

Earl Paulk Denies Sex-Abuse Charges

A lawsuit filed in April reopened old allegations about misconduct at Paulk's Atlanta church

In the wake of a civil law-suit accusing Bishop Earl Paulk with sexual misconduct, another Atlanta-area minister is calling for a body of national leaders to investigate numerous allegations of sexual immorality at the church Paulk pastors, the Cathedral at Chapel Hill in Decatur, Ga.

The lawsuit, filed in April, alleges that Paulk molested Jessica Battle when she was a child. She claims Paulk performed sexual acts on her between the ages of 7 and 11 and again when she was 17. Battle, a 22-year-old college student in Jacksonville, Fla., is the daughter of church member Patty Battle and granddaughter of Lynn Mays, a Cathedral pastor.

"I believe Earl Paulk is a wolf in sheep's clothing," said Johnny Enlow, 41, a former leader at Paulk's church who now pastors Refuge to the Nations Church in Loganville, Ga. Enlow was a deacon at Paulk's church and led the singles and couples ministries there until he and his wife, Elizabeth, left in 1992.

Barry Smith, a former children's pastor at the Cathedral who also left in 1992, said he was full of "anger and disgust" when he learned of Battle's charges.

"No one wanted to believe it. We knew it was a sick situation, but we hoped it wasn't that bad. It just broke my heart," the 40-year-old businessman told Charisma. When Smith left the

church, a Paulk relative who attended the church told Smith and others about alleged sexual misconduct among church leaders, Smith said.

Paulk declined to speak with Charisma and has declined comment on two other occasions in the last eight years. His spokesman, David Brokaw, said the Battle lawsuit is without merit, noting that Paulk wants a “speedy resolution” to the matter. “He’d just as soon get this over with as soon as possible,” Brokaw said.

The Sunday after the lawsuit was filed, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported that the 73-year-old Paulk told his congregation: “All accusations you have been hearing are absolutely untrue, and it will be proven so.” He also said he had received calls of support from Atlanta’s mayor, Bill Campbell, and from several prominent charismatic Christian leaders.

Enlow wants to convene a panel of the leaders Paulk named along with two of his own choosing—Los Angeles pastor Jack Hayford and North Carolina-based author Rick Joyner. Enlow said the evidence would stay within that panel and not go to the public.

Said Enlow: “Then they could make a judgment. If Earl Paulk is truly innocent, and these are just false charges going on and on and on, then this would be his opportunity to clear his name.” Enlow said he could bring in former members of Paulk’s church—some of whom are now pastoring elsewhere—as well as several women who have complained about sexual harassment they encountered during counseling sessions with Cathedral staff members in the early 1990s.

However, Hayford told Charisma that his schedule would not allow him to be involved in such a forum.

Brokaw said Paulk has “full confidence” in the judicial system and would rather resolve the case there instead of through a panel of church leaders.

Enlow, Smith and others claim that Cathedral leaders pervert the Scriptures to give biblical justification for what they call “kingdom relationships,” a term Paulk allegedly invented to describe church-sanctioned sexual relationships outside of marriage.

In 1993 Charisma reported that Paulk’s former ghostwriter, Tricia Weeks, claimed she had an affair with Paulk for more than a year. Weeks also claimed at that time that Lynn Mays used her position to encourage women to have sexual relationships with church leaders.

Raised in the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), Paulk pastored Hemphill Church of God in Atlanta in 1960 when he was accused of having an extramarital affair and left his denomination. He returned to Atlanta a few years later and founded what eventually became known as Chapel Hill Harvester Church. It was renamed the Cathedral at Chapel Hill after the congregation built an expansive neo-Gothic worship center.

In 1991, President George H.W. Bush named the Cathedral a “point of light,” commending the church for its social work. In 2000, the Georgia senate recognized Paulk for his “extraordinary work for God and his community.” The racially diverse church has an extensive local outreach.

The church became mired in scandal in 1992 when Paulk's brother, Don, admitted to an affair with a woman in the church. That same year seven women went public with accusations that they had been sexually harassed by Cathedral leaders.

When asked about the many allegations through the years, Brokaw told Charisma that Paulk has never been unfaithful to his wife, Norma, and all allegations involving him were "without merit." However, in a 1992 interview with the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Paulk admitted to the 1960 affair.

Smith believes Paulk must be held accountable. "If the body of Christ doesn't do something about it, he'll just keep on going," Smith said. "He's not accountable to anyone."

But Brokaw said Paulk is accountable—to the church's presbytery and its by-laws. "Ultimately there's accountability to the parishioners who can vote with their feet," he said. "That's always paramount in everybody's mind."

Enlow said he wishes no harm personally to Paulk or other Cathedral leaders but believes the time is past due for radical changes in a church that has "many good people but whose inner circle is bound by demonic strongholds."

Added Enlow: "I don't wish to see [Paulk] in jail, and I really don't want him to go to hell. I wish to see him repent and help lead those around him in repentance."

In her lawsuit, Jessica Battle is seeking unspecified monetary damages and is calling for a jury trial.