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2-28-2023

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NEWS

OUACHITA NEWS

Ouachita to host Keeping Faith conference March 28-29

By Addie Woods and Anna Roussel

February 28, 2023

For more information, contact Ouachita's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. — Ouachita Baptist University's community & family services program in the Pruet School of Christian Studies and the Title IX department will host a conference titled "Keeping Faith" to help faith-based communities learn how to recognize and respond to all forms of child abuse. The two-day training will be held March 28-29 in Walker Conference Center. Admission is \$15; Ouachita students and staff will be admitted free.

Christa Neal, Title IX coordinator and program advisor for community & family services at Ouachita, organized the "Keeping Faith" Conference. The speaker is Victor Vieth, chief program officer of the Zero Abuse Project and founder of the National Child Protection Center.



Photo 1 Victor Vieth

Neal worked closely with Vieth during her time at the Percy and Donna Malone Child Safety Center in Arkadelphia, which she formerly served as director. Vieth is a theologian and former prosecuting attorney who now focuses on training faith communities and professionals on how to respond to child abuse.

"Victor's belief is that we have to alter our views on God's perception of victimization," said Neal. "He has created this course called Keeping Faith that outlines how often abuse happens within faith

communities, how faith communities can be trained and establish policies and how we can have a response that is focused on helping victims heal and preventing abuse from happening in the first place.”

There are several sessions covering topics related to the spiritual, emotional and physical impact of abuse, as well as helpful response to abuse. The sessions offer interactive segments in which attendees will be presented with a sexual abuse case within a church or congregation and work through how to respond with resources and preventive measures.

“I’ve recently become more involved with the Arkansas Baptist State Convention’s response to sexual abuse, and that was a motivation to ask for Victor’s help in this area,” said Neal. “Our campus, but especially church leaders and anyone else in the community who cares about the safety of kids, will come away more informed and better equipped.”

Dr. Jeremy Greer, associate professor of Biblical studies and dean of the Pruet School at Ouachita, said, “The Lord has left his followers in the world to embody the values of the kingdom of God, to be a visible representation on earth of God’s kingdom and of his will being done as it is in heaven. Among his people, then, there should be no victimization and there should be solace for the brokenhearted. This conference will help us bring those kingdom values into our world.”

Neal recognizes how abuse can impact a children’s spirituality. She reiterated the importance of conferences like this because faith communities aren’t immune to these issues. Whether it be a faith-based university, a church or a congregation, policies must be put in place to prevent abuse.

“Not everyone is going to be part of policy-making in church bodies, but people need to understand that this can happen to children in church or outside of church walls,” she said. “The more aware we are of the problem and the more honest we are with ourselves, the safer and more supportive our churches will be.”

To register or learn more about the “Keeping Faith” Conference, visit obu.edu/keepingfaith or email nealc@obu.edu.