2016-present.

Information Shared

In the early part of 2007, Steve Morgan was facing an increasingly grave time of personal distress. Many of those close to him along with the overseers were concerned about his well-being and functioning. It got to the point where church members were asking me about him. I had numerous conversations with leaders in Seattle and Carbondale about how to help him through this difficult time and suggested on more than one occasion that professional help might be needed in terms of counseling and/or medical assistance. As a board member, I was getting ready to ask for Steve to take a leave of absence and seek professional help.

At about this time, in June 2007, a network conference was hosted at Bluesky Church in Seattle. Steve was having an increasingly difficult time during this conference displaying outwards signs of distress and anguish during his teaching and interactions with people. Members of the church noticed and expressed concern to me. I continued to be troubled and expressed this to James Chidester asking what could be done to help. During one of the conference sessions, I was pulled aside by Larry Anderson and James into an office for a private conversation. They told me that Steve wanted them to share information with me as an explanation for his current condition.

Larry and James told me that Steve was distressed and broken over a crime/sin that he committed in the 1980s when he was in his early 20s. After returning home to Michigan from college, he sexually assaulted a male high school student in his local church's youth group. Steve was serving in a leadership capacity for this youth group at the time of the assault. The victim was 17 years old at the time and sexual physical contact occurred. I was told this took place at a Mormon church, but I believe the church where this occurred was part of the Community of Christ which is the Reorganized Church of Latter-Day Saints (not the Mormons in Utah). Steve was arrested for this assault and I was told that the case was adjudicated by

the court, a psychiatric exam conducted, but it is unclear what penalties were meted out or how the case was ultimately resolved. Steve indicated that he gave a verbal apology to the parents of the victim.

At the time this information was divulged to me, Larry and James told me to keep the information secret and to not tell anyone including my wife Torrey. During this meeting, I was told Steve had changed since becoming a Christian and they were adamant that I needed to trust him as my pastor because they did. Sometime later I was personally told by Steve that Larry conducted a background check to determine if a criminal record was publicly available as there was concern that the information could become public. No record of the crime was found through Larry's search and Steve expressed relief. That brief conversation was the only time Steve and I ever discussed the matter. Steve continued in various levels of overt anxiety and distress for at least five years until at 2011-2012 when it slowly dissipated, we all turned attention to other matters, and my responsibility as a board member ended.

My Initial Reaction

At the time of being told this information and continuing for many years, I had numerous questions, confusion, and much distress as to its potential implications in terms of qualifications, impact on the victim, impact on the church, and wellbeing of Steve. Being an overseer at Bluesky Church at the time also gave me a level of responsibility for Steve and church. I held these questions to myself as it was communicated that the issue was a closed matter. In addition, the secrecy code to which I was sworn caused me to hold things inside and I was fearful about any repercussions from exposing this issue. My friendship with Steve, James, and Larry likely also clouded my judgement. I spoke to no one about the issue since being told in 2007.

Recent Events

However, recent public events surrounding the #MeToo and now #ChurchToo movements drew public attention to the topic of sexual abuse. This awareness resulted in many victims coming forward and impacted high profile celebrities, the U.S. gymnastics team, schools and universities, the workplace, and also the church especially within the context of leadership and supervision. The Catholic church has dealt with this issue for years and now the largest protestant denomination in the United States, the Southern Baptist Convention, is facing hundreds of revelations of abuse and long term coverup.¹ Matt Chandler and Village Church is currently facing scrutiny over the handling of a case of abuse.² And in 2018, Andy Savage from Highpoint Church resigned under public scrutiny after admitting to sexually assaulting a 17 year old member of a youth group he was leading 20 years prior.^{3,4} The elders at Highpoint who hired him knew this information at the time of his hire. This increased attention to the topic of sexual abuse and its impact in the church led me to once again reconsider the implications of this crime/sin especially in terms of church leadership. This is of particular importance given the typologies of sexual abusers where "*male perpetrators are driven mainly by a desire for power and control rather than by their sexual impulses, especially in situations where the victim is their spouse or an acquaintance.*"^{5,6}

