

RELIGION

'Rev. Elvis' accuses church of forcing his resignation

Ex-minister seeks severance, apology for 'clergy abuse'

JOEL KOM
CALGARY HERALD

An Elvis-impersonating minister has accused the United Church of Canada of making him "feel like a leper," attacking his character and forcing him out of the pulpit he occupied for eight years.

Rev. Bruce Sheasby wants an apology and severance package because the United Church "stepped on my blue suede shoes," he told reporters Friday.

Sheasby, known at the Red Deer Lake United Church as Rev. Elvis, said he was the victim of "clergy abuse" inflicted by the United Church.

He charged that church officials trying to wrestle control of his ministry away from him engaged in character attacks.

He also said some members of the congregation accused him of refusing to baptize a child and having an affair with a congregation member, both of which he denied Friday.

"I feel that God has left the building and I feel that Bruce should do the same," wrote one church member in a letter.

It all culminated in Sheasby resigning five months ago, a move he said



Mikhael Kjellström, Calgary Herald
Rev. Bruce Sheasby, performing at a press conference Friday, says the United Church "stepped on my blue suede shoes."

was forced upon him.

"I honestly felt like a leper in my own church, and I didn't do anything wrong," he said at a press conference.

"If the United Church of Canada will not acknowledge that I have been mis-

treated, then there will be a spiritual scar."

Sheasby wearing a white dress shirt unbuttoned at the chest, a black leather jacket, blue slacks, black shoes and slicked-back black hair, then launched into performances of Blue Suede Shoes and If I Can Dream.

Dave Pollard, chairman of the Foothills Presbytery, the church's governing body in south-central Alberta, said church officials only got involved in the situation after Sheasby resigned.

"We're dealing in good faith with Rev. Sheasby," he said. "We respect his right to make these claims, but the question is: Are they grounded in any fact?"

Pollard added "our door is always open" and the church would be willing to meet with Sheasby. But Sheasby said the church has refused all meetings with him and won't even return his calls.

Sheasby isn't the first minister to leave Red Deer Lake United Church on bad terms. The last minister also left the congregation and the United Church itself, something Sheasby has now done because of his disgust with how church officials handled his case.

He launched the Spiritual Community Church of the West and about 50 members of Red Deer Lake followed him, on top of about another 50 who have since joined.

No injuries reported after shots fired in two incidents

CALGARY HERALD

Calgary police are investigating reports of two shootings, bringing recent episodes of gunfire on city streets to five in less than two weeks.

The latest happened early Friday along the 300 block of 10th Avenue SW, outside a nightclub, where someone reported hearing a shot around 2:30 a.m.

Police are interviewing witnesses, but say no one was hit and no property was damaged.

A few hours earlier, police responded to reports of gunfire exchanged in Falconridge between two SUVs at around 11 p.m.

The vehicles were found abandoned. Police say a fight between the

two parties started after one drivers flashed the vehicle beams behind the other.

A fight with pepper spray erupted.

Police are examining the evidence and found a spent shell and a full shell.

"We don't believe it's gang related at this time," said Staff Sgt. Lorne.

The shootings come on the killing of a Calgary gang member Son Thanh Nguyen was shot while pulling into his Sac Boulevard home April 16.

The day before, one of Nguyen's associates was shot outside a game bar.

Police have made no arrests still investigating.

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Pastor says 'don't be cruel'

Minister has a little less congregation as he claims church bullied him to quit

TARINA WHITE
Sun Media

Five months after resigning, a former Calgary United Church minister is publicly lashing out at church leaders for allegedly bullying him from his pulpit.

Rev. Bruce Sheasby held a press conference in Calgary yesterday to draw attention to what he labelled "widespread" clergy abuse within the United Church of Canada.

"I experienced it in the form of attacks on my character," said Sheasby.

He pointed to accusations made by church officials that he had an affair with a member of his former congregation at Red Deer Lake United Church, and that he allegedly refused to baptize a baby because their parents weren't married.

Sheasby, leader of the congregation for eight years and a United Church minister for 13

years, claims church officials made the accusations to bully him from his congregation. "It was so clearly targeted to oust me from the church," he said.

