

Pastor, church named in civil suit

Johnson to be sentenced Friday on 1 count of unlawful sexual activity with minor

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By Mark Pollio

Fort Pierce -- Pastor Kenneth Johnson, recently convicted of having sex with a minor, and Friendship Missionary Baptist Church -- where he reportedly continues to minister -- were named in a sex-abuse lawsuit filed Tuesday.

Johnson, 39, is scheduled to be sentenced Friday on one count of unlawful sexual activity with a minor. He faces up to 15 years on the second-degree felony.

The civil suit was filed on behalf of an unnamed woman by her natural guardian, who also is unidentified.

Two key witnesses in the criminal case were the teenage victim and her guardian, Alfred Charlevoix.

Charlevoix, the victim's grandmother, testified during the criminal trial that she was considering filing suit against Johnson and the church. Neither could be reached for comment.

"The actions of Kenneth Johnson were so outrageous in character at so extreme a degree as to go beyond the grounds of human decency," the civil suit states.

The civil suit alleges many of the same details that lead to Johnson's criminal conviction. Johnson met the victim through his wife in 1999. Johnson's wife, Bernadette, was a basketball coach at Fort Pierce Westwood High School. The victim played on her team.

Before the 1999 season started, Bernadette Johnson invited team members to Friendship Missionary for a service with her husband. The victim, then 14-years-old, attended and then returned the following week.

Kenneth Johnson began counseling the victim, who had personal and family problems, according to testimony at the criminal trial. Her problems became so dire that Kenneth Johnson invited her to live at his home. The victim lived at his Juanita Avenue home for part of three months.

The suit claims the church was negligent in hiring and retaining Johnson, who has worked at Friendship for more than five years. Even after his conviction, Johnson continues to preach at Friendship Missionary.

The church is responsible for not supervising Johnson, the suit claims. The victim testified at the criminal trial that she had sex with Johnson in his church office and at his home. The suit also alleges Johnson had sex with the victim in a Miami hotel room.

The civil suit claims Johnson sexually molested the victim between January 2000 and September 2001, after she turned 15 years old. The victim testified during the criminal trial that Johnson would pick her up from school to meet for sex.

There are six counts altogether listed in the civil lawsuit. Each count requests damages in excess of \$15,000, interest, legal fees any other penalty the court sees fit to apply.

"I'm sorry the church would have to carry the burden and be responsible for his actions," said Lamar Donaldson, a deacon at Friendship Missionary.

"There are definitely people who think he should step down. If he did, maybe there would have been no civil suit."

Johnson also could not be reached for comment.

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