

Publisher Pulls Megachurch Pastor's Book After Assault Allegations

Bethany House pulled Andy Savage's latest book after he confessed a sexual incident with a girl who was in his youth group.

*Bethany House and Baker Publishing Group have cancelled publication of the Andy Savage book *The Ridiculously Good Marriage*.*

It may remain on various retail web sites for a short time until those sites update.

– Bethany House (@bethany_house) Jan. 8, 2018

Jules Woodson says Savage, a pastor at the Highpoint megachurch in Memphis, assaulted her when he was her youth pastor more than 20 years ago. Following the #MeToo movement, Woodson felt compelled to confront her attacker. He discussed the "sexual incident" over the weekend, including asking for forgiveness during a Sunday-morning sermon.

"I just hope that by me coming forward that I would give courage to one other person," Woodson tells *The New York Times*. "It doesn't matter if I was his only victim. What matters is that this was a big problem and continues to go on."

The *Times* reports Larry Cotton, an associate pastor of the church, The Woodlands Parkway Baptist Church, urged Woodson to stay quiet when she told him what had happened. Instead of telling her to inform the authorities, he told her that the church would address the episode internally.

Cotton, who is now on staff at The Austin Stone Community Church, was placed on leave after Woodson's allegations broke.

"In light of the seriousness of these accusations against Larry Cotton, we feel that due diligence is appropriate to ensure Larry's qualification for his current role of leadership. In order to remove our potential bias from the situation, we have placed Larry on a leave of absence while an investigation by a third-party organization is undertaken. We will provide a full report to the church after its completion," says John Yeng, director of communications with The Austin Stone Community Church.

After the incident, Savage left the Woodlands Parkway Baptist Church, and returned to Memphis. He was later hired on staff at Highpoint, where he gave the following statement:

As a college student on staff at a church in Texas more than 20 years ago, I regretfully had a sexual incident with a female high school senior in the church. I apologized and sought forgiveness from her, her parents, her discipleship group, the church staff and the church leadership, who informed the congregation. In agreement with wise counsel, I took every step to respond in a biblical way.

I resigned from ministry and moved back home to Memphis. I accepted full responsibility for my actions. I was and remain very remorseful for the incident and deeply regret the pain I caused her and her family, as well as the pain I caused the church and God's Kingdom.

There has never been another situation remotely similar in my life before or after that occurrence. The incident happened before Amanda and I were engaged, and I shared every aspect of this situation with her before I asked her to marry me. I further disclosed this incident to Chris Conlee before coming on staff at Highpoint and have shared with key leaders throughout my tenure.

This incident was dealt with in Texas 20 years ago, but in the last few days has been presented to a wider audience. I was wrong and I accepted responsibility for my actions. I was sorry then and remain so today. Again, I sincerely ask for forgiveness from her and pray for God's continued healing for everyone involved.

A petition calling for Savage's resignation has garnered more than 1500 signatures this week.