

# THE DAILY RECORD

## Law

### Judge dismisses lawsuit against Ethiopian church board

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A Baltimore County judge has dismissed a \$4.3 million lawsuit filed by more than 100 former members of an Ethiopian church against its board of trustees after the plaintiffs failed to respond to discovery requests.

The trial involving Ethiopian Evangelical Church was scheduled for Monday in Baltimore County Circuit Court. But Judge Thomas J. Bollinger Sr. dismissed the case Friday at the request of the defendants' lawyer.

"There are 116 unidentified plaintiffs in this case," Erika E. Cole wrote. "In order to be prepared for trial, the defendants must determine who is suing them and on what basis."

Plaintiffs' attorney Matthew W. Hurd, of Hartel, Kane, DeSantis, MacDonald & Howie LLP in Beltsville, could not be reached for comment.

The suit, filed last year, alleged the Liberty Road church's seven-member board of trustees changed the status of the church's religious corporation from a nonprofit to a religious entity in January 2008, giving themselves more power, without consulting the congregation. The board fired Pastor Daniel Berhanu soon after that, the lawsuit said.

The board countered that the change was lawful and that the pastor's firing was purely a religious matter, not subject to government intervention.

Berhanu and other ex-church members have moved to another congregation, according to court documents. Ethiopian Evangelical remains open and will celebrate the case's conclusion during services Sunday, said Cole, an Owings Mills solo practitioner.

"The church continued to do the work of the ministry rather than suspend it during litigation," she said.

