

September 27, 2019

To the churches of ARBCA:

This letter is to inform you that First Baptist Church of Clinton, LA voted unanimously to withdraw from the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America. Our missionary, Allen Beardmore, by his own decision, is also withdrawing from the association. We have benefited over the years from being in association with the brethren of ARBCA and are grateful to have worked alongside them for the cause of Christ's mission. For the reasons listed below, however, we have chosen to leave ARBCA. We struggled over whether to list all of the following charges because we do not desire to give offense. But we chose to list our charges because we want to be as clear as possible about our reasons for leaving.

1. In 2000 and beyond, ARBCA's officials failed to protect the children abused by Tom Chantry and failed to aid them in obtaining the justice due to them (Ps 103:6). In 2019, ARBCA's GA failed to reach out to those abused by Tom Chantry, to acknowledge the wrongdoing of the ARBCA council, to ask forgiveness from the victims, and to seek to make amends in any way possible (2 Sam 21:3; Lk 19:8).
2. Recently discovered documents in July of 2019 prove that ARBCA's 2000 Informal Council knew of Tom Chantry's child abuse and failed to report it to law enforcement (Rom 13:1). This failure to report to the authorities had the effect of exposing more children to danger and denying justice to Chantry's victims (Ps 82:3-4; Is 1:17).
3. ARBCA's 2000 Informal Council failed to recommend that Miller Valley Baptist Church discipline Tom Chantry, which is what the Scriptures require (Matt 18:15-20), and instead resorted to a biased and unbiblical program of restoration so that Chantry's ministry could be preserved (1 Tim 5:20-21).
4. The formation of the 2000 ARBCA Informal Council by Walt Chantry, Bob Selph, and ARBCA's 2000 Administrative Council was both unbiblical and contrary to ARBCA's confession of faith, which does not permit "informal councils" (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22-25; 2LCF 26.15).
5. The allowance of "sealed reports" facilitated the cover-up of a crime. Sealed reports from an ARBCA council are a violation of Scripture and ARBCA's confession of faith, which requires that all advice given by church councils "be reported to all the churches" (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22-25; 2LCF 26.15).
6. ARBCA's 2016 Administrative Council wrongly recommended Christ Reformed Baptist Church of Hales Corners, WI, the church where Tom Chantry was a pastor, for membership in ARBCA (Jas 2:9). But the AC withheld crucial facts from the General Assembly. They wrongly led the General Assembly to vote in favor of CRBC's membership without sufficient knowledge (Col 3:9), though they knew Tom Chantry was under investigation for child molestation and that Miller Valley Baptist Church of Prescott, AZ objected to CRBC's membership (Prov 6:19).
7. ARBCA's current failure to make an open and truthful statement denouncing these past wrongs has been a violation of the 9th commandment (Ex 20:16), bearing false witness to the churches of the Lord Jesus and to the watching world. None of the essential facts are in dispute. The problem is that ARBCA will not condemn ARBCA's past violations of Scripture and its own confession of faith, which led to the victimization of children and others.
8. We believe the failure to tell the truth about the above matters, to condemn past wrongs, and to try to

make things right with all wronged parties is schismatic, and breaks covenant with the churches of the association, which is our ground of withdrawal (Rom 16:17).

We realize that some ARBCA churches agree with much of what we have said above, but have chosen to remain in the association to continue working to make things right. We also know that some sincere and faithful brothers disagree with us on some of the charges listed above. We recognize that not all sincere Christians see things the same way, and certainly none of us sees everything perfectly. But we have set forth, to the best of our ability, and in a manner consistent with our consciences the wrongs committed by our association that warrant our withdrawal.

