

Pastor With AIDS Who Slept With Church Members Is Forced Out of Pulpit

Shell-shocked members of Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, are taking the first steps on a long road of recovery today as disgraced pastor, the Rev. Juan D. McFarland, finally left the church following a court order that he resign and cut all associations with the church. He cannot even attend services there.

The ruling earlier Thursday by Montgomery County Circuit Court Presiding Judge Charles Price brought some degree of closure to a dispute between McFarland and church leaders that erupted in late summer.

McFarland confessed that he not only had AIDS, but that he also had slept with several female church members without telling them he had the deadly disease. He also confessed to using illegal drugs and misappropriating church funds, according to a report on the *Montgomery Advertiser* newspaper's website.

McFarland walked quietly out of the building Thursday after relinquishing his keys to the church, where he had ministered for 24 years.

"Who does this to people, and you are the leader? Who does this?" an unnamed church member asked rhetorically when the scandal first broke last month.

"I know a young lady who is a member of the church who says she has slept with him and that she didn't want this to go public, and she is running out now trying to find out if there is anything wrong with her. And my heart goes out to her, because she's been a wonderful church member, and then for

something like this to happen. The fact that he didn't tell them at all. That's a crime in itself."

Lee Sanford, chairman of the church's board of trustees, said the meeting during which McFarland returned his keys was "tense" but not combative. Sanford said the church has always acted in a spirit of forgiveness toward McFarland.

"It was extremely reluctantly that we took the action that we did, but we have to look [out] for the spiritual welfare of the members of Shiloh Missionary Baptist in moving forward," Sanford told the *Advertiser*.

Sanford said the church will move in "a studied fashion" to find a new pastor, but for now the Rev. Arthur Green, the church's associate pastor, will lead services.

Nathan Williams, chairman of the church's board of deacons, said the confessions began when McFarland admitted to being HIV-positive during an Aug. 31 service.

Then, on Sept. 14, he confessed to having had sex with female church members inside the church, using drugs and misusing church funds. On Sept. 21, he admitted that he had full-blown AIDS. On Sept. 28, Williams said, he "started dismissing folks," The Montgomery newspaper reported.

After the Sunday service when there was the vote to remove McFarland, the pastor changed the locks on the church and changed who could access the church's bank accounts, Williams said.

At the most recent Sunday service, there were guards at the doors of the church to ensure that no unauthorized people could enter, Williams said.

Church members seemed happy that the ordeal was over, with many smiling and voicing their approval of the ruling as they walked out of the courtroom. Outside the church, they formed a

circle and prayed before leaving, the *Advertiser* reported.

Judge Price set a second hearing for Dec. 1, but Julian McPhillips, an attorney for the plaintiffs, said that by then, it will "probably be a moot point," and that McFarland most likely will have moved on and will no longer contest his removal.

McPhillips said the only issue that could remain is the possibility that money had been siphoned out of church accounts. He said that does not appear likely.

"I think we stopped it at the last moment," McPhillips said.

A case involving Wells Fargo Bank remains unresolved for the time being. The bank sent a check for the more than \$52,000 in a church account to Montgomery Circuit Court and asked that the court decide who should have access to it, the newspaper reported.

The court sent an order to Regions Bank to allow the original signers of the account there to access it again.

Sanford said that for the church and its congregation, it is time to begin healing. He said church leaders will begin reaching out to any other churches that might have had to deal with similar rifts.

"We have to move to repair the damage," Sanford said.