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SOCIAL ISSUES

## Minister sentenced for child sex abuse

While an Alabama Baptist church endures an abuse scandal, another in Mississippi accused in the past of harboring a predator will host a conference aimed at prevention.

By Bob Allen

A former children's minister at an Alabama Baptist church was sentenced to 30 years in prison after pleading guilty to child sex abuse March 7.



Jeff Eddie

Jeffrey Dale Eddie, 41, longtime associate pastor for children and church administration at Highland Park Baptist Church in Muscle Shoals, Ala., entered pleas to 16 counts of sodomy, three counts of sexual abuse of a child under the age of 12 and one count of child pornography.

According to the *Huntsville Times*, prosecutors offered a plea bargain after talking with parents of victims.

"The main reason was to keep any of these children from having to testify and being named in the indictments," said Colbert County District Attorney Bryce Graham. "Every victim and every parent is in agreement with this or we wouldn't have done it. I hope this brings closure to these people and they can get back on with their lives."

Eddie, arrested Feb. 4, had worked at Highland Park Baptist since 1998. Members called him "Brother Jeff." He was originally taken into custody for child pornography found on his church-owned computer when the pastor investigated a report of him behaving suspiciously with a child.

Graham said the counts of sexual abuse all involve one child, but numerous children came forward claiming they were also abused by Eddie. He declined to give the exact number but said it was "in the double digits."

During initial questioning by police, Eddie reportedly said he abused so many members of his children's ministry that he could not remember the number.

The Highland Park Baptist website listed [resources](#) for helping parents talk to children about sexual abuse.

Meanwhile, another Baptist church in Mississippi that for years employed a music minister now convicted as a child sex molester planned a workshop for church leaders, employees and volunteers to prevent sexual abuse of children.

[Morrison Heights Baptist Church](#) in Clinton, Miss., is host site for an April 29 [conference](#) sponsored by [Baptist Children's Village](#) and the [Christian Action Commission](#) of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

The church made [news](#) in 2011 when video on its website captured John Langworthy's confession of "sexual indiscretions with younger males" more than two decades ago.

Langworthy, the church's long-time associate pastor of music and ministries, later was charged with sexually abusing boys he met through churches during his student years at Mississippi College in the 1980s.

Langworthy [pleaded](#) guilty in January 2013 to five felony counts of gratification of lust but avoided prison in a plea bargain offered in part because prosecutors were unsure how a statute of limitations might apply to his case.

Prior to coming to Morrison Heights, Langworthy was fired at Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas for inappropriate



John  
Langworthy