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Lawsuit Alleges 'Pattern of Sexual Abuse' by Pastor

Katheryn Hayes Tucker, Daily Report

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A woman has filed a lawsuit against her former pastor alleging he sexually abused her for years starting when she was 15, telling her it was her duty in service to the church.

Attorney Jeb Butler of Butler Tobin said his client decided to go public with her allegations last month because she learned of other victims. He filed the lawsuit in Muscogee County Superior Court in Columbus, where the pastor lives. Butler said he timed the filing to meet the July 1 deadline for the extension created by the Hidden Predators Act allowing survivors of childhood sexual abuse to count the date of disclosure of the allegations rather than the event for calculating the statute of limitations.

The lawsuit named Lewis Clemons and churches he started and served as pastor, including Wynnton Road Ministries Church of God. The complaint said the intention is to bring the case against "each and every church" where Clemons—who calls himself "Apostle"—has pastored since 2000, including Faith Unlimited Ministries Church of Christ and the current church, Kingdom Awareness Ministries International.

Clemons could not be reached for comment after leaving messages at his church and home. Butler said he does not believe Clemons has retained an attorney.

Lequita Jackson alleged she went to Clemons at the age of 15 to seek his help and protection from a church music minister who had made inappropriate sexual contact with her starting when she was 14. She alleged the pastor told her he would take care of the problem but then began abusing her himself, calling his actions inspired by scriptures and necessary for her to serve the church. He started with what he called "anointing" her body with oil and went on to intercourse.

The lawsuit alleged a "long-term pattern of abuse, spanning many years and many victims." The complaint requested a permanent injunction prohibiting the defendant from serving as a pastor or church official "ever again."

Butler said Clemons did not report earlier because she did not believe members of the congregation would believe her. But learning last month of other allegations led her to break her silence.

"She's stronger now," Butler said, adding that Jackson is now 30 and married with children of her own. "She has a lot of courage."

The case is *Jackson v. Lewis Clemons*, No. SU17CV1756-68.

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