

Church ordered to pay for negligence in alleged sexual assault

Shoreline Christian Church to pay \$500,000

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A Travis County jury ordered Shoreline Christian Church to pay \$650,000 Friday for negligence in connection with an alleged sexual assault by a former church volunteer.

The church, however, will pay only \$500,000 in damages because that is what it agreed to pay in a confidential negotiation with the plaintiff before the trial if the jury ruled against it, the plaintiff's attorney said.

Angela Andrews, who also was a girls physical education teacher at Shoreline Christian School, was charged with sexual assault of a child in 2003. A 16-year-old girl who was a member of the church at 15201 Burnet Road accused Andrews of the crime. The girl said the assault happened at the teen's Round Rock home.

Andrews told the girl's father that she was asked by church staff to advise the girl on sexual issues, according to the lawsuit that the girl's father filed a few months later.

Andrews, who was 28 when she was charged, pleaded guilty this year to the lesser charge of improper conduct between an educator and a student. She was sentenced to five years' probation.

The jury in the 345th District Court decided Friday that the church was 51 percent responsible for the negligence that happened and Andrews was 49 percent responsible.

An attorney for the church, Joe Loiacono, argued during the trial that the church was not aware of what Andrews was doing with the girl.

"We are deeply disappointed by the acts of the volunteer, but, of course, our heartfelt prayer is with all who are affected by this," Loiacono said after the verdict.

Under the law, the church must pay the total damage amount because it was found to be more than 50 percent responsible, said Ray Chester, the attorney for the plaintiff.

"I hope this sends a message to the churches in our community that they need to closely monitor the activities between volunteers and teenagers," Chester said.

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