

Trinity escapes ‘vexatious litigant’ label — for now

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Colorful federal judge **David O. Carter** threatened to brand the mighty **Trinity Broadcasting Network** a “vexatious litigant” and forbid it from filing more lawsuits against the granddaughter of Trinity’s founders — but he won’t. At least, not right now.

But the broadcaster had better behave, or it could get worse than the legal equivalent of a public spanking.

“Plaintiff Trinity has brought, either directly or through its corporate agents, at least six lawsuits against Michael and Brittany (Koper) since terminating them on September 30, 2011,” **Carter (left) wrote in a recent minute order**. “Curiously, although Plaintiff Trinity had already filed the sixth case five days prior to this Court’s status conference on July 24, 2012, Plaintiff Trinity did not reveal this sixth case when this Court asked Plaintiff Trinity ... about its seemingly harassing litigation strategy.”

Trinity has demanded expedited rulings on its many motions, Carter noted. It did not explain why it continued to file case after case against **Brittany** and **Michael Koper**, rather than seek to amend earlier complaints.

“Plaintiff Trinity argues that all its cases have merit and thus are not frivolous,” Carter wrote. “Plaintiff Trinity has lodged five binders totaling over 1,500 pages documents to support this argument. However, Plaintiff Trinity makes no argument as to why its six duplicative lawsuits filed in three different fora — Orange County Superior Court, Central District of California, and the Eastern District of New York — are not

harassing. Because a litigant may be deemed vexatious if it is ‘frivolous *or* harassing,’ this Court concludes that Plaintiff Trinity has failed to show that it is not a vexatious litigant.”

Here Carter adopts the stern-parent, *I’ll-give-you-one-more-chance-but-then-you’re-grounded* tone.

“Nonetheless, this Court will refrain from designating Plaintiff Trinity as a vexatious litigant at this time,” he wrote — because it doesn’t appear that Trinity has filed any more cases against the Kopers since he called it on the carpet in July.

“However, the Court ORDERS that if Plaintiff Trinity ever again files a another lawsuit against either Brittany or Michael while this Court has jurisdiction ... Trinity shall: (1) file a brief of not more than 3 pages with this Court explaining why Plaintiff Trinity chose to file a new case rather than seek to amend its pleadings ... and (2) file a copy of this Order accompanying the complaint in the newly-filed case.

“Finally, the Court ORDERS Plaintiff Trinity to file a copy of this Order in all the cases mentioned in this Order which are not under this Court’s jurisdiction.”

Which means that the other judges with Trinity v. Koper cases before them will know exactly what Carter is thinking about Trinity’s prodigious legal maneuverings.

We’ve been telling you about the battles raging at **Orange County-based Trinity** — battles which are splintering a family, and putting the reputation of the world’s largest Christian broadcaster on the line.

First, the cast of characters:

- Brittany Crouch Koper is the granddaughter of Trinity founders **Jan** and **Paul Crouch**.
- Michael Koper is her husband.
- Trinity bills itself as the largest Christian broadcaster in the world, with **16** global television networks distributed on **76** satellites, multiple foreign and domestic affiliates, and **thousands** of cable affiliates on every continent save **Antarctica** — with headquarters here in Santa Ana. Subscribing to the “Have a need? Plant a seed” philosophy, its donors believe that sending money to the network will reap divine rewards later on. Trinity spent nearly **\$200 million** in 2010, and it had amassed nearly **\$1 billion** in net assets, according to its last tax return.

The Kopers had worked for Trinity while finishing up law and graduate school, then were promoted to the prominent jobs of finance director and secretary in 2011. They say they tried to clean house but were thwarted, and **have accused Trinity of playing fast and loose with the ministry’s millions**, including unlawfully distributing more than **\$50 million** to family members, buying a **\$50 million** jet through “a sham loan to an alter ego corporation” for the personal use of the Crouches, as well as a **\$100,000** motor

home for **Jan Crouch**'s dogs, falsely reporting "multiple residential estates" as guest homes or church parsonages to avoid income disclosures; [and a good deal more](#).

Trinity [says it's all untrue](#) and [paints a very different picture](#). It accuses the Kopers of engaging in an inflammatory smear campaign to divert attention from their *own* financial sins against Trinity – including stealing some **\$1.3 million** during their years of employ, as well as a trove of privileged documents that they're inserting into the court record in "drips and drabs" in an attempt to blackmail and destroy the network. The Kopers are "revealing in distorted fashion confidential client files and ... publishing their contents recklessly in this action to the media as part of a 'hush money' extortion campaign against TBN," [Trinity said in court filings](#).

Each side has reported the other to the authorities, including local police and the **Internal Revenue Service**. The assertions could cast a cloud on Trinity's nonprofit, income-tax-exempt status – which, if lost, could cost it **tens of millions** of dollars per year.