¹ https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/investigations/article/Southern-Baptist-sexual-abuse-spreads-as-leaders-13588038.php?utm_campaign=chron&utm_source=article&utm_medium=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.chron.com%2Fnews%2Finvestigations%2Farticle%2FInvestigation-reveals-700-victims-of-Southern-13591612.php

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/10/us/southern-baptist-convention-sex-abuse.html>

³ <https://www.vox.com/2018/1/17/16880278/andy-savage-sexual-misconduct-youth-pastor-evangelicals>

⁴ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/march/andy-savage-resigns-abuse-megachurch-standing-ovation.html>

⁵ <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/en/sexual-assault/understanding/perpetrators>

⁶ Robertiello, G. and Terry, K.J. (2007). Can we profile sex offenders? A review of sex offender typologies. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 12: 508-518.

Since the information about Steve's arrest was communicated to me in 2007, I had no one with which to process implications because of being sworn to secrecy and being told the issue was already resolved. The burden of carrying this secret information increased even further as the topic of sexual abuse became more public generally, and in the church specifically, over the past couple of years. I also began to sense a level of God-given responsibility as a former overseer of Bluesky Church from 2004-2011.

Seeking Advice

In an attempt to gather more information about the arrest incident, I conducted a background search using two databases (national and state of Michigan) but found no public records. I later learned that records are not always included in publicly available databases for a variety of reasons including the following: not all jurisdictions include records in electronic databases, records can be sealed or expunged for a variety of reasons including plea deals and diversion agreements. In addition, records are often sealed to protect innocent victims – now a legal requirement in the state of Michigan for sexual assault cases. In spite of not finding a record, Steve's confession to the assault remained and I knew that at least James and Larry were aware of it. I recently learned that Sandor Paull was also aware of the sexual assault incident and arrest since at least 2007. There may be others who know this information, but I am not aware of any.

Not knowing where to turn, in February 2019 I anonymously contacted Dr. Steve Tracy, a theology professor at Phoenix Seminary. Dr. Tracy's areas of expertise are theology, ethics, abuse, and sexuality. Along with his wife, who is a trained counselor, he founded Mending the Soul Ministries (<https://mendingthesoul.org/>) which is devoted to restoring God's wholeness to victims of abuse. In addition to his faculty position at Phoenix Seminary, he previously served as a pastor for 15 years. I briefly shared information without revealing names of people or of the church/network. He expressed serious concern and below is a direct quote of his response.

“The fact that he had a near nervous breakdown shows that the cover up strategy isn't working. The secrecy code of the elders isn't a healthy one and will most likely come back to bite them. Secrets like these have an amazing way of coming out over time, even if it is many years later. There have been numerous high-profile cases of abuse by a leader being covered up, sometimes for decades, eventually to come out at great cost. Quite recently this issue has exploded for the Southern Baptists due to a Houston Chronicle investigation documenting almost 400 SB pastors and elders who had credible accusations of perpetrating sexual abuse but still being in ministry.

I believe that committing sexual assault/abuse (same sex or opposite sex) does disqualify someone from vocational ministry. The qualifications of an elder given in 1 Tim 3 and Titus 1 highlight being “above reproach” and “having a good reputation” in the broad community. I don't see any way someone who has sexually assaulted, regardless of whether it was before or after their conversion, can meet these biblical qualifications.

Furthermore, all sin separates us from God and requires a savior but not all sin is of the same nature. As C. Plantinga states in his terrific book Not the Way It's supposed to Be, “all sin is equally wrong but not equally bad.” Some sin is singled out in Scripture as worse than other sin based on its deviation from the created order (cf. Rom 1:26-27), based on the consequences on others, and based on one's knowledge and willfulness (rebellious “sins of the high hand” in the OT had no sacrifice for forgiveness). For instance, of the 613 commands in the law of Moses, only about 20 are given capital punishment for violating them. Scripture singles out some sin, particularly abuse, as sin that is an abomination or particularly hated by God (Ps 5:6; 11:5; Prov 6:16-19). This is

largely based on the graver consequences of certain sin, esp. abuse, on individuals and on the community. Sexual assault is a most serious sin in God's eyes. It is terribly destructive to others (often having lifelong destructive consequences) and it demonstrates a particularly severe hard heartedness that is frightening in its implications.

