



Columbus woman speaks out after filing lawsuit alleging sexual abuse by local pastor 2:28



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Woman claims pastor sexually abused her as teen, used Bible as justification

BY CHUCK WILLIAMS
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A Columbus woman has accused a longtime local minister of years of sexual abuse that started in 2002 when she was 15, according to a lawsuit filed in Muscogee County Superior Court last month.

The civil suit was filed against Pastor Lewis Clemons, Church of God in Christ Inc., Wynnton Road Ministries Church of God in Christ, Inc., and five other parties that were not named. Clemons is currently senior pastor at Kingdom Awareness Ministries, where his title is apostle.

Lequita Jackson, who started attending Clemons' church when she was 14 and did not leave it until last month, alleges that Clemons led her into "inappropriate sexual contact." She said Clemons used his position of leadership in the church to make her "do what he wanted and to justify his actions."

Jackson, her husband of five years Jonathan Jackson, her attorney Jeb Butler of the Atlanta firm Butler/Tobin and Maria Herlth of the Columbus Sexual Assault Support Center sat down for an interview with the Ledger-Enquirer Wednesday morning to discuss the lawsuit and allegations.

The newspaper has a policy not to name those who identify themselves as sexual assault victims, but Lequita Jackson and her attorney consented to a video interview and the publishing of her name.

Calls to Kingdom Awareness Ministries and a personal phone number for Clemons on Wednesday morning were not returned. The suit was filed June 19.

Jackson, now in her 30s, and her husband attended Kingdom Awareness Ministries until last month when they left the church. In addition to being members and having met at the church, they both held volunteer ministry positions in the church, they said.

Jackson said one of the reasons she is coming forward now is that she recently learned "about seven other women" were in relationships with Clemons.

“When I found out there were other victims — all that time I thought I was the only victim and it was an isolated occurrence — I wanted to do what I could to stop him,” Jackson said. “Part of that included speaking out about what had happened to me and making sure that other people knew what he had done and to make it public knowledge.”

Her attorney said he applauded Jackson for stepping forward. “Clemons has taken something that can never be given back,” Butler said. “But when Lequita found out this had happened to others in her church, she was courageous enough to ask, and I am honored enough to help her in her goal to make sure this never happens ever again.”

There is a reason the suit was filed in Superior Court and not State Court, Butler said.

“We seek an order from the court barring Clemons from ever being a pastor or church official again,” Butler said.

The suit claims, “Clemon’s long-term pattern of abuse, spanning many years and many victims, shows as long as he is able to remain a pastor or church leader, he will sexually abuse those who accept him as a religious leader.”

The inappropriate sexual contact started at Faith Unlimited Ministries, a church Clemons led on Floyd Road in Columbus, according to the suit. At 14, the suit claims, Jackson began having “sexual contact” with the music director at Faith Unlimited Ministries. That music director is not named in the lawsuit.

Jackson sought help from Clemons to end the sexual contact, according to the suit. In Wednesday’s interview, Jackson said criminal charges were filed in 2002 against the music director, but the case was not prosecuted when she “recanted” her story.

Clemons then began to have “inappropriate sexual contact” with her, Jackson’s suit claims.

“Defendant Clemons subjected Plaintiff to a practice that he called ‘body anointing’ in which he took off Plaintiff’s clothes and rubbed her body with oil,” according to the suit. “... Defendant Clemons told the Plaintiff his actions were authorized by the Bible.”

The suit alleges that the victim and Clemons had sexual intercourse.

The sexual relationship with Clemons continued from 2002 to about 2009, Jackson said. Jackson said she did not tell anyone at the church of the relationship with Clemons.

“I finally got the courage to say I did not want to go through that emotional turmoil any more,” Jackson said.

She stayed in the church because of bonds and relationships with other members in the church, Jackson said.

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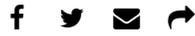


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