



Woman sues two Lane County churches

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EUGENE, Ore. (AP) — Two Lane County churches were negligent in hiring and retaining a clergyman who was convicted of sex crimes earlier this year, according to a lawsuit filed by the victim.

The suit, filed Monday, also lists the former clergyman, Charles Fenwick Jr., as a defendant. Fenwick, 36, was sentenced in August to five years in prison. He pleaded guilty to rape and sodomy after investigators found his DNA in a sperm stain on the girl's high school prom dress.

The victim, who is now 19, alleged that the abuse started when she was 14.

Fenwick worked as a pastor at New Hope Christian Center in Veneta in 1998 and 1999, and at The Lighthouse in Eugene in 2000. Both churches are listed as defendants, along with New Hope's parent groups, the Pentecostal Church of God Oregon-Southern Idaho District, based in Drain, and the national Pentecostal Church of God based in Joplin, Mo.

The teenager, identified only by her initials, said in the suit that she was an active member of the youth and music programs at New Hope and The Lighthouse.

She alleges that she has suffered permanent emotional and psychological injury because of the abuse, and requires long-term counseling and medication.

She wants \$50,000 in economic damages and \$10 million in punitive damages.

New Hope Christian Center has been closed since late July in a controversy tied to the sex abuse case. Pentecostal district officials have said they closed the center because of financial duress brought on by an exodus of members. But a former senior pastor and several members contend the church was closed in retaliation for their support of the abused teenager.

Harold Gore of Drain, executive superintendent of the denomination's Oregon-Southern Idaho district, did not return a phone call seeking comment.

In Missouri, the Pentecostal Church of God's two top leaders, Superintendent Phil Redding and General Secretary Ronald Minor, told the Register-Guard newspaper that the lawsuit is unprecedented. They said the denomination's national body has never before been named a defendant in a suit alleging child abuse.

Minor said church officials are concerned about the teenager's welfare but do not believe the denomination is liable.

"I don't think the lawsuit will stand," he said.

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