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Silver Taps

Christian Duvall Owen
May 14, 2001 — March 16, 2023

Sports: Final softball home series against Mizzou
SOFTBALL ON PG. 8



Samuel Falade — THE BATTALION

People dance outside the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library during its 25th anniversary celebration on Saturday, April 22, 2023.

Bush Library celebrates 25 years

Presidential library honors quarter century with community celebration

By Ayden Castillo
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The George H.W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum welcomed visitors to celebrate their 25th anniversary. Visitors were allowed free admission into the museum all day, with the evening celebration kicking off at 5 p.m.

On April 22 at 5 p.m., the grounds in front of the museum hosted food trucks, bouncy castles and a stage for the evening's entertainment. The Texas A&M Women's Chorus opened the event, the Aggiedland Mariachi went on after, then the Killer Dueling Pianos. Before the final event started, three community leaders gave speeches reflecting on the museum's history with College Station. Following the speech a performance was delivered by the Singing Cadets along with a firework display at the end of

"God Bless America."

Holzweiss said the event was for the community.

"We've been here for 25 years, and we want to give back to the community who has given so much to us," Holzweiss said. "College Station and the Texas A&M community have been unbelievable partners with us for 25 years, and this is our way of saying thank you."

President Bush put his museum here for a reason, Holzweiss said.

"President Bush put his library here because he loved Texas A&M and he loved the students," Holzweiss said. "His main driving force in life was 'public service is a noble calling,' A&M and the Bush School [of Government and Public Service] embodies that, which is why he wanted his library to be here."

Holzweiss said the Bush Museum is also getting ready for bigger events to celebrate Bush's 100th birthday.

"Leading into next year, we will be celebrating President Bush's 100th birthday," Holzweiss said. "We have a new building that is under construction and that will be open in 2024, we are planning a series of

events that will lead up to the grand opening of that building."

Students unfamiliar with the Bush Museum and its legacy shouldn't be afraid to visit, Holzweiss said.

"We're here for you," Holzweiss said. "The students are most welcome at the museum, so please come and check it out, we have new exhibits coming up, we have a Marine Corps art exhibit opening in early June and we will also have an Aggie football exhibit opening in late August."

Chief Executive Officer of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation Max Angerholzer said the presidential center and foundation wanted to give back and say thank you.

"Tonight is all about the community," Angerholzer said. "We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Texas A&M University and the city of College Station. The president and Mrs. Bush embraced this community and they felt like family here, and we want everyone in this community to feel like they have ownership of what we're doing here at the Bush Presidential Center."

BUSH ON PG. 3

A&M vet school tops global rankings

Veterinary program climbs nine spots internationally

By Camila Munoz
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Texas A&M's School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences has been ranked 11th globally, sixth in the country and first among SEC schools for veterinary science. The prestigious title was awarded by the 2023 Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings.

The Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings cover five subject areas and 54 disciplines. This past year, A&M climbed up nine spots, after placing 20th in last year's rankings.

Dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences Dr. John R. August said the reason for the increased rankings has to do with the history of the vet school. August said because the vet school has been around for over a century, it has a strong foundation for innovation.

"We have more than 106 years of history, which allows us to get better each year and build on that history," August said. "Our university is proud of having a vet school and understands the importance of a vet story. It has invested in our schools so we can excel in our program."

The increased rankings has to do with the continued investment of the university into its programs as well as the academic achievements of the students on the national licensing exam, August said.

"We attract the best students, we hire the

best faculty, and we have the best resources to deliver our programs successfully," August said. "A lot of it goes back to the success of our students and faculties. At the end of the fall semester of their fourth year, they take the national licensing exam and the state board exams after that. In the fall of 2022, the average of A&M students who took the exam was 93%, compared to the national average of 79%."

Biomedical sciences senior Jenna Demarus is a pre-vet student who has worked at the large animal hospital, microbiology lab and oncology ward. Her time working at the vet school inspired her to pursue a career in veterinary medicine. Demarus

said her goal is to attend A&M's vet school because of the positive atmosphere, patient teachers and the program's competitiveness.

