

Charisma News Brief: Pastor Dismisses Stovall Weems 'Conspiracy' Claims

Pastor Chris Hodges, named in a federal complaint by former pastors of Celebration Church in Jacksonville, Florida, claiming he, two other pastors and several high-profile members of the Association of Related Churches conspired to oust them from their positions, has dismissed the claims and say they will be "proven untrue."

The founder and leader of Church of the Highlands in Birmingham, Alabama, Hodges said in a statement to the Christian Post that he is "saddened by the false and misleading allegations" of Stovall and Kerri Weems, also the founders of Celebration Church. In the complaint, the Weemeses claimed the defendants "masterminded" a conspiracy to take over the church and to remove them from their roles.

The Weemeses have been embroiled in a legal battle with Celebration Church, a 12,000-member megachurch, since April 2022 which, through an internal investigation, revealed that they were accused of financial misconduct and fraud. Weems resigned his position in April 2022, but has denied the allegations.

Hodges was named in the suit along with Dino Rizzo, executive director of ARC; and John Siebeling, who leads Life Church in Memphis, Tennessee and is a founding board member at ARC.

"ARC is a non-profit with the singular mission to help new churches as they get off the ground and develop," Hodges said in his statement. "Hundreds of ARC churches are loving and serving people in their communities because of the support and resources they have received. Any claims mischaracterizing the actions or mission of ARC will be proven untrue."

Get your FREE CHARISMA NEWSLETTERS today! Stay up-to-date with current issues, Holy Spirit news, Christian teachings, Charisma videos & more!

The complaint says that ARC used its “significant influence and power as a vehicle to facilitate and conceal their nefarious scheme.” It also claims that the “Defendants intentionally caused substantial and other irreparable harm to the Plaintiffs through a pattern of unlawful and often criminal acts that included extortion, psychological abuse, wire fraud and computer crimes which ultimately caused over \$100 million in damages.”

The Christian Post reported that Hodges’ attorney, Bryan O. Balogh of Burr & Forman LLP, insisted in a statement on behalf of his client that the allegations in Weems’ lawsuit “have no merit.”

“It’s a privilege to represent Pastor Chris Hodges because he is a man of high integrity and remarkable kindness. His ministry has immeasurably impacted our state. The allegations raised by former pastor Stovall Weems against the Association of Related Churches have no merit,” Balogh said in a statement to CP. “ARC is a non-profit on which Pastor Hodges serves as a director that supports communities through church planting around the nation. We regret that Mr. Weems named Pastor Hodges in the lawsuit, but we are grateful for a judicial system, like ours, focused on finding the truth. And because the courtroom has always been the best place in which to hear the truth, we look forward to continuing this discussion there.” {eoa}

Join Charisma Magazine Online to follow everything the Holy Spirit is doing around the world!

Shawn A. Akers is the online editor at Charisma Media.