

Earl Paulk Dies After Long Cancer Battle

✖ **March 30, 2009** – Former Atlanta megachurch pastor Earl Paulk Jr., who helped popularize “kingdom now” theology but was plagued for decades by sexual scandal, died early Sunday morning after a lengthy battle with cancer. He was 81.

Paulk, founder of what is now known as the Cathedral at Chapel Hill, was taken to an Atlanta hospital on Jan. 1 with an intestinal blockage and was never released, his brother, Don Paulk, told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on Sunday. He had previously undergone surgery for prostate cancer.

Through his books and television ministry, Paulk helped promote “kingdom now” theology, which teaches that the church, as a manifestation of God’s kingdom, must take dominion of every sector of society. But through the years numerous women alleged that Paulk coerced them to have sex with him, saying he told them certain “kingdom relationships” were not limited to traditional moral boundaries.

Although he repeatedly denied the allegations, DNA testing proved in 2007 that Paulk lied about past infidelity and was the father of his nephew, D.E. Paulk, who now leads the 1,000-member congregation.

“For whatever good he may have done, my uncle had a serious problem with sexual addiction, and never owned it, and never really took any responsibility for it,” Paulk’s nephew, Bishop Jim Swilley, pastor of Church in the Now in Conyers, Ga., said in a blog posting Sunday. “He died in disgrace, and, unfortunately, will for the most part only be remembered for the scandals.”

A third-generation minister, Earl Pearly Paulk Jr. began

preaching at age 17 in his father's Pentecostal church in Greenville, S.C. He earned a bachelor's degree from Furman University and graduated from Emory University's Candler School of Theology in 1952.

He later became pastor of Hemphill Church of God in Atlanta—now Mount Paran Church of God—but left in 1960 after having had an affair. He and his brother, Don Paulk, then left the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) and founded Gospel Harvester Church in Atlanta, later called Chapel Hill Harvester, then Cathedral of the Holy Spirit and now the Cathedral at Chapel Hill.

Once known for its racial diversity, creative arts programs and massive, neo-Gothic sanctuary, the Cathedral drew more than 10,000 members in the 1980s and 1990s. During that time, the church's public housing ministry was named one of President George H.W. Bush's thousand points of light.

But membership began to decline as accusations of sexual misconduct mounted against Paulk and other Cathedral leaders. In 1992 a church member went public with claims that she was pressured into having a sexual relationship with Don Paulk, who served as senior pastor. He admitted to an affair and resigned but was reinstated three weeks later.

The same year, several women alleged that a church staff member sexually harassed them during counseling sessions. Another female staff member claimed in 1993 that she had a sexual relationship with Earl Paulk.

In 2001, another former member filed a lawsuit claiming the bishop sexually molested her when she was a child and later when she was a teenager. That suit was settled out of court in 2003.

Last year, a judge dismissed a lawsuit filed by Mona Brewer and her husband, Bobby, alleging that Paulk coerced Mona Brewer into a 14-year affair. The couple and their attorney

were ordered to pay more than \$1 million in legal fees. But in February, a Georgia appeals court struck down that order and called for new hearings to be held regarding the fees, the *Journal-Constitution* reported.

The Brewers' case sparked a chain of events that led to Paulk's pleading guilty to lying under oath about having affairs with other women. He was fined \$1,000 and put on probation for 10 years.

Bishop David Huskins, leader of the International Communion of Charismatic Churches, which Paulk founded in 1982, asked Paulk to resign from the organization after the Brewers' claims became public. But Huskins said on Sunday that despite his failings, Paulk has left a positive impact on countless lives.

"All I know is at a moment in time that only sovereign God could have orchestrated He brought this man to the planet and in that same amazing way brought me into his life and him into mine," Huskins said in a statement. "So much of who I am and ever will be is in part due to Earl Paulk."

In recent years, current pastor D.E. Paulk has moved to make the church "radically inclusive." He has advocated for gay rights and is an associate of the controversial preacher Carlton Pearson, who teaches that all people, not just Christians, are born again.

With dwindling membership, the 6,000-seat facility was put up for sale last fall for \$24.5 million.

D.E. Paulk said the Cathedral congregation is praying "for peace and closure for all who have been connected in any way to [Earl Paulk's] life and ministry."

In addition to his brother, Paulk is survived by his wife, Norma; two daughters, Susan Joy Owens and Roma Beth Bonner; eight grandchildren and several great-grandchildren.

Huskins said a viewing will be held at the Cathedral on Friday from noon until 9 p.m., followed by a memorial service on Saturday at 2 p.m. He said Paulk's body will be cremated and his ashes scattered around the Cathedral in a private family ceremony to be held at a later date.