"I really like it because we get a lot of repeat patients and clients," Demarus said. "It's really good for me to work on rapport with them. I get to have a really close relationship with the dogs that come in every day."

Demarus originally wanted to go into healthcare, but said the teaching environment and what she has learned about veterinary medicine from the large animal hospital workers made her want to be a veterinary doctor.

VET ON PG. 3



Kyle Heise — THE BATTALION

Texas A&M's School of Veterinary Medicine was given prestigious rankings for its performance and dedication. It ranked 11th globally and sixth in the U.S. in veterinary sciences, and ranked first among the SEC schools.

Exploitation of faith

Christland Church members describe alleged abuse, manipulation, control

By Nicholas Gutteridge
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Content warning: This article discusses suicide and allegations of spiritual and sexual abuse.

Sándor Paull came to College Station in 2017 and founded Christland Church with a group of colleagues, a "church plant team." The group focused its recruitment efforts on Texas A&M students and began inviting them to Christland. However, A&M students and former members recounted that while initially welcoming, the church soon engulfed them, with many still recovering today from alleged instances of sexual and spiritual abuse, manipulation and mistreatment.

Christland is a "multiethnic, multigenerational church with a heart for students" located five minutes away from A&M. It has 4.8/5.0 stars on Google Reviews, a welcoming website and, when searched online, a majority of the results are generally positive.

But a closer examination of sources from the church, including court documents and leaked records, reveals a different story. Paull, vice president of a network of nationwide churches and lead pastor at Christland, has allegedly stood by while this abuse and mistreatment has run rampant, even personally perpetuating them in some instances, according to insider sources. Yet he has faced no consequences; conversely, sources say he's thrived — right here in College Station.

A nationwide organization

Christland was founded in 2017 as part of a larger group of churches headed by Steven D. Morgan, the current president of The Network, a collection of 26 churches, with 24 in the United States and two internationally.

In 1987, Morgan, 22 at the time, was arrested for aggravated criminal sodomy against a minor in Kansas, according to court documents, with the court finding "probable cause" that he "unlawfully, knowingly, willfully and feloniously commit[ed] sodomy with a child under sixteen years of age."

In 1987, Kansas defined aggravated criminal sodomy as sodomy with a child who is not married and is underage, causing a child under 16 years old to engage in sodomy with a person or animal or sodomy with an individual who does not consent.

After initially failing to appear in court, a diversion agreement — a system meant to remove a case from the justice system and resolve it through alternate means — was signed, which required Morgan to attend counseling, have no contact with the victim and have no involvement with youth organizations for three years, among other things, in exchange for dropped charges, a promise that was fulfilled in 1990.

In 1993, Morgan, then 29, began working with Paull, then 20, according to a training resource for pastors Morgan wrote.

He would later invite Paull to become a pastor at Vineyard Community Church, later renamed Vine Church, in Carbondale, Illinois in 1994, becoming the first pastor recruited by Morgan. Together, they would help grow the organization, taking the name The Network, with Paull rising to vice president along with being seated on the board. Over the years, Paull would guide and train multiple pastors before moving to College Station in 2017.

An alleged cycle of control, undeterred

Staff, pastors and members would be subject to various forms of "spiritual abuse and systemic gaslighting" from The Network's "controlling, manipulative and abusive culture," according to a mission statement from former members and staff who came together to create the website Leaving The Network, or LTN.

Skyler Ray Taylor, the primary webmaster, shared his experience on the website.

"I entered as a spiritual refugee and stayed on as a prisoner," he wrote in 2022.

Taylor was a member at Vine Church from 2002 to 2014, serving as a staff member from 2007 to 2014. In his writing, he described his time with Morgan and Paull to be one linked to

CHRISTLAND ON PG. 4



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Istika Samant—THE BATTALION

Christland Church on Highway 6 in College Station on Thursday, April 20, 2023.

grooming and control. “Steve spent his entire career as a pastor grooming young men to be utterly loyal to him,” Taylor wrote. “At conferences and retreats, young men from Vine Church would be rounded up and presented by Sándor to Steve.”

