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News

Tim Huber | Anabaptist World

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Former MB leader's credential revoked

U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches

Former district conference leader Gary Wall's ordination and credential were revoked by the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches this fall after he withdrew from a restoration process that he initiated.

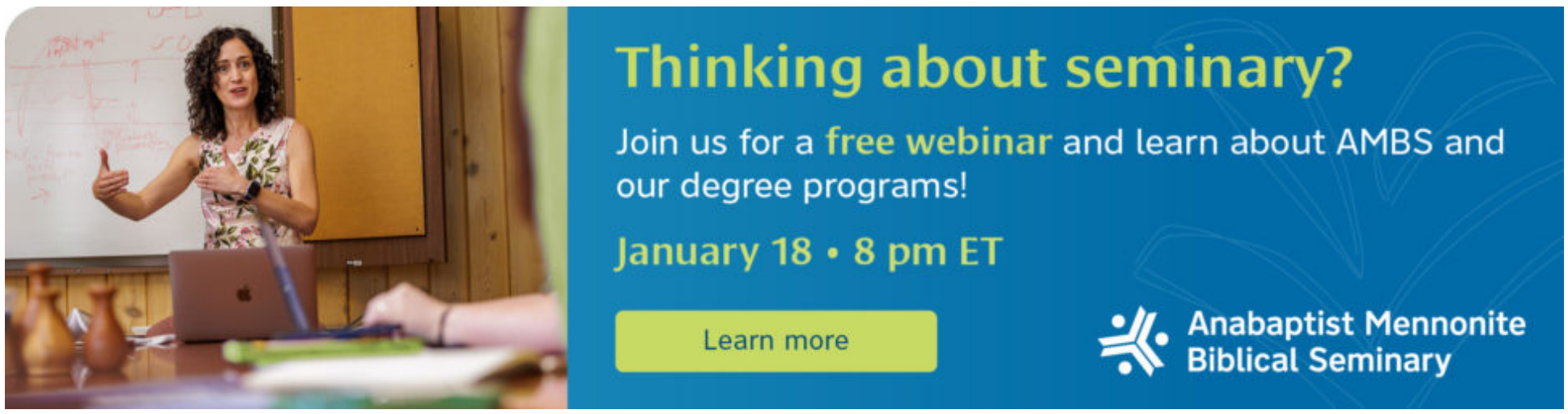
Wall was charged in 2019 with engaging in prostitution in Fresno, Calif., while he was Pacific District Conference minister. He withdrew a plea of no contest the following year, and the case was dismissed based on a plea agreement. He has maintained his innocence and requested a restoration process in 2021, but he withdrew when a third-party law firm was engaged to conduct an investigation that included the 2019 police report.

A restoration team made up of PDC and USMB representatives shared about its work Nov. 29 at North Fresno Church in California and on Zoom. The only previous report on Wall and the restoration process came in a one-hour "family discussion" with representatives of USMB's Board of Faith and Life during afternoon free time at USMB's national assembly July 26-30 in Independence, Mo.

At the Nov. 29 meeting, former PDC moderator and restoration team member Pat Coyle offered a timeline of events surrounding Wall before fielding questions.

He said the PDC Executive Board made missteps.

"Representing the board, I apologize, and we didn't lead like we could have and should have, and a lot of that is we simply were not prepared," Coyle said. ". . . If you don't have a plan, it can be very confusing, and you can get tugged in several directions."



Four years before Wall was detained by Fresno law enforcement, the USMB Board of Faith and Life created a resource manual to offer "guidelines and procedures that address sexual misconduct for any and all licensed and/or ordained pastors." The 28-page document was created with input from Fresno Pacific University faculty and updated in 2017.

After the November meeting, current PDC district minister Jordan Ringhofer said the resource was not an adopted policy for the district in 2019, and it was possible some in district leadership didn't know it existed at that time. The PDC Executive Board and Board of Faith of Life put a policy in place in late 2020 or early 2021 based on the resource for responding to a sexual misconduct or abuse allegation involving a PDC employee.

The restoration team had recommended that Wall's ordination and credential be rescinded and that his ministry status be updated to indicate he is "not suited to serve in a district, national or international role in the Mennonite Brethren denomination unless and until he chooses to re-engage in a satisfactory reconciliation process with denominational leadership."

Wall had voluntarily returned the ordination and credentials pending restoration, and PDC and USMB leaders revoked them during meetings in September and October.

Coyle was asked during the meeting about interaction concerning the status of Wall's credentials with the Presbyterian church in Las Vegas that is currently employing Wall as a men's minister.

"There's been no official communication from the restoration team, conference leaders or USMB leaders," he answered.

As she concluded the meeting with prayer, restoration team member Dina González-Piña affirmed the importance of having women involved in the process. She knows many women who do not want to be the lone female in a group because of tokenism, but will serve if there are more than one.

"That there were three of the five [restoration team members] being women was really helpful in working toward restoration," González-Piña said.

TIM HUBER

Tim Huber is associate editor at Anabaptist World. He worked at Mennonite World Review since 2011. A graduate of Tabor College, Read More

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