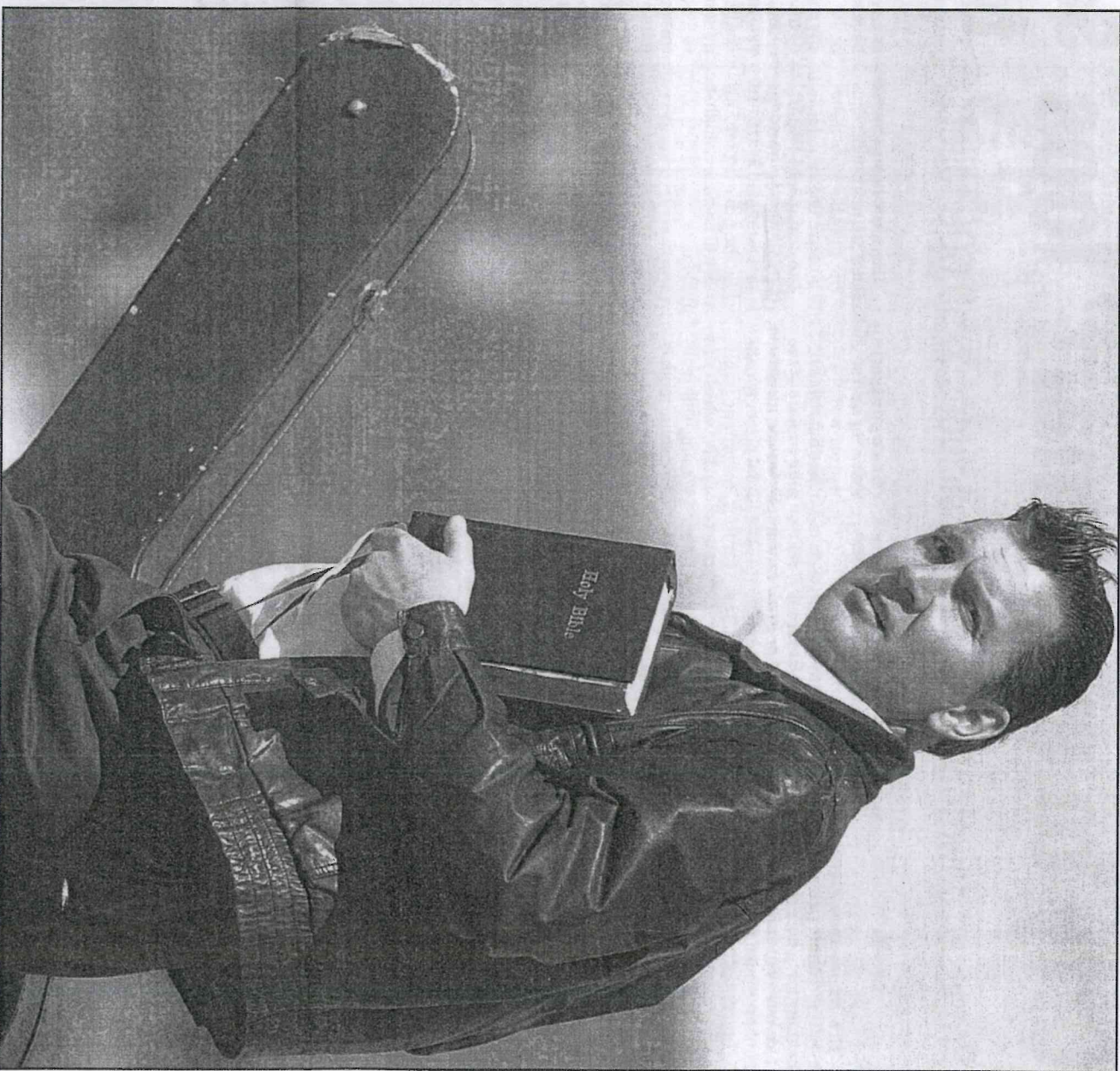
Sheasby, who's also an Elvis impersonator, said he went on stress leave in June 2006 after receiving harassing, anonymous e-mails telling him to quit. He quit six months later.

Rev. David Pollard, chair of the United Church of Canada Foothills Presbytery, denies the accusation of clergy abuse. "That's his perception of the situation," he said.

Pollard said there was friction between the presbytery and Sheasby because of a difference of opinion on church governance and growth.

Sheasby is seeking a severance package on the grounds he was given no choice but to resign his post. Pollard said the presbytery is reviewing Sheasby's request.

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DARREN MAKONICHUK/SUN MEDIA

Rev. Bruce Sheasby, who moonlights as an Elvis impersonator, says the United Church of Canada has bullied him and other ministers from their pulpits. The church denies Sheasby's allegations. Sheasby is seeking severance from the church.

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