

MINISTER SHOT IN SPREE SUES CHURCH, LEADER

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An African-American minister from Downstate Decatur who was wounded in the 4th of July weekend shooting spree of Benjamin Smith filed a federal civil-rights lawsuit Tuesday in Chicago against white supremacist Matthew Hale and his World Church of the Creator.

The suit filed by Rev. Stephen Anderson alleges that Smith's rampage was intended to further the World Church of the Creator's self-proclaimed "holy war" against African-Americans, Jews, Asians and other ethnic groups.

Without offering specifics, the lawsuit alleges that Hale was aware of Smith's fateful plans but failed to warn authorities and prevent the tragedy.

Smith, an avowed racist with ties to Hale and his East Peoria-based hate group, went on a three-day shooting spree last July in Illinois and Indiana, killing two and injuring nine before fatally shooting himself as police closed in.

That weekend, Anderson, pastor of the Greater Faith Temple Church, was standing outside his home in Decatur when Smith pulled up in his vehicle and shot him three times.

"I thought I was dying," Anderson said Tuesday at a press conference called by his attorneys and the Center for Constitutional Rights, a New York-based civil rights group.

According to Anderson's lawyers and the suit, he lost the use of much of his right arm and hand, continues to suffer nightmares and bouts of depression and paranoia, and fears traveling even short distances alone.

The suit seeks unspecified damages, though Ron Daniels, executive director of the Center for Constitutional Rights, indicated Anderson's lawyers would go after the assets of Hale and the World Church of the Creator. The suit also names Smith's estate as a defendant.

Hale didn't return a telephone call, but his attorney, Glenn Greenwald, blasted the suit as an attempt to somehow hold Hale responsible for Smith's rampage because they shared a political philosophy.

That constitutes "a very dangerous and clearly unconstitutional guilt-by-association, which courts have made clear are impermissible," Greenwald said.

Besides, a comprehensive FBI investigation uncovered not a shred of evidence that Hale knew in advance of Smith's deadly plans, Greenwald said.

The lawsuit marks the second one brought against Hale by a victim of Smith's shooting spree. The earlier one, filed in Cook County Circuit Court, also named Smith's parents, but a judge dismissed them from the suit last week.

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