

Home-Schooling Leader Bill Gothard Resigns Amid Abuse Allegations

Bill Gothard, an Illinois-based advocate for home schooling and conservative dress who warned against rock music and debt, has resigned from the ministry he founded after allegations of sexually harassing women who worked at his ministry and failing to report child abuse cases.

Gothard's resignation from the Institute in Basic Life Principles, according to a letter sent to families affiliated with the ministry he founded, comes a week after he was put on administrative leave. According to an organizer involved in the whistle-blowing website Recovering Grace, 34 women told the website they had been sexually harassed; four women alleged molestation.

RNS spoke with several women who alleged they were sexual harassed, including one woman who alleged that Gothard molested her when she was 17.

Gothard is 79 and single.

Gothard told the Board of Directors he wanted to follow the New Testament command to listen to those who made accusations against him, according to an email sent from David Waller, administrative director of the Advanced Training Institute to families involved in the ministry.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus directs his followers to "go and be reconciled" if "your brother or sister has something against you."

"To give his full attention to this objective, Mr. Gothard has resigned as president of the Institutes in Basic Life

Principles, its Board of Directors, and its affiliated entities," Waller's email said.

Waller said the two institutes will continue under interim leadership, including upcoming conferences in Nashville and Sacramento under ATI president Chris Hogan.

Gothard's ministry had been a popular gathering spot for thousands of Christian families, including the Duggar family from TLC's "19 Kids and Counting." Gothard's Advanced Training Institute conferences were also popular among families within the Quiverfull movement, who eschew birth control and promote big families.

Gothard has also rubbed shoulders with Republican leaders. He and former presidential candidate Mike Huckabee were photographed at a campaign lunch together; former Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue spoke at one of Gothard's conferences; and Sarah Palin, when she was a small town mayor in Alaska, attended his International Association of Character Cities conferences declaring Wasilla among Gothard's "Cities of Character."

The allegations against Gothard dovetail with financial woes. In recent years, IBLP's net revenue has dropped significantly, and the ministry is losing money. Between 2009 and 2012, it lost \$8.6 million. Its net assets dropped from \$92 million in 2010 to \$81 million in 2012. It held 504 seminars in 2010, but that number dropped to fewer than 50 in 2012.