

Lawsuit Against Paulk Triggers Resignation

The founder of Atlanta's Cathedral of the Holy Spirit has stepped down from leading international network

Bishop Earl Paulk Jr. resigned from his position as archbishop of the International Communion of Charismatic Churches (ICCC) after leaders of the Georgia-based organization asked him to step down in October. When ICCC leaders met again a month later they elected a new leader and voted to cut all ties with Paulk.

The abrupt move came on the heels of a lawsuit filed against Paulk in August. In the suit, former parishioner Mona Brewer alleged that Paulk, pastor of Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Atlanta, coerced her to have sex with him and others-including visiting charismatic preachers.

Brewer and her husband, Bobby, with whom she filed the suit, served on the staff of the cathedral. She claims that around 1989 Paulk began requiring her to have sex with him, "other members of the church community [and] leaders of other churches as well as his family members, sometimes with other individuals observing the sexual acts," the lawsuit said.

Brewer admits that she should not have consented to the alleged demands, but she said Paulk manipulated her into thinking her salvation depended on her engaging in the sex acts. Paulk has denied the accusations repeatedly, and he countersued the Brewers shortly after the lawsuit was filed. He later retracted the litigation.

Accusations of sexual misconduct have hounded Paulk since he was accused of committing adultery in 1960. In 1992 a church member went public with claims that she was pressured into having a sexual relationship with Paulk's brother, 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 Jr.

In 2001, a female church 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.

The cathedral-known for its racial diversity, creative arts programs and massive, neo-Gothic sanctuary-continued its ministry, although in 1992 membership dropped by half, from 12,000 to 6,000. Paulk denied wrongdoing and refused to grant media interviews, but he continued to oversee the ICCC, which he had led since 1982.

Previously, most area pastors kept quiet about the scandal, and national Christian leaders didn't get involved in what they viewed as a local problem. No church court investigated the charges, largely because Paulk's ministry has been independent of denominational accountability since he left the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) more than 40 years ago.

But new ICCC presiding bishop David Huskins, 39, says the days of loose accountability in his organization are over. "What

the charismatic world needs today is someone to take responsibility," Huskins told Charisma.

Huskins could not comment on specific allegations of sexual misconduct by Paulk or other cathedral staff members. But he said the ICCC has tightened its bylaws and released a strongly worded statement that holds its members to high standards of morality and theological integrity.

"We do not condone beliefs that allow for immorality or sexual impurity," Huskins said. ICCC leaders also made it clear in their Nov. 17 meeting that Carlton Pearson, the prominent Pentecostal bishop who recently became an avowed Universalist, is no longer affiliated with the ICCC.

The ICCC elected Margaret Idahosa, widow of Nigerian church leader Benson Idahosa, as vice president. She was so adamant about breaking ties with Paulk, Huskins said, that she threatened to pull all her African churches out of Paulk's network if the group did not take a strong stand against him.

The ICCC works in 29 countries and represents hundreds of congregations. Paulk served as archbishop of the group, but ICCC leaders voted in November to discontinue the use of that title.

"We do not find that term to be scriptural," said Huskins, who will use the less authoritarian title of presiding bishop.

In early November, a group of Atlanta-area pastors issued a statement of apology for alleged abuses of power at Paulk's church. Bradley White, 49, pastor of City Harvest Worship Center, and Johnny Enlow, 46, pastor of Daystar International

Christian Fellowship, are two of the ministers rallying Atlanta pastors around the statement. Posted on the Internet at , it apologizes to women who were “betrayed, victimized, abused and wounded by sexually inappropriate actions.”

Enlow said he speaks for a growing number of pastors who are signing the statement. “Christian leaders who see unrighteousness done in the name of Christ simply cannot sit back and say nothing,” he said.

Huskins admits that the ICCC or some other church body should have looked into the charges against Paulk and the cathedral years ago when accusations first surfaced. Now, he says, “it certainly will be played out in the legal system.”

The Brewers’ lawsuit is currently moving forward in Dekalb County Superior Court, and dozens of witnesses are going through a deposition process. Bobby Brewer told Charisma in October that he and his wife filed the suit “to give victims a voice.”

Among the dozens of people required to appear in court for depositions in the case are two of Paulk’s daughters, Beth Bonner and Joy Owens, and numerous other Paulk family members.

At the same time relatives were being deposed for the trial, Paulk, 78, was battling cancer. He was admitted to an Atlanta-area hospital for surgery to remove his bladder and prostate along with part of his colon.

Huskins said he viewed Paulk as a spiritual father for many years and now must face a wide range of emotions. “I’m angry. I’m grieving. I’m challenged by my own lack of discernment,” he said. “But it is time for new leadership.”

Acknowledging a “dangerous trend of independence in the charismatic movement,” the new ICCC leader believes Spirit-filled churches must be more intentional about confronting unbiblical behavior in its leaders. Huskins added: “We have no choice but to deal with sin in our midst.”

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