What followed would be a call from Paull, where he would reveal “that he and Steve feel like God is calling you to be a pastor,” according to Taylor’s account. They would then rise through The Network’s ranks, with the “most loyal being promoted to ever higher positions.”

The Battalion reached out to Taylor, who responded through email. In a written statement, he emphasized the role Paull played in The Network’s growth.

“Sándor’s primary role in The Network is to ensure Steve Morgan’s directives are carried out and to identify very young men to present to Steve for consideration as future leaders,” Taylor wrote. “These men whom Sándor has identified for Steve have nearly always been current students at a university when they were recruited.”

Taylor noted Paull would even go as far as to watch over children, preparing them for a leadership role in The Network.

“Do you know how long it takes for me to release a pastor here into that role,” Paull said in audio shared by Taylor. “There’s some of you in this room — I’ve been watching you since you were five, wondering if that’s what God’s built you to be.”

Taylor wrote that Paull’s involvement was instrumental in The Network’s rapid expansion into college towns nationwide, sharing that Paull recruits young individuals into “church plant” teams, where they uproot their lives to move to new towns, starting churches and spreading The Network.

“[A&M] students should be aware that The Network specifically targets college students and that Sándor Paull, in particular, has been incredibly effective at convincing students to become loyal to the organization,” Taylor said. “Nearly every leader in this organization began their involvement with The Network as a college student.”

Taylor shared those who have reached out to LTN have described “priority shifts to stay at a Network church rather than continuing after college ... and the increased control Network leaders exert over large and small decisions in their lives.”

“In some cases, young men have been flown to Austin to meet with Steve Morgan directly at his home,” Taylor said. “Parents, siblings and friends describe feeling helpless as they watch their loved ones get drawn deeper and deeper into the group.”

Paull spoke at The Network’s Summer Leadership Conference in 2018, where he emphasized the importance of forgoing individualism in exchange for devotion towards one’s leaders — even if they’re wrong.

“We are trained and conditioned that I have to give my opinion,” Paull said in a recording of the 2018 conference. “My voice has to be heard. And the truth is ... your voice and your opinion doesn’t matter if Jesus hasn’t put you in that role of responsibility. We’re all in danger of thinking too highly of our own opinions.”

Throughout the conference, Paull spoke on multiple topics surrounding leadership, including his own.

“I had four staff members leave in one semester, and I remember calling Steven saying, ‘Steve, is it me?’” Paull said in the recording. “Because sometimes it is, right? Sometimes, yeah, it is you. And when he said, ‘I don’t think so. I think they’ve got their things,’ I chose to trust him because I believe that if it was me, he loves me enough that he’d tell me.”

On Christland’s website, the “Kids Programs” curriculum conveys a similar tone, with the children having to memorize Proverbs 3:5–6, most notably the message “trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.”

Morgan also presented a related message in a 2011 teaching at Blue Sky Church in Seattle, comparing the ideal member to one that is similar to an “obedient child” following their parents.

“It shouldn’t be that your small group leader is exhausted by you,” Morgan said in the

audio. “Do you know there’s such a thing as getting what you think you want and having it cause you great harm?”

Hidden and belittled: The accused sodomy of a minor

Despite the alleged crime occurring in 1986, it stayed hidden from the public until the court documents were revealed in 2022, according to the documents posted in an article on LTN. Paull first went to Joshua Church in Austin on July 10, 2022, where Morgan is the lead pastor, to distribute a letter detailing The Network’s response to the situation, reaffirming their “commitment to serve alongside [Morgan] in his work.”

He then spoke to Christland Church about the situation on July 17, 2022. Paull would reveal he had known about the alleged aggravated sodomy of the minor for 27 years but was “opposed to having to speak to a person’s forgiven sin” because “biblically, it’s forgotten by God,” as Paull claimed the incident happened before Morgan had converted to Christianity.

In his speech, Paull would go on to describe the situation to the churchgoers, divulging that it allegedly occurred at a Mormon summer camp between Morgan, 22, and a 15-year-old boy. However, because the charges were dropped due to the diversion agreement, he believes there were “not malicious acts of violence that were involved.”

