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Couple Drops Suit against Paulk

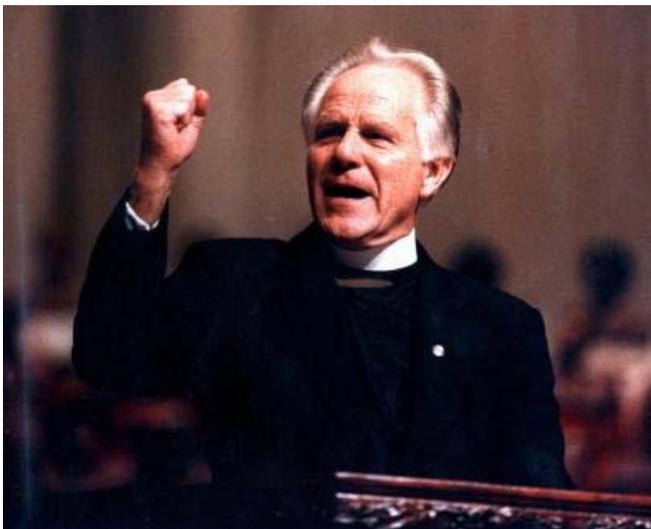
By Gayle White
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<http://www.ajc.com/news/content/metro/dekalb/stories/2007/03/06/0306meshpaulk.html>

The lawyer for a couple suing Bishop Earl Paulk and Chapel Hill Harvester Church abruptly dropped the sexual misconduct case on Monday less than a month before it was set to go to trial.

Bobby and Mona Brewer, longtime members and employees of the South DeKalb mega-church also known as the Cathedral at Chapel Hill, filed suit in August 2005, accusing Paulk of using his role as spiritual adviser to coerce Mona Brewer into a 14-year affair. The Brewers had asked for unspecified damages.

Paulk's lawyer admitted that the clergyman had a sexual relationship with Mona Brewer, but said it was brief and she was the initiator. Paulk could not be reached for comment late Monday.



Bishop Earl Paulk admits an affair but denies he pressured Mona Brewer into it

The Brewers' attorney, Louis Levenson, said he dropped the suit because of difficulty getting witnesses to testify against Paulk and because of long delays in preparing the case — including having to wait a year to question Paulk, who was recovering from cancer surgery.

Levenson's action seemed to stun both opposing lawyers and DeKalb Superior Court Judge Mark Anthony Scott, who had told lawyers to begin preparing questionnaires for jurors in the case.

Bobby and Mona Brewer were part of the independent charismatic church — Bobby as a pastor, Mona as a staff member and featured singer — for decades as Paulk built it into one of the metro area's largest congregations, with some 12,000 members. Paulk also developed an international following with books, tapes and television broadcasts.

But the Brewers' accusations were just the latest in a string of sex scandals involving Paulk dating back more than 40 years. Only one involved litigation, and it was settled out of court in 2003.

Dozens of potential witnesses had been questioned in the Brewers' case. Scott had planned to begin the trial on April 2 and set aside the entire month for a trial.

But on Monday at a pretrial hearing, Levenson wrote out a request for dismissal of the case by hand and handed it to lawyers for Paulk and the church.

Levenson acted just as Scott was about to rule on a motion by Paulk's lawyers to dismiss the allegations. By dropping the case before the ruling, Levenson left open the possibility of filing another suit with the same allegations.

He didn't say Monday whether he planned to refile.

"We were having difficulty even at this point getting witnesses to speak out against the acts of Bishop Paulk and the church," Levenson said. "Sometimes you just have to do this."

Scott had not indicated how he would rule when Levenson dropped the case.

The Brewers were out of town and did not attend the hearing. Reached by telephone later, Bobby Brewer said he and Mona "haven't had time to gather our thoughts." He said he trusts Levenson.

"Things were coming to a place where we thought the truth could be heard," Bobby Brewer said. "It may take a little longer, but the truth can't be hushed forever."

Dennis Brewer (no relation to Mona and Bobby Brewer), the Texas lawyer who served as lead counsel for Paulk and the church, said the Brewers' lawsuit was "the worst case of abusive litigation I have seen in my 52 years of law practice."

The lawyer, who has represented several high-profile ministers, said Paulk and the church have spent more than a million dollars in legal defense fees.

"A million dollars of God's money was spent on a lawsuit that when they had to face the reality that they didn't have a case, they dismissed," he said.

Paulk's lawyers argued before Scott on Monday that even if the Brewers' claims were true, the couple had waited too long to file their suit under Georgia law.

Bruce Hedrick, one of Paulk's attorneys, told Scott that he should apply a two-year statute of limitations on the civil claims, ruling out most of the alleged affair. And, Hedrick pointed out, Mona Brewer was an adult — age 29 — when she freely entered a sexual relationship with Paulk.

At least one other woman was expected to testify that Paulk had taken sexual advantage of her. Cindy Hall, the first baby born into Chapel Hill Harvester Church and, like Mona Brewer, a soloist at the church, came forward to support the Brewers, saying she had had a sexual relationship with Paulk for more than a decade. She has never filed a lawsuit against Paulk.

Hall said Monday she was "dumbfounded" and "astounded" by the turn of events, but said she would reserve further comment until she was able to talk to the Brewers.

Paulk has been plagued by allegations of sexual misconduct for much of his lengthy career.

In the early 1990s, his former ghostwriter and biographer accused him of manipulating her into a sexual relationship. He denied that, but in the midst of the scandal he admitted to having had an adulterous relationship in 1960 when he was pastor of what was then known as Hemphill Church of God, now Mount Paran. He left the Church of God denomination then and formed what is now Chapel Hill Harvester.

In 2001, a former liturgical dancer at the church sued Paulk, claiming he molested her when she was a child and a teenager. The suit was settled out of court. Bobby Brewer claimed in his suit that he lent Paulk and the church \$400,000 for the settlement.