

Former pastor of Dallas' St. Luke faces second lawsuit alleging sexual misconduct

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A second man has filed a sexual misconduct lawsuit against Tyrone Gordon, former senior pastor of St. Luke Community United Methodist Church.

The lawsuit, filed Friday by former St. Luke musician Jeff Carson, alleges that Gordon was sexually inappropriate with him on two church trips and often tried to grope him during visits to the pastor's office.

Carson says he resigned from St. Luke in 2007 because of the alleged harassment. His lawsuit comes two days before Gordon — who resigned as pastor and relinquished his United Methodist ministerial credentials last month — is to begin holding services in a Dallas hotel ballroom.

Gordon, 55, who left St. Luke during a church investigation into his behavior, had served at St. Luke since 2002. He replaced the Rev. Zan Holmes, the legendary minister who retired but is now serving as the church's interim pastor.

Last month, a former St. Luke member and employee, Cameron Greer, also sued Gordon, the church and the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church with similar allegations.

Gordon has denied all of the accusations. Bill Miller, Gordon's spokesman, said the allegations are just attempts to grab headlines and "put the squeeze" on him for money.

Carson, 42, alleges in his lawsuit that on church trips to Washington and Atlanta, a naked Gordon invited him into his hotel room where, on both occasions, the pastor asked Carson to "talk dirty" to him while he masturbated.

In both cases, Carson said he immediately left and subsequently reported the incidents to his supervisor at St. Luke.

The suit also alleges that on several occasions, Gordon asked Carson into his office between Sunday morning worship services. The suit states that Gordon "always attempted to grope Plaintiff Carson by grabbing Plaintiff Carson's" groin during those meetings.

Carson alleges that on other occasions, Gordon used his index finger to tickle Carson's palm while shaking hands, a practice Carson described in the lawsuit as an "established pattern" of behavior.

Carson said that in filing the lawsuit, "I feel like I'm doing the right thing because it's an epidemic. I really want to do my part to bring justice to this situation."

Renowned church

Under the leadership of Holmes, St. Luke became a leading United Methodist church in the country and one of the most prestigious black churches in Texas. It counts several prominent leaders among its members, including Dallas County Commissioner John Wiley Price and U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk, the first black mayor of Dallas. The church has often been a leading voice on civil rights and other community issues.

Carson has been associated with St. Luke for more than 15 years. He said he still maintains his official membership while serving

as a musician at a Baptist church. But he said his experiences with Gordon have left him questioning his faith.

"I have no faith in the church," he said, adding that he had contemplated suicide and sought counseling. "I am disillusioned. My best spiritual moments are at home or on vacation. I've just seen too much where it's not about saving souls, it's more about growing the churches ... but for all the wrong reasons. I was preyed upon."

The attorney for Carson and Greer, Marilyn Mayse, said that neither of her clients initially sought to file lawsuits but simply wanted Gordon disciplined. But she said that the situation at St. Luke got too far out of hand and that the repercussions will be long-lasting.

"This dude did us wrong," said Mayse, herself a longtime member of the church. "People are devastated. Even I went to a psychiatrist. We were a close church family. And 'G' has literally chased away folks with this filth of his. He's killing Zan Holmes' legacy."

Gordon's voluntary defrocking hasn't stopped him from planning to preach. The once rising star of the United Methodist Church plans to hold worship services beginning Sunday at a Radisson hotel blocks from the Southern Methodist University Perkins School of Theology, where he was once a student and executive board member.

"I am appalled that he would open another church in view of the allegations that have been made against him," said Mayse.

Bishop Scott Jones of the Kansas West Annual Conference, where Gordon once served, said that because Gordon has relinquished his credentials, he is free to start a church in the eyes of the United Methodist Church.

"But if any of these allegations against him are true, people should not follow him," Jones said.

Gordon's new ministry

Although a flier announcing services for the Transforming Life Christian Fellowship lists Gordon as senior pastor and promises "Powerful Preaching," "Dynamic Praise & Worship" and a "Warm & Inviting Fellowship," Gordon isn't actually starting a church, said Miller, Gordon's spokesman.

"He's been asked by a group of former St. Luke members to start having services again. They just asked him to be a preacher again, and he agreed," said Miller, who is based in Austin. "This new effort doesn't pay him anything."

Asked why Gordon would give up the pulpit of one of the state's most prominent African-American churches to preach at a hotel less than three weeks later, Miller said Gordon wanted to get back to his roots.

"He had long held ordination papers with the Baptist church, and he just changed his ministry," Miller said, adding that he expects Gordon's new ministry to eventually "be up under the Baptist banner."

Some St. Luke members said they have met with counselors in the wake of the Gordon scandal. Holmes, 77, said the wounded church is trying to heal.

"We are moving from brokenness to healing and wholeness," said Holmes, who declined to discuss the lawsuits. "It's a process and ... I'm just trying to help the congregation move forward to claim the brand-new future that God has promised."

"We're praying for Pastor Gordon and his family; we're praying for Cameron Greer and his family," he added. "We're in prayer for everybody."

According to his lawsuit, Carson "experienced deep depression, contemplated suicide and sought medical treatment from a licensed professional psychiatrist, Dr. Paula Dobbs-Wiggins, from 2004 to 2007." Wiggins and her attorney husband, Kevin, are also members of St. Luke.

Gordon's attorney, Ben Hall of Houston, has already started working on a defense, Miller said. He said Hall has acquired affidavits from other men named in Greer's lawsuit who, Miller said, deny that Gordon ever acted inappropriately with them.

"When the facts come out and the cards get played, you'll be surprised at what all comes out," Miller said. "It's all being driven by one person and one attorney, and you'll find that what's been said, it's not true."

Miller said there is no chance the two sides will reach a quiet financial agreement to end the case.

"There will be no settlement. We aren't settling — we say, bring it on."

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