

Pedophile exposed at local church

The Portland Foursquare Church sacrificed its children to maintain the illusion of a pristine reputation

by Renée LaChance

Shortly after the Rev. Thomas Baker began working for the Portland Foursquare Church in 1989, he became aware that Raymond Milas was sexually molesting young children.

An 11-year-old girl came to Baker at the urging of her mother and told him that Milas had touched a young boy "like he shouldn't have." Baker phoned the boy's father and informed him of the report. The boy's father told Baker that there had been a problem in the past but he was taking care of it. When asked later, Baker could not remember anything about the nature of this problem except the word "sucked." When asked if he realized that some sort of oral sodomy took place between Milas and the youth, he said, "I remember the word, and to follow the logic, I don't know what else it would be."

The father said that there had been no further problem after that, and Baker let the incident slide. Baker said he felt it had been handled sufficiently by the abused boy's family, and he was not worried about other children at the church. He did not check to see what activities Milas was involved in at the church, and he did not notify any church staff or volunteers of the incident. He did not question Milas about the incident or instruct him to stay away from children at the church.

This incident was not the first time Milas's sex crimes had been reported to a pastor at the Portland Foursquare Church. Two years earlier, the Rev. Alan Hamilton heard a rumor that Milas had sodomized a 5-year-old member of the church. Like Baker, Hamilton contacted the boy's father, who confirmed the rumor and told Hamilton that he was taking care of it. The abuse did not take place on the church premises, so Hamilton did not feel a need to report it to other staff or volunteers. He also did not instruct Milas to stay away from church activities involving children, nor did he offer him any counseling.

Neither Hamilton nor Baker reported the incident to any agency or police department as required by the Oregon Child Abuse Reporting Act. In fact, it wasn't until Baker became aware in June 1990 of a number of incidents of sexual abuse involving Milas and 4- to 8-year-old boys that he asked legal counsel about his duty to report.

By then it had become impossible to deny any longer that there was a problem.

On a Wednesday evening in June 1990, John Richardson, supervisor of the Sonbeams, a group for 4- and 5-year-olds that met on Wednesday evenings, pulled Baker from a class. Richardson indicated to Baker that there was a problem of a sexual nature with Milas.

Multnomah County Deputy District Attorney Charlene Woods, who handled Milas's trial, said that a church worker had entered a restroom at the church and overheard Milas and a young boy in a conversation that intimated sexual abuse. The conversation disturbed the church worker, who immediately reported the incident to Richardson.

Baker called Milas into his office, and Milas confessed that he had molested the boy.

Baker also learned that Milas was giving another young boy a ride to a babysitter that night, so he insisted on riding along. The significant outcome of that car ride was that the boy commented to Baker about how different the ride home was, because when Milas had driven him to the church they both had had their pants down.

What a dilemma for Baker! Now he had the knowledge that Milas was currently sexually molesting at least two boys from his church and that he had molested another boy from the church a year before, and yet Baker made no effort to contact the boys' parents or to report the incidents to an authority. In fact, Baker didn't even consider reporting the abuse; Richardson was the one who said, "We have got to report this."