Sincerely in Christ,
The Elders of First Baptist Church of Clinton, LA
On behalf of the congregation

Timeline of Actions Taken by FBC To Address ARBCA's Mishandling of the Tom Chantry Matter

August-September 2017 – First Baptist Church conducted an extensive investigation of ARBCA's handling of the Tom Chantry matter, which found that in 2016, ARBCA's Administrative Council (AC) wrongly recommended admission of Tom Chantry's church to the association though it knew Chantry was under investigation for child molestation and that MVBC had a conflict with Chantry. Due to conflicting data, this early investigation by FBC was unable to determine conclusively whether ARBCA's 2000 informal council had any knowledge of child abuse, though we now know that they did.

October 2017 – The elders corresponded in a series of letters with the Administrative Council and the Membership Committee, asking them to adopt policies that would prevent them from recommending a church whose pastor is under investigation for a crime. We also attempted to get the Administrative Council to agree to policies that would prevent them from withholding any information from the General Assembly, which might lead messengers to vote against accepting a church into membership. These efforts failed, but they resolved to press the matter further at the 2018 General Assembly.

May 2018 – At the General Assembly (GA) in Fargo, ND, Pastor Tom Hicks met with ARBCA's Administrative Council and other leaders to object to the recommendation of Tom Chantry's church in 2016. Tom Hicks urged that they should never recommend churches whose pastors are accused of any crime, and he asked that they commit to disclose all relevant correspondence about such matters with applicant churches to the whole GA, which is what ARBCA's constitution requires (IV.C.2). The leaders at the GA in Fargo strongly reaffirmed their decision to recommend Tom Chantry's church in 2016 and denied that any wrong had been done.

June 2018 – Pastor Tom Hicks corresponded with and asked the Administrative Council to draft and implement a child abuse reporting policy, which would apply to all of ARBCA's councils, committees, as well as to anyone acting on behalf of ARBCA in an official capacity. The AC agreed to make this recommendation to the 2019 GA, and they published this recommendation in Report 2 in October.

September 2018 – After the release of “Report 1” by ARBCA's AC, the elders of FBC Clinton, LA were deeply concerned that the report justified ARBCA's past actions and laid a great deal of blame at

Pastor Chris Marley's feet. The elders of FBC did not agree that Chris Marley was to blame, and did not accept the self-justifications presented in Report 1. Pastor Tom Hicks spoke on the phone with the Chairman of the Administrative Council about the need for an independent investigation, and he expressed his concern that "Report 1" wrongly blamed Chris Marley and failed to accept responsibility for any wrongdoing on the part of the association.

March 2019 – The elders of First Baptist Church of Clinton, LA posted a list of five concerns to all ARBCA pastors on ARBCA's website, requesting discussion. That list stated, among other things, that ARBCA should reach out to Tom Chantry's victims, and that anyone involved in the Tom Chantry matter should provide clear testimony of his involvement to the association. Because of questions raised on the internet, Fred Malone posted his own personal testimony of involvement in 2000 to all of ARBCA and refuted the public charge made against him. The elders of FBC then turned their list of concerns into a series of questions and submitted them to the GA planning committee, which were to be asked at the General Assembly in May.

May 2019 – Pastor Tom Hicks was the first messenger to speak to the Tom Chantry matter on the floor of the General Assembly in Cleveland, OH. He went to the microphone five times, asking questions, which he hoped would bring conviction, acknowledgment of wrongdoing, and determination to reach out to wronged parties, including Tom Chantry's victims, to make things right. Sadly, Bob Curley, who was a member of the Administrative Council, rebuffed each of pastor Tom's questions. The General Assembly refused to acknowledge any wrongdoing at any level by any of ARBCA's officials, committees, or councils. The elders of FBC Clinton, LA were deeply disturbed by the lack of any acknowledgment of wrongdoing and the complete lack of desire to make things right with the victims.

Fred Malone motioned that letters of regret be sent to Miller Valley Baptist Church of Prescott, Grace Reformed Baptist Church of Rockford, and Christ Reformed Baptist Church of Hales Corners for the failure of the 2016 AC to recognize that MVBC's protest was a difference or conflict between churches. This motion passed, and letters of regret were sent by the moderator.

