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Orange District Court

Newbury Pastor Pleads Innocent To Molestation

BY ELLEN CRONIN, Staff Writer
Tuesday April 9, 2002

A Newbury pastor accused of molesting boys he had met through his church pleaded innocent Monday.

Joseph A. "Pastor Joe" Rinaldi, 60, is charged with five counts of lewd/lascivious conduct with a child. He faces up to 25 years in prison if convicted.

The charges cover a time period from 1993 to 1998 and involve three boys whose ages ranged from 10 to 15 at the time of the alleged abuse. An affidavit refers to other alleged victims, one as old as 19.

Rinaldi met the boys through the Newbury Bible Church, where he was pastor, and/or the Newbury Christian School, where he was principal.

The Associated Press reported Rinaldi resigned as pastor and principal late last year, amid the criminal investigation. Vermont state police arrested him in February.

The affidavit claims he had fondled the boys' genitals, and in one case convinced a boy to undress and get into bed with him.

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The counts filed against him allege assaults that happened in Newbury, but court records also claim molestation happening at a swimming pool in Barre and on a school trip to Washington, D.C.

The affidavit also claims Rinaldi confessed to a detective, giving the detective details about where and when he'd allegedly molested boys.

"I want to get it over with, take my punishment, go on with my life, Detective Sgt. Walter Goodell quotes Rinaldi as telling him.

"I've been in spiritual bondage to inappropriate behavior for most of my adult life, and it goes back to my childhood," Rinaldi also is quoted as allegedly having said.

All of the alleged molestations involved pre-teen or teen-aged boys; there are no accusations involving girls.

At one point during his alleged confession to police, Rinaldi supposedly described his state of mind during one of the incidents, this one involving a boy he and his wife babysat overnight in their home while the boy's mother worked the night shift.

"In my twisted mind at that time, I would think, Ôthere's nothing to this; I can get away with it," the affidavit alleges he said.

At the end of the police interview, Detective Goodell asked Rinaldi what he (Rinaldi) thought the state should do about the accusations.

"I understand fully that something has to be done," Rinaldi is quoted as allegedly having said. "I'm not well-versed in the law to know if I'm facing a fine or prison time. I haven't thought of that. I think I would handle jail time or whatever else comes down from this."

Rinaldi allegedly continued, "I don't want to hide behind my Christianity or my faith ... to receive anything less than what I should have."

The court released him on unsecured bond. He is forbidden to have unsupervised contact with any of the alleged victims and potential witnesses mentioned in court records. Also, he's not allowed to have unsupervised contact with children under age 16.

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