It seems to me that having this in his past will cripple many aspects of your pastor's ministry. I would consider sharing your concerns with the Elders. Maybe with all the MeToo fallout they will be more open to dealing with this."

Dr. Tracy also recommended that I reach out to a non-profit group called GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment - <https://www.netgrace.org/>). He stated that GRACE,

"...is an excellent Christian ministry founded by a former sex abuse prosecutor and grandson of Billy Graham [Boz Tchividjian]. They might be willing to give you advice on this situation. They would be my first choice."

This response from a respected Christian leader caused an increased realization of the potential gravity of the issue. On the recommendation of Dr. Tracy, I reached out to GRACE through an anonymous note about the situation to their general contact email. Within five minutes I received a reply directly from the Executive Director, Boz Tchividjian, who stated that the information was "extremely troubling." Mr. Tchividjian called me via phone the next day and said that given the situation and their experience with similar circumstances, and that even though the crime in question occurred years ago, it remained of utmost importance to be addressed and should be brought to church leaders. He stated that GRACE is a non-profit group that regularly works with a variety of churches and Christian organizations to gather information and provide recommendations regarding issues of sexual abuse. Mr. Tchividjian freely offered to work with church leaders about this matter.

Outstanding Questions

After contemplating the matter for many years and speaking with several experts, a set of unresolved questions emerged. Such questions included, but are not limited, to the following:

1. How has the incident affected the victim? Sexual abuse often causes long term, devastating impacts to victims such as trauma, stress, guilt, depression, anxiety, increase rates of suicide, difficulty with relationships, and increased drug use.⁷
2. Has restitution or any reparations been made to the victim in addition to the verbal apology Steve indicated he offered? Such reparations typically go beyond a simple apology and may include paying for therapy or counseling costs, prescription costs, and legal costs incurred during the processes.⁸ Reconciliation and treatment of victims is outlined in biblical texts.
3. Will the victim come forward with information making it public especially in light of the current #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements?
4. What criminal charges were filed for the arrest to occur? Michigan law outline several degrees of felony rape depending on the act committed, age of the victim, and authority circumstance. All degrees of rape currently come with penalties ranging from 15 years to life imprisonment.⁹

⁷ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/trauma-and-hope/201704/overcoming-sexual-assault-symptoms-recovery>

⁸ <https://victimsofcrime.org/help-for-crime-victims/get-help-bulletins-for-crime-victims/restitution>

⁹ [http://www.legislature.mi.gov/\(S\(y2jdgtdyq4puthkatl2c1x3\)\)/mileg.aspx?page=getObject&objectName=mcl-328-1931-LXXVI](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S(y2jdgtdyq4puthkatl2c1x3))/mileg.aspx?page=getObject&objectName=mcl-328-1931-LXXVI)

5. What are the implications of the assault being committed against a minor? In the state of Michigan, if an assault is against a minor, it would automatically be considered statutory rape if the victim were under age 16, or under age 18 if “*The actor is in a position of authority over the victim and used this authority to coerce the victim to submit.*” Seventeen year-old minors under an authority figure are not capable of consenting. According to Michigan law, being convicted of sexual assault against a minor now results in a lifetime listing on sexual predator registries along with lifetime electronic monitoring.
6. What conditions drove Steve to commit this act of sexual assault against a younger male victim over whom he was leading in a church setting?
7. Since the victim was a male, are issues of homosexuality involved? Most experts state that sexual assault does not involve sexual orientation as it is more an act of power than sex.¹⁰
8. Have the underlying causes of the crime been dealt with professionally by an expert in sexual abuse in a long-term manner? What professional help is appropriate for those who commit such crimes of abuse?¹¹
9. How do the typologies of sexual abuse involving issues of power, influence, and leadership apply to a person in church leadership?¹²
10. Given the statistics on underreporting and reoffending by sexual abusers, what are the possibilities that other acts of abuse occurred either before or after the confessed arrest?¹³
11. Should someone arrested for such a crime serve in a vocational leadership role per the requirements of overseers as outlined in the bible? Is a leader with this background “above reproach” and do they have a “good reputation in the community”?
12. How does having this background affect Steve’s ministry?
13. Is it healthy for Steve’s long-term wellbeing to serve in church leadership capacities?
14. Should a person with this background supervise subordinates who lead church youth groups? We would not likely hire a church youth leader with this background.
15. What is the extent of knowledge of this information within the leadership of the network?
16. Was this information known by official leaders of the Association of Vineyard Churches at the time Steve was planting Vineyard Community Church in Carbondale in 1995 and becoming ordained as a pastor? What implications would it have if they had known?
17. How would church members and other leaders within the network churches respond if this information became public?
18. Why is this information being kept secret amongst a select group?
19. What actions have already been, or should be taken to address this matter?
20. Should external organizations and experts be involved in advising and assisting with this matter?

