

Ashlyn Kennedy

The Rev. Dr. Kerry Burkley presented a talk on the Child Advocacy Center for journalism students at Baylor on Wednesday evening. He spoke about his work with the organization as the associate director and his convocational ministry through also being a pastor at Greater Ebenezer Church of Waco.

Burkley, a Baylor alum, holds the Doctor of Ministry and the Master of Divinity degrees. He is a trained professional forensic interviewer through the Child Advocacy Centers of Texas.

Burkley discussed the roots of the Child Advocacy Center, which centers around speaking out for the best interest of children, especially in regard to sexual and physical abuse. He said that the organization began through the lack of support and logistics for those who worked in the investigative field and in social work, which often led to missing, revictimized, or even murdered children.

"Children were not protected in the United States until 1974," Burkley said. "Pets had more protection than children in this country before 1974."

Burkley credited former U.S. Representative Robert E. Cramer with starting the movement of protecting abused children so that "children don't fall through the cracks." Burkley said Cramer identified the lack of communication between social and criminal justice services in cases of abused children, and this led to the creation of the Child Advocacy Centers.

Burkley touched on his role as a forensic interviewer, where he works with children who have made allegations of abuse. Burkley said that he and his team are the ones who end up talking to the children and elicit any details that the child may disclose so they can pass it on to law enforcement and the CPS.

"It's a pivotal role in getting the law enforcement to do their investigation," Burkley said. "But at the same time, it's important to make sure that child has a space to tell their story."

Another topic Burkley focused on was how his faith contributed to his role at the Child Advocacy Center. He said it felt awkward to work at a place that was federally funded, as he was not supposed to talk about faith, which felt opposed to his being able to talk freely about it at church and in his sermons. But he considers his two jobs to be a convocational ministry, meaning that he doesn't just see himself as an associate director, he sees himself as a pastor in that role.

"Every bit of who I am in that role is to represent Jesus and God," Burkley said. "I'm very much Pastor Burkley in the midst of a child abuse investigation, when people come into my office who are struggling with something that went down on a case, when I see that child that I'm meeting for the first time who is there to talk about some hard to talk about stuff."

Professor Robert Darden, who teaches journalism, said that while faith is not necessary to be great at one's job, he likes the idea of having someone of faith in a role like Burkley's at the Child Advocacy Center.

"In Rev. Dr. Burkley's case, I think [his faith] brings an added bonus dimension to his work with children," Darden said.