“There’s been no cover up,” Paull said in the recording. “There has been no concealment.”

However, Andrew Lumpe, a former staff member of The Network, posted a story on LTN that shows the extent of Paull’s involvement. Lumpe was told about Morgan’s alleged abuse in 2007, later contacting Steve Tracy, Ph.D, a theology professor who specializes in abuse within churches, among other things, in the wake of the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements in 2019.

“I believe that committing sexual assault/abuse ... does disqualify someone from vocational ministry,” Tracy said in a written message to Lumpe. “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.”

Lumpe included this excerpt in a letter he sent to Paull, who then flew to California to meet with him, where Paull told Lumpe the situation had already been handled within the church.

“Sándor stated that they would not be taking any actions,” Lumpe said. “Sándor also stated that they would not be contacting outside experts.”

Throughout the meeting, Paull supported Morgan, emphasizing the crime “happened before he was a Christian.”

“I asked if they would hire a youth group leader at their churches, if they knew the person had an alleged sex assault crime background like Steve’s,” Lumpe said. “Sándor hesitated, then answered with a sheepish ‘maybe.’ I further pressed him if he would let his then 17-year-old daughter attend a youth group led by a person arrested for sexual assault. He would not answer.”

Ben Powers, a former lead pastor of City Lights Church in St. Louis, Missouri, later reached out to Tracy, providing more detail on the alleged crime.

“The family of the boy Steve raped found Leaving The Network and reached out to us giving us more details of the crime,” Powers wrote in a message in 2022. “The boy was 15 years old at the time, and after the assault, suffered in many ways and still does today.”

When speaking to Christland in 2022, Paull’s sentiment was unchanged, saying the board, appointed by Morgan according to page 11 of The Network’s Operating Bylaws, found no wrongdoing, even mentioning that he was on two of the four boards that looked into it.

“This is not something that the Bible prohibits,” Paull said in the recording. “I’ve shared this in ... detail [with members of staff and] I am very thankful that ... we are in absolute complete unity at Christland in terms of what we believe.”

Paull then reaffirmed his commitment to Morgan once more, stating that they are “thankful for Steve’s strong yet humble leadership, depth of love, Christ-honoring character.”

“Doctrinally, there’s been no miscarriage of justice,” Paull said. “It’s not a betrayal of pastoral trust, responsibility. I want to be more like him. I do. He is a better man than me, in his character and his gifting and his obedience to Jesus.”

He went on to reassure Christland members about safety protocols regarding children, stating that no church in The Network has ever had someone “with that background” in their Kids Program, nor have they ever “had an investigation nor needed it.”

A recording tells a different story, however. Alex Dieckmann, lead pastor at Rock River Church in San Marcos, a church involved in The Network, taught a session at the Network Leadership Conference in 2019. During this session, he revealed the apparent molestation of a minor.

“There’s a woman who hadn’t confessed something her whole life,” Dieckmann said in the audio. “She was molested as a child, and then what happened was, because that happened, she did the same to someone else. She would be around kids and serving in the Kids Program. She could not hold a child without thinking back. I prayed for her and just prayed [for] healing.”

Texas’ mandatory reporting law requires suspected child abuse be reported to the proper authorities, with a failure to do so resulting in a Class A misdemeanor, punishable by imprisonment of up to one year and/or a fine of up to \$4,000.

The audio indicates the individual continued serving in the Kids Program after Dieckmann heard the story and no report was made. The Battalion reached out to Dieckmann and Rock River Church multiple times but received no response.

Christland’s website states their willingness to share a copy of their training manual for their Kids Program upon request, but The Battalion received no response upon inquiry. However, the manual was shared by an anonymous Christland attendee.

In the five-page training manual, there is no mention of the mandatory reporting law, instead telling volunteers to “contact a Christland staff member immediately” if they suspected a child was a victim of abuse.

A separate anonymous attendee described the training they underwent at Christland, using the alias “Alex” to protect against retaliation.

