

Updated: Man Allegedly Injured After Being "Slain" in the Spirit™ Sues Church

Matthew Lincoln is seeking \$2.5 million from the charismatic congregation because he claims altar workers failed to catch him.



[] A man is suing his former Knoxville, Tenn., church and its pastors for negligence, claiming he was severely and permanently injured when church "catchers" failed to assist him during a prayer service last year.

In a \$2.5 million civil action filed last week, Matthew Lincoln, a 58-year-old recording engineer, accused Lakewind Church pastors Michael and Monique Sexton of not properly "supervising the catchers." Both the church and the pastors are named in the lawsuit.

Lincoln, who had been a member of Lakewind since 1995, claims in the suit that in his many years attending the nondenominational church, he was always "caught" if he "fell out in the spirit" because altar workers were customarily in place during prayer ministry. According to the complaint, Lakewind Church typically positions altar workers behind parishioners who receive prayer to catch them in the event that they experience "dizzying, fainting or falling in the spirit."

But during a service on June 6, 2007, Lincoln said visiting minister Robert Lavala slightly touched his forehead, and he "received the spirit," fell backward and struck the carpet-covered cement floor with the back of his head and back. The lawsuit claims the fall aggravated a degenerative disc disease in Lincoln's neck and back that he had "reasonably recovered"

from before the incident.

"To me this is not a complicated matter," said Lincoln's attorney, J.D. Lee. "The [church] had a set duty that they recognized, that the [church] board recognized ... and they didn't catch him. The poor guy fell out, and they breached the duty that they had."

But David Long, an attorney representing the church and the Sextons, disagrees with Lee's premise and does not believe his clients should be held liable. "The church has not done anything wrong and was not negligent," he told *Charisma*.

In addition to losing income due to his alleged injuries, Lincoln claims he can no longer care for his disabled 25-year-old daughter. His wife, Shirley, is suing Lakewind for \$75,000 as a "derivative action" that resulted from the "loss of consortium, loss of services and companionship of her husband."

According to his lawyer, Lincoln has incurred many medical bills during the last year and is scheduled for extensive back surgery next week.

Lee said the church's insurance company, Zurich in North America, refused Lincoln's claim because the church did not have a duty to catch him and because Lincoln's account of the incident was not completely factual. Zurich confirmed that Lakewind Church is their client but declined further comment.

-Paul Steven Ghiringhelli