

# Venues wash hands of 'cult' church

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By Victoria John

Grace Gospel Church, the Hillcrest-based church that has been labelled "a cult" by the local community and the media, has been asked to leave three different venues in the past year.

Pinetown Boys' High School, the Assagay Hotel and the Westville Hotel have all terminated venue hire agreements with the church, saying that they did not want to be associated with it.

In November last year The Independent on Saturday published reports detailing the activities of the church, an affiliate of Church Team Ministries, which has been accused of brainwashing members, arranging marriages and urging young members to distance themselves from their families.

The chairman of Pinetown Boys' High School board, Chris Dyer, said the lease ended at the end of January.

The school, which had given the church two months' notice, did not renew the lease because "we received complaints about the church and we just did not want to get involved with them.

"We want no association with them. It is not good for a school to be associated with this kind of thing."

## **Reputation**

The owner of Assagay Hotel, Jake Jacobs, said he "had no idea" of the church's reputation when he agreed to let it use his venue.

"We are Christians here and we thought we were doing a good thing by letting this church use our conference room. We were actually doing the opposite," said Jacobs.

Jacobs, whose premises were used in February, said: "I received calls from people with information about the church - things I had no idea about. The calls were strong, but they were not abusive.

"I also did my own background research and was shocked at what I found. I decided that I needed to protect my business. I do not want the reputation of being a cult supporter."

The Westville Hotel's managing director, Don King, confirmed the agreement they had had been terminated.

"We have dealt with the issue and the church is no longer meeting at the hotel."

Church leader Basil O'Connell-Jones said despite being asked to leave the venues, the church would continue its work.

"The feedback we have from the school and hotels is that they received letters containing lies and unfounded accusations against Grace Gospel Church.

"It is totally understandable they do not wish to be negatively publicised or harassed and we would like to thank each of these venues for their hospitality and professionalism.

"One thing, for sure, is that no one can stop what God is doing," he said.

A group of parents has formed the CTMI Concerned Parents Group and has created an online forum at [www.ctmiconcernedparents.com](http://www.ctmiconcernedparents.com)

## **Testimonies**

Two members of the parents' group, Keith Brown and Steve Goddard, have been asked to speak at events to provide testimonies on their personal experiences with the church as well as research done on the church with assistance from an expert on unhealthy and dangerous religious groups, Stephan Pretorius.

Last month, Brown addressed a local men's breakfast group followed by a women's breakfast.

Last week the two addressed about 80 members of the public.