A Call to Action

You may consider that this matter was put to rest years ago both personally, after Steve’s conversion and confession, and internally by other leaders. But I implore you to carefully consider the concerns and recommendations raised by Dr. Steve Tracy, Mr. Boz Tchividjian, and the list of questions listed above. Dr. Tracy and Mr. Tchividjian both recommended that this matter be brought directly to church leaders and not to Steve himself. It could be that outside assistance is indispensable as Mr. Tchividjian recommends that organizations not solely rely on internal inquiries due to potential conflicts of interest.¹⁴

¹⁰ <https://www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault-men-and-boys>

¹¹ https://www.smart.gov/SOMAPI/sec1/ch7_treatment.html

¹² Robertiello, G. and Terry, K.J. (2007). Can we profile sex offenders? A review of sex offender typologies. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 12*: 508-518.

¹³ https://www.smart.gov/SOMAPI/sec1/ch5_recidivism.html

¹⁴ <https://religionnews.com/2015/10/16/are-abuse-survivors-best-served-when-institutions-investigate-themselves/>

Attempting to resolve such a complex and weighty issue solely on the viewpoints of a handful of network insiders who were appointed to positions by Steve may not be a wise approach. As seen in other recent cases in evangelical churches such as with Andy Savage and Highpoint Church, the fallout from trying to handle such situations internally, along with secrecy codes, is often worse than directly dealing with the matter.

God forgives sin no matter how serious and all of our sins are ugly in God's eyes. We could all lay out a litany of serious sins and perhaps even crimes committed when younger and before becoming a believer. We should be willing to do so even in a public setting. If we are truly forgiven, then all previous sin should be in the light - consider people from the bible who committed serious crimes such as Paul and David. And we know that God wonderfully regenerates and sanctifies believers. But the matters remain of an arrest for a serious sexual assault crime, having a good reputation in the community, seeking reparations with victims, the secrecy employed, and the profile of power abuses by those who sexually abuse younger victims over which they lead or have authority.

My request is for church leaders to carefully consider this matter and take any prudent action.

Personal Apology

During the past 12 years it has been exceptionally difficult and stressful to hold onto this information in secret. But I've come to the realization that my previous role as an overseer along with the advice of experts necessitates the sharing of this information with those in accountability positions. I apologize to you for not earlier expressing concerns about this matter or pursuing answers to questions. I hope and pray that you will forgive me for waiting so long.

Conclusion

There has been much personal agonizing over how to approach this issue. I have been close to Steve and his family and have been an integral part of the church network for over 17 years – I love the people and the churches to which I've been deeply committed. I love Steve and care about him and his well-being. Bringing this information to light potentially puts my family and me in a vulnerable position. But I am convinced through God's leading and by wise counsel that it is extremely important for the health of church members and leaders to address the matters raised in this letter. I am willing to accept any outcomes as I trust God with being in control of all things. I only ask you to consider the issues and the sources.

Perhaps your reactions to this information will mirror mine and run the gamut of being surprised, confused, troubled, defensive, reactive, protective, but hopefully self-reflective of our own sin and frailties. Those responses are to be expected. Or perhaps you already knew about this information and had settled in your mind that everything was resolved. Either way, I only ask that you seek God, pray earnestly about the situation, pursue wise counsel both internal and external to the church network, consider the church and its members, and rely upon the eternal truths found in the Bible as you carefully deliberate these matters.

I remain available to speak further should you desire. But I now pass this matter over to those of you who are in positions of spiritual and legal responsibility.

In God's Love,

Andrew Lumpe