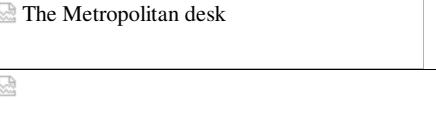
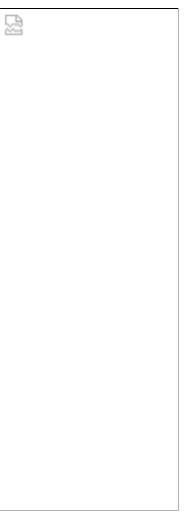
 The Metropolitan desk	 The Metropolitan desk
	 <a href="#">Dallas-Fort Worth news</a>	
	<p><b>Metro areas:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Arlington</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Garland / Mesquite</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Lewisville / Denton</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Metro Plus</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Northeast Tarrant</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Park Cities</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Plano</a></p> <p><b>Columnists:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Steve Blow</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Bob St. John</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Larry Powell</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Other columnists</a></p> <p><b>Special areas:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Dallas Discussion</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">DISD Discussion</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">DISD in Turmoil</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Traffic Report</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">White Rock Lake</a></p> <p><b>Other areas:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Education Extra</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Obituaries</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Religion</a> <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Texas Lottery</a></p>	

## Coppell church accused of hiding sexual abuse

### Ex-deacon, 68, gets 10 years for molesting girl, 4

02/27/98

By Michael Saul / *The Dallas Morning News*

When allegations surfaced more than a decade ago that a Coppell school trustee and church deacon was sexually assaulting young girls, **church officials persuaded the accusers' parents not to pursue criminal charges**, a prosecutor and one of the parents said Thursday.

"**It was rushed under the rug**," said Assistant District Attorney Kate Porter, chief of the family violence and child abuse division of the Dallas County district attorney's office. "**It was very much a concerted effort at the church to suppress this and not file criminal charges.**"

Monte Ray Freeman, a former deacon at the First Baptist Church of Coppell and former Coppell Independent School District board member, was sentenced Thursday to 10 years in prison and fined \$750 after pleading guilty to aggravated sexual assault of a child.

Mr. Freeman, 68, admitted molesting a 4-year-old girl last year, a crime that **the girl's mother says might not have occurred had Mr. Freeman been prosecuted in the early 1980s.**

Mr. Freeman confessed to the abuse in a written statement to police several days after the incident.

"I did commit this crime of which I am accused. I am very sorry and very despondent about doing this to my dear friends and I want to get this behind me," he wrote. "I swear by all I hold dear that I will not ever do anything else to hurt her nor anyone else in anyway. I need help to overcome this problem and I know I need help."

**Court records indicate Mr. Freeman was accused of molesting as many as six girls in 1982-83. He was never charged or prosecuted in any of those cases.**

"If something was said years ago when he did this, perhaps it would not have happened to my child," said the 4-year-old girl's mother. "I just can't believe supposed Christian-based people would do this and just cover it up and let it go. That doesn't seem very logical to me or moral."

*The Dallas Morning News* does not publish the name of victims of sexual assault. The mother's name is not being used to protect her daughter.

"It's the Kos thing all over again," said the victim's mother, referring to suspended Catholic

priest Rudolph "Rudy" Kos.

Last year, a civil jury found that the Catholic Diocese covered up Mr. Kos' abuse of 11 plaintiffs and urged church leaders to "admit your guilt." The jury returned a \$119.6 million judgment, the largest clergy-abuse judgment in U.S. history. Mr. Kos is scheduled to go to trial next month in a criminal court on eight sex-abuse charges.

Lou Brown, who served as First Baptist's pastor for 23 years, declined to comment Thursday.

"I don't want to go into it. It's past history. I really don't want to talk about it," he said.

But a parent who says **Mr. Brown and another church official begged him not to pursue criminal charges said Thursday he regrets adhering to their wishes.**

Mr. Brown "quoted Scriptures saying when a brother in Christ sins on you, you should handle it through the church," the parent said. "I don't think they wanted to admit to themselves that one of their own deacons was a child molester. . . They took advantage of all the families that were trying to get this man off the streets."

**The parent said he filed a complaint with the Coppell Police Department and then withdrew it because church officials "assured me they would take care of it," he said Thursday.**

"They were pretty persuasive," he said, adding that he regrets the decision and hopes others can learn from his family's pain. "If your child tells you that someone has been molesting them, don't back off, pursue it and let the investigators find out what the facts are."

His daughter, who is now 24, said Thursday that Mr. Freeman was her Sunday school teacher when he molested her at the church. She said she was 9 at the time.

"He has been ruining people's lives for a very long time. I don't think 10 years is long enough, but it's better than nothing," she said. "I wish it hadn't been swept under the rug for so long. It's a long time coming."

Mr. Freeman's son, who declined to give his name, said his family also is suffering. He said he hopes members of the public will not persecute the family for his father's actions.

"Nobody is in any danger anymore," Mr. Freeman's son said. "He is paying for what he did . . ."

Mr. Freeman's son said his father had been in counseling back in the 1980s and was in counseling since the latest incident.

"He has always been a good provider for the family. He has been a loving husband and a loving father," he said. "He is not a monster."

Mr. Freeman, who worked in the insurance industry, was elected to the Coppell school board in April 1967 and resigned in February 1983. His resignation letter makes no mention

of the child abuse allegations, officials said.

Coppell police Detective Scott Peters said there is no "official record" of any allegations from the 1980s at the Police Department. But, he said, his investigation into the current case led to his finding the six alleged victims from the 1980s. He also said Mr. Brown, the pastor, confirmed to him that there was "an incident" back then.

"I am very comfortable with the six. I would believe there is even more than that," the detective said.

Mr. Freeman's attorney, E.X. Martin, said he cannot comment on the allegations from the 1980s. But, he said, he believes the disposition of the current case was fair to both sides.

"It's a tragedy for everyone involved," Mr. Martin said. "I have no doubt that he can be rehabilitated."

The latest incident occurred on April 3. The girl, who is now 5, told her parents about Mr. Freeman's abuse. The girl's mother said the incident has been devastating for her daughter and the entire family, especially because they trusted Mr. Freeman.

"It's not people who you think are bad that do this," she said. "It is people who you trust the most."

The 35-year-old woman said she hopes what happened to her family will encourage people to be responsible and report allegations of abuse to the police when they occur.

"The church officials covered it up, and that never should have happened," she said. "I don't know any Bible that would tell you to cover that up. That's downright sick. Someone who could do that to that many kids is not going to stop."

Ms. Porter, the prosecutor, said she does not know if prosecution of the earlier allegations would have prevented the incident with the 4-year-old girl. But, she said, it could have served as a wake-up call to Mr. Freeman.

Molesting a child is a crime, she said, and should not be handled by church officials or neighbors.

"I think he felt like he got away with it the first time and that he could do it again," Ms. Porter said. "There should have been more intervention."

- [Back to Top](#)
- [Discuss this story in the Dallas Discussion Forum](#)
- [Send a letter to the Editor about this story](#)
- [Back to Metro indexes](#)



