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Accused Dewar minister had been hired in Sulphur

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HENRYETTA -- A former Dewar First Baptist Church music director worked briefly at another Baptist church before his arrest on sexual battery complaints last week.

Aaron M. McDonald, 23, was hired in June at the Calvary Baptist Church in Sulphur, said the Rev. Brent Parsons. Asked if the hiring came after June 11, Parsons said, "Yes."

McDonald is accused of touching the genitals of a 15-year-old boy who, with another friend, was staying the night at McDonald's mobile home in Henryetta on June 11, according to an affidavit for McDonald's arrest.



McDonald

The Rev. Jack Vance, pastor of the Dewar church, said earlier that McDonald left his post as music director "within a couple of hours" after Vance learned of the allegations.

Just when church officials had learned of the allegations was not clear.

Vance said McDonald had been music director for only two Sundays prior to June 11.

Vance could not be reached Friday. He also had said earlier that the congregation is "well-aware" of what is going on.

But an anonymous caller to the Tulsa World on Friday identified himself as a member of the church and said no one in the church had told him or others of the McDonald allegations.

"Nobody knew. Not a word was spoken about it," the caller said.

Law enforcement officials were not informed of the allegations until the 15-year-old's parents notified Henryetta police June 24.

Detective Randy Knight's affidavit for an arrest warrant said the victim and another youth had stayed overnight with McDonald.

The victim claimed that during the evening, McDonald used his foot to rub the boy's genitals while they were on a couch. During the night, McDonald grabbed the boy's genitals twice in McDonald's bed, the affidavit alleged.

Knight traced McDonald to Warner, where he was arrested July 25 after allegedly admitting that he had touched the boy with his hand and foot.

In Warner, the Rev. Larry Combs of the First Baptist Church said he knew McDonald from a year ago when McDonald led the music at a revival. But McDonald was "never employed here," Combs said.

McDonald had been staying with the Warner church's youth leader and his wife while looking for jobs at other churches, Combs said.

The Warner youth leader was a high school friend of McDonald's who later told Combs that he had "no clue" that McDonald might molest children, Combs said.

He said he asked McDonald after his arrest, "Did you do any of that in Warner?"

"No, I can promise you I didn't," Combs quoted McDonald as saying.

Combs, a former police officer, said he conducts background checks on all potential employees as a matter of church policy.

Since Baptist churches are autonomous, each has its own method of hiring workers, he said.

"Ethically, it would be reported" to police if he learned of such incidents within his church, Combs said.

McDonald most recently worked in Sulphur, where Police Capt. Paul Luna said the Police Department had no reports on McDonald.

McDonald earned a degree in vocal music a year ago from Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, school records show.

He listed Shawnee as his hometown when he posted \$20,000 bail last week in Okmulgee.

He is scheduled to appear Wednesday in Henryetta to learn what charges may be filed against him.

Okmulgee County prosecutor Beryl R. Davis is reviewing police reports on the allegations.

The Oklahoma Baptist General Convention said the convention offers guidelines to churches on dealing with such matters as sexual-abuse claims, said Marcus Wehmuller, assistant public relations director for the convention.

Those guidelines are not given to the public, he said, but the state group recommends that churches conduct background checks on volunteers and employees.

However, Wehmuller said the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a resolution at its June convention in St. Louis which acknowledged that "Roman Catholics are seeking to address the scandal of sexual abuse by members of their clergy."

Resolution 3 states: "We encourage those religious bodies dealing with the tragedy of clergy abuse in their efforts to rid their ranks of predatory ministers . . ." and to ". . . call on civil authorities to punish to the fullest extent of the law sexual abuse among clergy and counselors."

The resolution also calls "on our churches to discipline those guilty of any sexual abuse . . ." and to "cooperate with civil authorities in the prosecution of those cases."

The resolution ends, "We pray for those who have been harmed as a result of sexual abuse and urge our churches to offer support, compassion and biblical counseling to them and their families."

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