

NEWS

Trinity Broadcasting Network on hook for entire \$2 million judgment awarded to Jan Crouch's granddaughter, judge says



Sisters Carra and Brittany Crouch, as children, featured on TBN's web site

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Trinity Broadcasting Network, which preaches the "prosperity gospel," is on the hook for the entire \$2 million in damages that a jury awarded to the aggrieved granddaughter of Trinity's founders, a judge decided.

After a trial that lasted nearly one month, a jury concluded on June 5 that late televangelist Jan Crouch behaved outrageously when she blamed and berated her then-13-year-old granddaughter for a suspected sexual assault by a Trinity employee. The granddaughter, Carra Crouch, now 24, argued that her grandmother never reported the incident to authorities to avoid bad publicity for TBN.

The \$2 million awarded by the jury last week was carved up so that Trinity was only responsible for paying 45 percent of it – \$900,000. The other \$1.1 million was the responsibility of Crouch's mother and the man involved, the jury decided – even though neither was named in the suit.

Orange County Superior Court Judge Peter Wilson up-ended that formula with an order made public on Monday. The jury found that Crouch is entitled to \$2 million, Wilson said, and ordered Trinity Christian Center of Santa Ana, TBN's corporate parent, to pay the entire sum, with interest accruing at 10 percent per year until it's paid.

Trinity is prepared to fight. "Unless this Court is going to declare a mistrial, the only judgment that may be entered against Trinity is for \$900,000," it said in court filings. "Trinity reserves all rights to challenge that judgment."

Carra Crouch's suit originally named John Casoria, a family cousin and attorney who works for Trinity, and was the one who fired the man suspected of the assault, according to court documents. The judge dismissed Casoria from the claim, saying Crouch shall take nothing from him, and allowing him to recover fees and costs as provided by law.

It was unclear Tuesday what those fees and costs might amount to, and whether they would be deducted from any award.

Crouch said she was sexually assaulted by a TBN employee at a Praise-A-Thon fundraiser in Atlanta in 2006, according to court records. Her grandmother had accompanied her on the trip. Crouch said she smoked a cigarette, drank alcohol and watched a movie on her bed with a 30-year-old man, and that the man fondled her, tried to kiss her, and gave her a glass of water that she suspects was laced with a drug that made her pass out. When she awoke, she suspected she had been raped.

After that, Carra Crouch's life took dark turns for which Trinity should be held responsible, her lawyers argued.

While the fight over the award is apparently not over, a \$2 million judgment would not be inconsequential for Trinity. Recently, the empire has hit bumpy financial times, and is downsizing.

In March, TBN's iconic headquarters in Costa Mesa – a cross between a wedding cake and the White House, with twinkling white lights – sold for \$18.25 million, according to CoStar Group, a commercial property database. The 65,000-square-foot, three-story building on a 6.19-acre campus is familiar to many for its bright holiday displays along the 405 Freeway on Bear Street.

Trinity has also sold several multi-million dollar homes since Paul Crouch Sr.'s death and Jan Crouch's death, last year, at age 78.

Trinity's revenue has taken a precipitous dive during the drama, from \$207 million in 2006 to \$121.5 million in 2014, according to a Register review of its most recent tax filings. Reports are that revenue was up in 2015, but Trinity's most recent tax returns have not yet been made public.

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Teri Sforza

Sforza birthed the OC Watchdog column aiming to keep a critical (but good-humored) eye on governments and profits, large and small. It won first place for public service reporting from the California Newspaper Publishers Association in 2010. Sforza contributed to the OCR's Pulitzer Prize-winning investigation of fertility fraud at UC Irvine, covered what was then the largest municipal bankruptcy in America's history, and is the author of "The Strangest Song," the first book to tell the story of a genetic condition called Williams syndrome and the extraordinary musicality of many of the people who have it. She earned her M.F.A. from UCLA's School of Theater, Film and Television, and enjoys making documentaries, including the OCR's first: "The Boy Monk," a story that was also told as a series in print. Watchdogs need help: Point us to documents that can help tell stories that need to be told, and we'll do the rest.

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Kelly Puente covers courts and criminal justice for the Register. She has worked as a journalist since 2006 covering everything from education to crime and breaking news. Kelly previously worked at the Long Beach Press-Telegram before joining the Register in 2013.

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