

Appeals Court Halts Proceedings in Defamation Case Against Robert Morris, Gateway Church

Texas' Fifth Court of Appeals has put a temporary halt on all proceedings in Cindy Clemishire's defamation lawsuit against Gateway Church, founder Robert Morris, and the church's independent elders. At the same time, it considers a mandamus petition filed by the defendants.

Justice Mike Lee issued the order last week, writing that the court would "STAY all proceedings in the trial court" involving the parties until the petition is resolved. He also directed responses to the mandamus filing to be submitted by Dec. 29, 2025.

The pause comes after attorneys for Gateway Church sought emergency relief following the trial court's refusal to dismiss the lawsuit and its approval of limited discovery, as reported by The Christian Post. Their petition argues the case cannot move forward because it would require a secular court to intrude on protected church matters.

Gateway maintains that the institution is wrongly included as a defendant. "Gateway and its leaders simply do not belong in this lawsuit, which asks a secular court to pass judgment on the church's statements and actions while investigating its former pastor's misconduct," attorney Ron Breau said. He added the church's conduct "is protected by the First

Amendment from secular second-guessing.”

Clemishire and her father are seeking more than \$1 million, alleging church leaders made “factual, defamatory statements” that downplayed her abuse. Attorneys for her family argue that the case “does not implicate church governance, discipline, or matters of doctrine” and that the limited discovery ordered earlier is both narrow and necessary.

Morris pleaded guilty in October 2024 to sexually abusing Clemishire over several years, beginning when she was 12. Before the stay, the trial court had ordered Gateway leaders to produce internal and external communications related to how they addressed the allegations once they became public.

The appeals court’s ruling freezes the case until it determines whether the defendants meet the legal standard for mandamus relief.

Prepared by Charisma Media Staff.