



GATES
LAW FIRM
YOUR PERSONAL INJURY ATTORNEYS

December 8, 2023

VIA EMAIL

Immanuel Baptist Church
501 N. Shackelford Road
Little Rock, AR 72211

Re: Caring Well and Patrick Miller

Dear Church Family:

My name is Joseph Gates, and I represent one of the victims. She is a survivor of Patrick Miller's sexual abuse that he committed during his time as Assistant Director of Children's Ministry at Immanuel Baptist Church. The details below will be **graphic**. While I urge everyone to read, please understand that I will not sugarcoat the abuse; thus, I will use graphic and detailed language.

I write this letter, and it is addressed to the deacon body, the ministers, the finance team, the personnel team, and the Sunday School leaders. I write this letter to bring clarity to what has happened to the daughters of Immanuel, to question whether we are Caring Well for these daughters who are victims of Patrick Miller, to question whether Immanuel has repented for its sins of failing to protect our children and for failing to believe our children, and to ask whether we are being good Baptists in our response to this abuse.

For those who do not know me, I am married to Edith who actively serves in the Women's Ministry and the Preschool Ministry. [REDACTED], and we have been members of Immanuel Baptist Church for almost a decade. For the past two years, I have and still currently teach a Sunday School class. I have served in other areas of Immanuel including preschool ministry. We could not have more skin in the game of Immanuel protecting children as we are currently trusting Immanuel to protect [REDACTED] as we send them to classes at Immanuel.

I am also a trial lawyer who has represented survivors of sexual abuse when pastors have raped young people while elders, deacons, and other pastors stood idly by with knowledge of the abuse but did nothing in response. I have also represented families who have either suffered personal injuries or lost their loved ones due to negligence. I deal with trauma daily.

Because of my work representing survivors of sexual abuse, I offered to help Dr. Steven Smith in May 2022 after he addressed the Church regarding the failures at the Southern Baptist Convention (“SBC”) level concerning sexual abuse.¹ It is this public address in May 2022 that I urge Immanuel to review.

On May 24, 2022,² Dr. Smith declared to the Church body that Immanuel will:

- (1) “Stand with the abused to provide a church where people can heal and find shelter.”
- (2) “We have had, for many years, protocols in place that, by God’s grace, have proven effective in the prevention of abuse.”

As shown below, I submit that neither declaration is true.

My first charge to Immanuel is that for Immanuel to Care Well for victims, we must look backwards at the hurt and carnage already done to our children. To aid in looking backwards, here are the provable facts:

- (1) Patrick Miller served as Assistant Director of Children’s Ministry in 2015.
- (2) As Assistant Director, Patrick Miller had access to children, particularly young girls in the 3rd and 4th grade.
- (3) Patrick Miller routinely played “hide and seek” with these daughters of Immanuel.
- (4) While playing “hide and seek”, Patrick Miller would groom these girls by isolating them individually in locked and darkened rooms on Immanuel’s campus.
- (5) Patrick Miller played this game with multiple girls.
- (6) Patrick Miller’s intent in playing this game is to normalize these girls into thinking it was ok to be alone with a man who was not their father in locked and darkened rooms.
- (7) The number of girls who Patrick Miller played this game is currently unknown.
- (8) What is known that two brave girls, including my client, have come forward to detail what happened in these locked and darkened rooms on Immanuel’s campus.
- (9) One victim, [REDACTED], detailed that Patrick Miller used his hands to rub on her undeveloped breasts and then used his fingers to digitally penetrate her vagina after Sunday night services.
- (10) Another victim detailed that Patrick Miller used his hands to rub on her undeveloped breasts underneath her shirt (so skin to skin contact) when she was in [REDACTED].
- (11) This victim will tell you that the abuse happened so frequently that it became routine.

¹ Please see Exhibit 1.

² Please see Exhibit 2.

(12) This victim will tell you that Patrick Miller told her that the “hide and seek” game was “our little secret” (our meaning the victim’s and Patrick’s) and that she could not tell anyone else about it.

The abuse occurred at Immanuel by an employee of Immanuel. The abuse also occurred because Immanuel chose to ignore the threat of sexual abuse by failing to institute policies and procedures in 2014 that would have likely prevented the abuse.

Dr. Smith and Dr. Doug Pigg had knowledge of Patrick Miller’s actions as early as 2018. Before we can lay the abuse by Patrick Miller at the feet of others, Immanuel must recognize the sin in our camp, and like Joshua, root out Achan’s sin. Immanuel must publicly declare that Immanuel hired a pedophile who groomed, groped, molested, and abused the daughters of Immanuel.

