

Star-Telegram

Sexual Abuse Victim Settles Seminary Suit

Fort Worth Star-Telegram—August 30th, 2005

A Trophy Club man has settled his civil lawsuit against Dallas Theological Seminary on the eve of what promised to be an emotional trial related to a seminary graduate's sexual abuse of boys.

Aaron Babb said in his lawsuit that seminary officials should be held accountable for the abuse he suffered at the hands of John Gerrit Warnshuis, who graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary in 1992 and became pastor of an Argyle church.

Both sides agreed to keep the terms of the settlement confidential. The agreement was reached late Friday, and the trial was scheduled to begin Monday in Fort Worth.

"I really wish I could talk to you", said Babb, 22, of Trophy Club. " But I really have to say, 'no comment.' That's what my attorney told me to say."

The Star-Telegram does not usually identify victims of sexual abuse, but Babb previously said he hopes that by coming forward he might help others who are dealing with similar abuse.

Babb said he rejected a previous offer by the seminary. But his attorney, Thomas McElyea, said Monday that an amicable settlement was in the best interests of his client and the seminary. " he was prepared to go to trial, but he's pleased with the terms." McElyea said. " It's scary to think what happened to him."

Thomas Brandon Jr., an attorney for the 80-year-old nondenominational seminary, said officials there also are satisfied with the settlement.

"My personal hope is that this will help promote healing for Mr. Babb and for the seminary," Brandon said.

The settlement prevented what was expected to be a lengthy, emotional trial stemming from Babb's molestation while Warnshuis was pastor at Oak Hill Free Church in Argyle from 1996 to 2001. In the lawsuit, Babb contended that his abuse could have been prevented if seminary officials had reported Warnshuis' alleged abuse of another boy in 1988.

Instead, after being expelled from the seminary, Warnshuis was allowed to graduate in 1992 after receiving counseling from a psychologist who said he was mentally sound, seminary officials said.

Thus, the Argyle church had no warning that Warnshuis was a danger to children when they hired him in 1996, Babb said.

But seminary officials said no one from the church called to check on Warnshuis' credentials when he was hired.

The church, which initially was a party to Babb's lawsuit, reached a confidential out-of-court settlement in the case in the spring, McElyea and Brandon said.

Seminary officials said they didn't call police in 1988 because they were unclear whether they were required to.

A 1995 state law requires anyone who suspects child abuse to report it.

Warnshuis was arrested in 2001 after another teen-age boy accused him of molesting him at a Keller church where he worked before going to Argyle. Babb's abuse allegations followed shortly thereafter. The first victim settled a similar lawsuit with the seminary two weeks ago.

Warnshuis is serving a 40-year prison sentence after pleading guilty in December 2001 to sexually assaulting Babb. Authorities said they believe he molested dozens of boys in Texas and California.

McElyea said Warnshuis, the last remaining party to Babb's lawsuit, likely will be dismissed from the suit now that the other parties have settled.

"He's in prison," McElyea said. "I expect him to be there until he passes. He's in his mid-40s."