

Jack Schaap Faces 10-Year Sentence in Teen Sex Case

A megachurch pastor in Indiana is facing at least 10 years in prison and an additional 10 years of supervision upon release for a sexual relationship with a teen girl.

Jack Schaap, former pastor at First Baptist Church in Hammond, Ind., pleaded guilty in September in a U.S. District Court to transporting a minor across state lines for sexual relations. In a January court filing, he requested that he be given the minimum 10-year sentence and blamed the affair on stress and depression.

Racy details of the illicit relationship between Schaap, 55, and an unnamed FBC member who was 16 at the time, have been revealed as he awaits sentencing, which should come this week.

During the sentencing process, prosecutors presented a memorandum that revealed the content of nearly 640 text messages exchanged between Schaap and the teenage girl, who had sought counseling from the former pastor. In some of the messages, sent between June 21 and July 21, Schaap claimed that Jesus Christ had sanctioned their relationship, the *Chicago Tribune* reports.

"You opened your heart wide to me—you made me more than a Pastor/Rescuer—you made me your friend your confidant, your beloved. You gave me your trust, your heart, your love, + your affection," Schaap wrote the girl, according to a 23-page document shared by the *Tribune*.

Reportedly referring to a counseling session with the teen, the married father of two reportedly wrote her, "You have affectionately spoken of being 'my wife.' That is exactly what Christ desires for us. He wants to marry us + become eternal lovers!"

There were allegations during the case that the minister and the girl had sex in his office at the church in July, while a youth conference was happening on the premises. Schaap was let go July 31, after a deacon saw a text message on his phone from the teenager, reportedly of the two of them kissing.

The court document, which also mentioned 25 phone calls, was filed Wednesday in the U.S. District Court in Hammond. It claims that Schaap courted the girl while juggling duties for the 15,000 member FBC Hammond congregation, which he said in his defense made him "exhausted and depressed" at the time of the relationship.

A sentencing memorandum filed by the pastor's attorney, Paul Stracci, said Schaap was regularly working 100-hour weeks as he struggled to raise money for the church, handled additional counseling responsibilities and had to lay off staff. The megachurch pastor was also being treated for chronic and acute inflammation of his prostate.

All of these circumstances led to his "aberrant" behavior with the girl who turned 17 during their unlawful relationship. Schaap admitted to adultery and "improper behavior," and said while pleading guilty in September that his actions were "sinful and wrong."

"Unfortunately, for a four-week period during the summer of 2012, he acted in a manner contrary to the entire balance of his life by engaging in sexual activity with a young woman with whom he had only recently come to counsel," Stracci wrote in the memorandum, according to The Associated Press.

"We as a church are praying for the families involved and look forward to a day in the near future when we can restore the name of First Baptist Church in our community," FBC spokesman Eddie Wilson said.

Wilson said in a statement in September that the church's members "are deeply saddened by the events that led up to this

day.”

He continued: “We are sorry for the victim and the victim’s family as well as the Schaap family. We grieve with all who have been hurt.”

In January, FBC brought on John Wilkerson, from First Baptist Church of Long Beach in California, as its senior pastor.