Public declaration serves a dual purpose: (1) for the known and unknown victims, they can feel cared for when they see their Church stand up for them and (2) for the abusers in our midst, they will know that they will get caught because Immanuel will be a Church who will publicly out their abuse.

Immanuel failed to care for Victim 1 and is currently failing to care for Victim 2. Victim 1’s disclosure led to a public prosecution of Patrick Miller. Patrick Miller was initially charged with Class B Felony Sexual Assault in late 2018. Around the time the arrest warrant was issued, the family of Victim 1 went to leadership at Immanuel including Dr. Pigg to tell Immanuel that Patrick Miller was being arrested. During that meeting in 2018, the family of Victim 1 asked Immanuel to tell the parents of potentially affected girls. Immanuel chose not to tell the parents of potentially affected girls in 2018. As a result, no other victims of Patrick Miller came forward during the time of the public prosecution.

After 3+ years of the criminal prosecution and countless delays, Patrick Miller through his lawyer negotiated the Class B Felony Sexual Assault down to a Misdemeanor Harassment charge. Harassment is saying mean things on Facebook. Harassment is NOT sticking your fingers inside young girls. Nevertheless, the criminal justice system allowed the plea deal to go through.

The glaring consequences of that plea deal are threefold: (1) Patrick Miller served no jail time, nor did he pay any court costs/fines; (2) Patrick Miller does not have to register as a sex offender; and (3) Arkansas public policy dictates that misdemeanors are to be sealed UNLESS there is clear and convincing evidence as to why the record should NOT be sealed. In July 2023, Patrick Miller filed a Petition to Seal his records. I learned of Patrick Miller on October 26, 2023, and I immediately checked CourtConnect.

On November 2, 2023, the State filed a pleading that said it did NOT object to Patrick Miller sealing his record. On or about November 3, 2023, I randomly checked CourtConnect again and saw the no objection pleading by the State, which I knew meant that Patrick Miller would have his record sealed.

Spurred to action, I was able to get permission from Victim 1 and Victim 2 to file an objection to Patrick Miller's request. I called the Prosecutor's office and the Judge's Law Clerk begging them to slow down as I will file an objection. Thankfully, they heard my call. The Judge's Law Clerk told me on November 6, 2023, that she had printed an agreed order to seal Patrick Miller's record. I filed my formal objection on November 9, 2023.³

The Judge set a hearing yesterday, December 7, 2023, to review the Petition to Seal. Unfortunately, the Judge had a migraine and excused herself before the hearing started so the Judge's assistant reset it to a date in February 2024. Therefore, Patrick Miller's Petition to Seal is still pending. Before the hearing, I invited Dr. Smith, Dr. Pigg, and Melissa Weddle to attend the hearing to show their support to the victims.

Patrick Miller was at the hearing. I was there along with Victim 2 and her mother and others including [REDACTED]

These stories are relevant because Immanuel has consistently shown a pattern of not Caring Well for her daughters. Victim 2 who met with Dr. Smith and Dr. Pigg in the summer of 2022 after making her first disclosure was met with disbelief despite both having knowledge of what Patrick Miller did to Victim 1.

So how has Immanuel "[stood] with the abused to provide a church where people can heal and find shelter"? I submit that Immanuel has completely failed Victim 1. As she has not given me permission to use her name (even though she gave me permission to file the objection), I will respect her right to privacy. Victim 1 suffered abuse by Patrick Miller, by the criminal justice system, and by Immanuel as she had to walk alone.

Further, what "protocols [were] in place that, by God's grace, have proven effective in the prevention of abuse"? As shown above, abuse was not prevented, and there were no protocols until a week or so ago which won't go into "effect" until January 2024.

"Reconciliation isn't possible without confession and repentance."⁴

I pray Psalm 139:23-24 over Immanuel: "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting!"

I pray Psalm 82:3-4 over Immanuel: "Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

³ Please see Exhibit 3.

⁴ "A Church Called Tov" page 151.

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I pray for you leaders of our Church to rid the sin in our camp by publicly disclosing what happened and seek repentance and forgiveness from our daughters who were abused on our hallowed grounds by a man who Immanuel failed to protect our daughters from. This is your moment.

Leaders of our Church, choose whom you will serve. Will you serve the old guard of handling things in the backroom while effectively doing nothing to prevent abuse or will you choose repentance and confession by publicly disclosing what happened? Will you beg the forgiveness from Immanuel's daughters?

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,
Gates Law Firm, PLLC



Joseph Gates
Attorney at Law

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