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Boston youth minister resigns; abuse alleged

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON - A popular minister credited with turning around the lives of troubled youth resigned Friday amid allegations that he fondled a teen-ager in his care.

Richard Williamson, executive director and cofounder of God's Posse, a group he co-founded to minister to jailed youth, was asked to step down from the organization last Monday. He gave the organization a letter of resignation on Friday.

Williamson allegedly touched an 18-year-old five years ago. The man, now 23, has told police of the alleged sexual assault, according to the Rev. Gilbert Thompson, pastor at New Covenant Christian Church where Williamson was a congregation member and a deacon.

The Boston Globe could not reach Williamson for comment on Friday.

"When we spoke to Rich he had admitted to the misconduct and the abuse of his position," Roosevelt Smith, a board member of God's Posse, told the Globe on Friday. "The board's position has been to ask Richard Williamson for his resignation. A letter was dropped off today."

Officials at the church were shocked by the turn of events for the respected minister. The victim, whose name has not been released, was baptized and was a member at New Covenant, one of the city's leading evangelical congregations.

Both the young man and Williamson looked to church leaders for advice after the victim told Thompson about the allegations two weeks ago.

"I support this young man because he feels someone took advantage of his trust," Thompson said. "He informed me that he's gone to the police and filed charges of sexual assault. He feels isolated, he's been hurt, and I'm trying to minister to him."

Williamson co-founded God's Posse in 1994 to minister to jailed teens and youth in Department of Youth Service custody. He also preached to gangs in Boston's public housing.

Two years ago, Williamson added a housing program to help young men re-enter society after prison or DYS custody. The program housed men ages 18 and older in an apartment under Williamson's supervision.

Because of the allegations, the program has been temporarily shut down, and Williamson and the two people living in the apartment have relocated.

Board members denounced the alleged contact between Williamson and the man in his program, but also cited the positive aspects of his work."

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