

Earl Paulk Lawsuit Settled

A lawsuit claiming that Bishop Earl Paulk sexually molested a woman when she was a minor has been settled out of court. A brief statement from Paulk's Atlanta-area church, the Cathedral at Chapel Hill, announced that the case, filed in April 2001 in state circuit court in DeKalb County, was settled on Jan. 16.

The suit was filed by former church member Jessica Battle, 23, who had alleged that Paulk, 75, sexually molested her when she was between the ages of 7 and 11, and again at age 17. Neither Paulk nor Battle, nor their attorneys, would comment on the settlement.

Battle's claims are the last in a series of allegations of sexual misconduct at the Cathedral, located in the Atlanta suburb of Decatur. Ten years ago, at least 13 women claimed they were victims of sexual misconduct there, according to media reports and notarized letters.

* In November 1992, a former teacher at the Cathedral alleged that a church leader manipulated her into sex, saying she was told the relationship "would be good for the church."

* In December 1992, five women held a news conference claiming that church leaders excused sexual sin because "'kingdom' relationships between mature Christians are not bound by earthly interpretations of morality and marriage."

* In 1993, a former Paulk ghostwriter claimed she had an affair with him for more than a year.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported that in 1960 Paulk admitted to having had an affair that led to his leaving the pastorate of Mount Paran Church of God in Atlanta to go to Arizona.

Paulk remains a popular speaker at many conferences and hosts a regular TV show on Trinity Broadcasting Network. With 25,000 members, his church is one of the largest in the city. Though Paulk remains the church's senior pastor, his nephew Donnie Earl Paulk has been more visible in the pulpit in recent months.

Former Cathedral pastor Barry Smith, who left the church in 1992, told Charisma that there is a gross lack of accountability at the church. "It doesn't appear that any action from God or the church has taken place," he said.

Through the years, Paulk has repeatedly denied the allegations. The racially diverse church has extensive community outreach programs and was named a "point of light" in 1991 by then President George Bush.

Richard Daigle in Atlanta