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The courts

Jury: Church owes \$3.6M

Award to victim of sexual assault in judge's hands

By Jim Woods
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

A Delaware County jury has found that the Grace Brethren Church of Delaware should pay \$3.6 million to a woman who was sexually assaulted by a former pastor.

The jury found yesterday that the church was negligent in supervising Brian L. Williams, said attorney John K. Fitch, who represents the victim. Visiting Common Pleas Judge Richard M. Markus is yet to sign off on the final order.

The woman, who is now 21, was 15 when she was sexually assaulted by Williams during a counseling session in March 2008 while he was pastor of the Sunbury Grace Brethren Church. Since then, she has been found to have post-traumatic stress, Fitch said.

"She has tremendous fears and anxiety," Fitch said. "She has fears about when Williams is released.

Williams pleaded guilty to two felony sexual-battery charges and was sentenced to eight years in prison. He remains behind bars.

The woman and her father sued the Grace Brethren Church of Delaware because that church had supervised and supported Williams as pastor at the Sunbury church. Williams had worked as a youth pastor at the Delaware church before taking the Sunbury assignment, the suit said.

The lawsuit charged that the Delaware church was aware of at least two previous incidents involving young women in which Williams "engaged in sexually inappropriate behavior."

The jury also recommended awarding \$75,000 to the woman's father.

W. Charles Curley, the attorney representing the church, could not be reached for comment last night.

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