Baker wouldn't do that. He was preoccupied

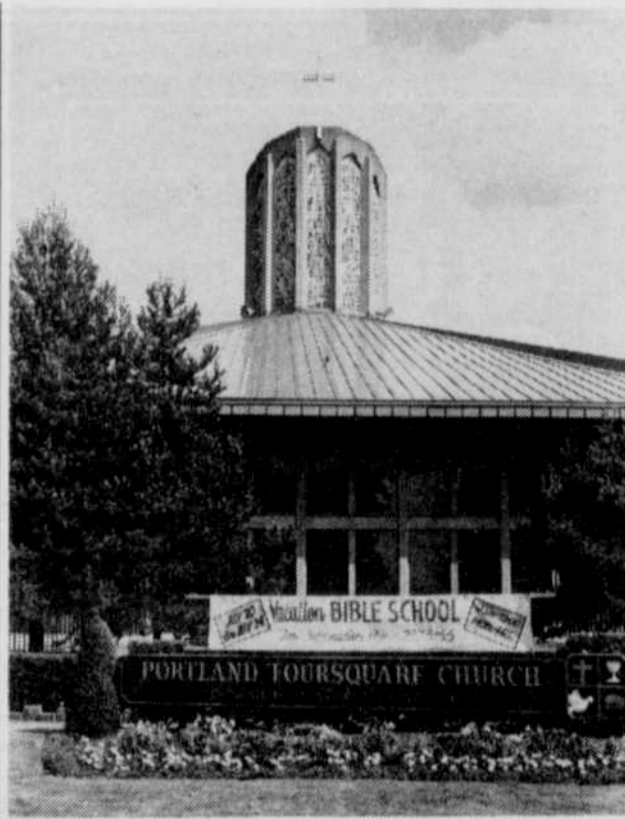


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with a trip to Mexico that he was facilitating with a high school youth group. He did not want to have this incident involving Milas blow up while he was out of town, so he instructed Richardson to wait until he got back from Mexico, two weeks later, before reporting the incident to the parents of the boys or to the police. Baker instructed Richardson to keep Milas away from the kids and out of the Heritage Building where the Sonbeams group met.

In the days that followed it became apparent that pedophilia at the Portland Foursquare Church was a bigger problem than Baker had thought. In the midst of Baker's trip to Mexico he received a phone call from an underling saying that they just couldn't wait any longer to report the abuse, so Baker acquiesced.

Detective Al Smith of the Portland Police Bureau was assigned to the case. When he took Milas in for questioning, Milas confessed to sexually molesting and sodomizing seven boys aged 4 to 8. Subsequently, Milas was charged with 35 counts of sodomy and sexual abuse. He pled guilty to 13 counts in exchange for the state dropping the remaining 22 counts against him. Milas has admitted to abusing two to three times that number of boys, but the police were unable to identify them. Milas was sentenced to 20 years and instructed to pay \$10,000 in restitution to four of the victims.

"I was the only parent at Ray's sentencing," said Lisa Smithey. "Ray was begging not to be sent to prison. I had tears in my eyes. I really felt that two other people should have been handcuffed and sent to prison with him: Pastor Al Hamilton and Pastor Tom Baker. When I was pregnant with my son and going to the Portland Foursquare Church, they knew about Ray. This never should have happened."

Smithey had been a member of the Portland Foursquare Church most of her life. After her son was born, she involved him in the church's activities. Smithey's son was one of Milas's victims. She filed a lawsuit against the Portland Foursquare Church in May 1991 holding the church and pastors Baker and Hamilton responsible for the abuse. After the story was published in *Just Out* and mentioned in Phil Stanford's column in *The Oregonian*, the Portland Foursquare Church settled the lawsuit out of court on Oct. 19, 1992, just hours before the trial was to begin.

Settling the lawsuit put an end to the two-year ordeal that Smithey had endured while suing the church. No amount of time will fully heal her young son from the effects of the abuse.

Smithey first realized that something was wrong when her son refused to go to the

babysitter's. At night he began wetting his bed and woke with nightmares. Smithey began to take her son to work with her, and finally she had to quit her job in order to stay at home with him.

"My life was a mess," remembered Smithey. "I had no money. I lost my house. I lost my car. Suing the Foursquare Church was the last thing I wanted to do, but it saved my life. I am a Christian, I believe in God and I wanted to do the right thing for my son."

Like the traditional dysfunctional family, the Portland Foursquare Church turned on Smithey when news of her lawsuit became known. Baker spoke from the pulpit about Smithey's lawsuit and encouraged prayer chains for her.

"Other church members said I was just out for the money," recalled Smithey. "It really hurt my feelings when members of the church accused me of being vindictive and said I was doing the devil's work." Pastor Baker spoke with Smithey a number of times during the course of the lawsuit and encouraged her to let the church counsel her son. He told her that her son was young and that "he'll get over it."

"I don't know how he can say my son is not affected by this," said Smithey. "He is still having nightmares. My son says when Ray gets out of prison he's going to take a rope and tie [Milas's] feet and watch him walk. My oldest son says he's going to kill Ray. My whole family is devastated by this."

