

Eddie Long Settles Sexual Misconduct Claims

After vowing to his congregation to fight, Atlanta megachurch pastor Eddie Long has quietly settled the sexual misconduct lawsuits filed against him.

Four men—all former members of Long's church now in their early 20s—claim the pastor used gifts, trips and money to coerce them into engaging in sex acts with him beginning when they were 17 or 18. Because the men were over the age of consent in Georgia, which is 16, no criminal charges were filed.

"After a series of discussions, all parties involved have decided to resolve the civil cases out of court. This decision was made to bring closure to this matter and to allow us to move forward with the plans God has for this ministry," Long's church, New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, said in a statement. The trial was set to begin later this year.

"As is usually the case when civil lawsuits resolve out of court, we cannot discuss any details regarding the resolution or the resolution process, as they are confidential," New Birth said. "This resolution is the most reasonable road for everyone to travel."

The lawsuits claimed Long has "a pattern and practice of singling out a select group of young male church members and using his authority as Bishop over them to ultimately bring them to a point of engaging in a sexual relationship."

The plaintiffs, Maurice Robinson, Jamal Parris, Anthony Flagg and Spencer LeGrande, claim Long took them on trips to various locations in the U.S. and abroad, sharing a room with them and engaging in sexual acts. The men allege Long gave them lavish gifts—ranging from cars to college tuition—to engage in sexual

activity, and that they became paid employees of the church.

Long has steadfastly denied the allegations. "I want you to know, I am not a perfect man, but this thing I'm gonna fight," Long told his 25,000-member New Birth Missionary Baptist Church last September on the first Sunday after the allegations went public.

"And I want you to know one other thing," he added. "I feel like David against Goliath, but I have five rocks and I haven't thrown one yet."

Terms of the settlement were not disclosed.

Adrienne S. Gaines contributed to this article.