July 2019 – The elders of FBC Clinton, LA, along with four sister churches in ARBCA, sent a communication via email to the messengers of the General Assembly, asking to extend the General Assembly in an electronic session by email. The communication called for the association to discuss whether ARBCA should accept responsibility for its failures in 2000-2001 and beyond, to directly contact Tom Chantry's victims to confess sins and to beg their forgiveness, and to make a public statement condemning the actions of ARBCA in 2000-2001.

Pastor Doug VanderMeulen of Community Baptist Church, Fargo, ND, motioned for the extension.

Pastor Tom Hicks seconded the motion and sent an email to the entire General Assembly with two previously unseen attachments: a 2002 letter from Earl Blackburn (chairman of the AC) and a reply from Tedd Tripp (a member of the informal council to MVBC in 2000). These letters included brand new information, which had not previously been known in the association or in public.

After pastor Tom emailed these letters to the GA, they were subsequently released by an unknown party to the bloggers and became public. Had pastor Tom not released these documents, they would not be publicly available today.

Pastor Tom had only come into possession of these letters just a few days prior to releasing them to the GA. Tedd Tripp's letter was the first conclusive proof that a member of ARBCA's 2000 Informal

Council believed that Tom Chantry had committed the crime of child abuse. Tedd Tripp presciently said that he believed that Tom Chantry would go to prison for his actions, if he were tried in a court of law. This document provided the first definitive and irrefutable evidence of a cover-up.

After the release of the Blackburn, Tripp, and Jensen letters to the GA, and after much debate, the GA passed the motion to extend the electronic session to discuss ARBCA's involvement in the Tom Chantry Matter.

The elders of FBC worked with other churches during the electronic session of the GA to attempt to pass a series of motions. Administrative Council member Bob Curley, however, preempted our motions by making a motion of his own, insisting that the GA has no authority to express any disapproval of any person or committee acting on behalf of ARBCA. Pastor Tom Hicks appealed to the moderator with a point of order, saying that the GA may not consider any motion that contradicts ARBCA's constitution, which clearly allows for statements of disapproval. After an attempted amendment and discussion, Bob Curley's motion was ruled out of order by the moderator.

Pastor Doug VanderMeulen presented the following motions in collaboration with the elders of First Baptist Church of Clinton, LA (and others).

First, there was a motion to have an emergency GA to permit face to face discussion. The messengers of FBC, pastors Tom Hicks and Fred Malone, voted for this motion, but it failed.

Second, there was a motion stating that the GA condemns ARBCA's past failures to address Chantry's sins against the children of Miller Valley Baptist Church. The motion also acknowledged that great harm has resulted from ARBCA's past failures. Many messengers insisted that the GA has no authority to condemn its own past failures since 2LCF 26.15 forbids "censures." Pastor Tom argued before the GA that the prohibition against "censure" only forbids church discipline at the associational level. He further argued that the association must condemn its past wrongful actions. The messengers of FBC, pastors Tom Hicks and Fred Malone, voted for this motion, but it failed.

Third, there was a motion for direct communication with each of Chantry's victims to acknowledge the gross failures of the association and to express sincere regret that these failures resulted in physical, spiritual, and emotional harm. The messengers of FBC, pastors Tom Hicks and Fred Malone, voted for this motion, but it failed.

After the association's failure to pass these motions, pastor Tom Hicks reached out to Tom Chantry's victims through Chris Marley in an effort to express sorrow for their ordeal, grief for ARBCA's wrongful actions, and gratitude that Tom Chantry has been sentenced to prison.

August 2019 – At the quarterly business meeting, Pastor Tom Hicks gave a full report of ARBCA's 2019 General Assembly to the congregation at First Baptist Church of Clinton, LA. The elders recommended withdrawal from the association. The elders' recommendation to withdraw from ARBCA required a change in the constitution and therefore could not be considered the same day the proposal was made. The elders, therefore, called a special business meeting to be held on September 15 to consider the question.

September 2019 – At a special called business meeting, FBC of Clinton, LA voted to withdraw from ARBCA.