I really felt that two other people should have been handcuffed and sent to prison with him [Ray Milas]: Al Hamilton and Tom Baker.

Lisa Smithey, mother of victim

Two years after Smithey's son was molested by Milas, the symptoms persist. On a routine visit to the doctor, her son, who is now 6 years old, became traumatized when the physician attempted to stick a tongue depressor in his mouth. He has nightmares about being raped, and people in his dreams are always out to get him. He asks his mom if someone is going to hurt his younger sister and "touch her private parts, too."

"This never should have happened. It never should have happened to any of the boys. I wasn't being vindictive by filing the lawsuit; I just wanted the truth to get out. And an apology," said a disillusioned Smithey. "I want other parents to know what may have happened to their kids. By settling out of court the truth isn't getting out and I still haven't gotten an apology. I wanted to go to court, but Jill encouraged me to take the settlement."

Jill Otey is Smithey's attorney. A former deputy district attorney, Otey dedicates herself to helping victims of child sexual abuse. She hopes to change people, to educate people and to rid society of the social ill of child abuse. Her current soapbox is making institutions aware of the Oregon Child Abuse Reporting Act.

"We have got to stop institutions from allowing abuse to happen within their own four walls," said an impassioned Otey. "That was what this case was about. That is where the Foursquare Church fell short."

The International Foursquare Church is the parent church of the Portland Foursquare Church. The church has no training programs to teach clergy, staff or volunteers how to recognize sexual abuse, nor do they have a program to teach clergy the statutory requirements in their states about reporting abuse to authorities.

"It is unbelievable that a pastor would not know about the Child Abuse Reporting Act," said Otey. "The statute is very comprehensive in explaining who is responsible to report abuse."

"Public and private individuals who are required to report include physicians, dentists, lawyers, school employees, nurses, human resource employees, juvenile department employees, police officers, clergy, psychologists, social workers, day care, foster care, chiropractors, naturopaths, youth group leaders and more. A person cannot be sued civilly for inaccurately making a report. The law errs on the side of children. And that is how it should be. This was totally ignored by the Portland Foursquare Church," said Otey.

"If Hamilton or Baker had reported the abuse when it first happened, not only would a number of those kids have been spared, but Ray could have had an opportunity for counseling and rehabilitation," said Otey. "Ray was an abused kid himself. Now you have this 26-year-old man sitting in prison for 20 years."

"What happened there never should have happened," Otey continued. "It was grossly negligent on the part of the Foursquare Church. Perhaps it was coincidental, but I saw this church harboring the Oregon Citizens Alliance. They rented rooms to them and supplied them with names and fostered their message, and yet, at the very exact same time, they were hiding pedophilia within their own four walls. They were trying to label people within our society as equivalent to pedophiles in our state constitution, yet they were hiding it and covering it up within the church."

When Phil Stanford wrote about the lawsuit in his column in *The Oregonian*, a reader wrote to chastise him for writing about this case in the midst of the battle over Ballot Measure 9. That response illustrates that people still don't understand that same-sex pedophilia is not homosexuality. Pedophilia is violence against children; it is abuse. Committing violence against children has nothing to do with a person's sexual orientation, yet the OCA and the Portland Foursquare Church fed the fires of hate surrounding Ballot Measure 9 with that misinformation. Some people who supported a "no" vote on Ballot Measure 9, like Stanford, still believe that same-sex pedophiles are also gay.

"Ray was a pedophile," said Otey. "He chose little boys, making him a same-sex pedophile, not a homosexual. He never had an adult relationship in his life with either a man or a woman."

It would seem prudent for the Foursquare Church to educate its members, clergy and children's services staff about the symptoms of child abuse (sexual, physical and emotional) and about the laws requiring the reporting of such abuse to the proper authorities. Baker admitted negligence in complying with the Oregon Child Abuse Reporting Act in his deposition with Otey. By doing so, he has risked losing his job. Pastors of the International Foursquare Church can have their ministerial standing revoked for "willful or negligent failure to comply with governmental regulations."

If we can make institutions more aware of the problem of abuse, maybe we can stop the tide of child abuse that is sweeping this nation.