

West Palm Beach minister, church pay \$600,000 to man who accused him of rape

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A prominent minister, his church and deacon have reached a \$600,000 settlement with a mentally disabled man who accused the minister of rape.

The Rev. Thomas Masters, pastor of the New Macedonia Church of Riviera Beach, and Church Mutual, insurer for the church, negotiated the settlement with the man, according to his attorneys and court papers filed Monday.

The man, who has the mental capacity of a 7-year-old, attended New Macedonia and accused Masters of coercing him to smoke crack cocaine and then raping him twice on church property over Thanksgiving weekend in 1991. Police investigated, but no charges were filed.

In 1998 a jury awarded the man more than \$2 million after finding against Masters, and against his church and Deacon Joseph Lawrence for failing to investigate the allegations.

But the 4th District Court of Appeal threw out that verdict in June, citing procedural errors during the first trial and noting that the mentally disabled man had repeatedly changed his story.

The parties opted to negotiate a settlement instead of going to trial again.

Circuit Judge Mary E. Lupo approved the settlement, according to Michael Cooksey of Riviera Beach and Charles Torres of Denver, who represented the mentally disabled man.

The man now lives in a group home in West Palm Beach. The settlement money is paying for an annuity to cover the expenses for his continuing care, Torres said.

Masters has testified before the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva and has made several television appearances. He led marches in the past against drug dealing, drive-by shootings, the Ku Klux Klan and the 2000 presidential election results.

In 2000, he challenged state and national laws that allow minors to be sentenced to death and to be sent to adult prisons.

He could not immediately be reached for comment.

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