“It was just like a 30-minute meeting with the Kids Program director on my first Sunday ... and she just kind of walked me through how it’s done,” Alex said. “She said they were going to do a background check, but I don’t believe I ever had one done. I immediately started serving that very day. From my understanding, that’s what the training looked like for everyone.”

A separate anonymous source from Christland, referred to as “Sam,” was an attendee and member who helped found the church in 2017. They said the church’s Kids Program emphasized safety for participants.

“Sándor would regularly, up on the podium on Sundays, say, ‘Your kids are safe, we do background checks on all of our workers before they’re allowed to serve,’” Sam said.

Despite being founded in 2017, emails shared with The Battalion indicate Christland only instructed volunteers to undergo a background check in 2022 — around two weeks after Morgan’s court documents were revealed.

One email from Cody Dicks, a student from Southern Illinois University, or SIU, before joining Vine Church and later becoming staff pastor at Christland, stated that Kids Program volunteers would do a background check using a company named Checkr to “sync the background checks of our volunteers with our church database,” as it would “allow all the information to be in one location for ease of filing and organization.”

Despite the email indicating that Christland had access to background checks from volunteers, none of the multiple sources The Battalion contacted had any recollection of volunteers undergoing one.

“No one from the church plant had a background check done, and we were the first ones serving in the Kids Program,” Sam said. “So they weren’t running checks from the very beginning. The whole team got a 20-minute training during one of the [church] plant

meetings, and then the Kid’s director said, ‘Now you are all officially trained to serve in the Kids Program,’ and that was that.”

Emma Wright, Class of 2022 and former Christland member, shared a similar experience.

“To be honest, there wasn’t really any training,” Wright said. “There was no type of certification, no type of online course you had to take. I don’t think anybody would have been able to recognize any signs of abuse unless they were really, really obvious.”

Attempts to infiltrate a university

Sam said that in the founding group had any experience or affiliation with A&M, hypothesizing that The Network chose the area because A&M fits the target demographic well.

“Before we planted, we had prep meetings ... we were learning the culture of A&M, the Aggie traditions, ways to fit in, like ‘Aggies don’t boo, they hiss,’ the ‘Gig ‘Em’, who’s allowed to say whoop,” Sam said.

In Illinois, Sam said Paull and the leaders encouraged small groups — groups meant to study the Bible — to compete over who could search Christland the most, as it would move it up the list of options when those in the A&M area searched online for churches. This continued once they arrived in College Station, as noted in a June 19, 2017 email.

“We need to be searching for ‘church in college station tx’ rather than anything else,” Paull relayed in 2017. “It already has the highest ranking and will continue to be higher as it has the least competition.”

A different email from June 7, 2017 had a similar message.

“I wanted to remind all of us to take time to get on our website,” Paull wrote. “We REALLY [sic] need to be in the first page of search results by the week before the TAMU semester begins.”

Sam noted one of Paull and Christland’s initial priorities was getting a Recognized Student Organization, or RSO, approved.

“They do work really hard to get at least one or two students who are on the church plant into A&M so they can register Christland as an RSO,” Sam said. “Then, they can do more school-sanctioned events.”

The Battalion found an RSO under the name of “Christland College Ministry” with a link leading to Christland’s website. The public contact for the RSO is economics senior Madison Guye, a member of the initial group that came to Christland in 2017 and current small group leader at the church, according to Christland’s website. She began attending A&M in 2019.

Guye did not respond to multiple requests for a comment.

The Battalion found that two separate network churches, Joshua Church and Rock River Church, established RSO’s in their respective cities at University of Texas at Austin and Texas State University in San Marcos, with more likely existing in other colleges around the nation. According to their 2022 constitution, UT’s RSO invites students and takes them to Joshua Church, where Morgan is the lead pastor.

In another email, Jackson MacLachlan, a staff pastor that “focuses on reaching college students” according to his biography on Christland’s website, sent out a request for students to work shifts at the Memorial Student Center Open House, an event that occurs at the beginning of every semester.

Scan the QR code for the entire story

