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Rodelo

Youth pastor sentenced in beating

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Tom LaVenture - The Garden Island | 3 comments


LIHUE — A youth pastor accused of beating a tenant for allegedly giving marijuana to his foster children was sentenced to 30 days jail, five years of felony probation and ordered to serve 400 hours of community service Wednesday in 5th Circuit Court.

James Rodelo, 50, of Anahola, said the past two years of going through the criminal justice process has helped him appreciate the needs and broken lives of people who go through the courts each day. He said he was also remorseful and regrets his actions, which the prosecutor said required the victim undergo reconstructive surgery.

"I regret doing this and I have learned my lesson about not taking matters into my own hands," Rodelo said in court.

Rodelo was a youth pastor at Christian Missionary Retreat in Anahola. He was allowing the victim, James Heron, 38, to stay in a trailer for six months at the youth camp he ran in Anahola prior to the incident in June 2011.

Attorney Michael Soong said Rodelo was trying to help Heron by providing him with a place to stay. Then Rodelo learned from his children that Heron was giving them marijuana and getting high with them.

Rodelo asked Heron to leave the rental when an argument followed, Soong added. The victim pulled a knife, the two wrestled, and a chase ensued throughout the neighborhood in which Heron became injured.

Soong asked for a deferred acceptance of the sentencing and public service work to serve as a deterrent for future crime. He said the circumstances of the case, the lack of a felony record and Rodelo's standing in the community did not justify incarceration.

"I don't believe that jail will do the community or Rodelo any good," Soong said.

County Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Shauna Lee Cahill said their description of events differ. This wasn't one punch that followed an emotional argument.

Heron, who was not present at the hearing, suffered serious bodily injury from a beating that included a knee to the face, Cahill said. The injuries required reconstructive surgery.

Rodelo was originally charged with first-degree burglary and first-degree assault. A conviction could have meant a 10-year prison sentence.

After the arraignment on May 1, 2012, Soong filed a motion to dismiss the indictment based on a claim of false testimony to the grand jury and preindictment delay. The motion was withdrawn after the prosecution amended the

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Cahill said the charges were mitigable and that the state agreed to reduce the charges and did not object to the motion for deferred acceptance of the no contest plea. She asked the court to sentence Rodelo to 30 days jail in part for the severity of the injuries.

Judge Kathleen Watanabe sentenced Rodelo to six months jail. She suspended all but 30 days for the duration of the five-year felony probation.

Watanabe granted the motion for deferred acceptance which will keep the conviction off Rodelo's permanent record upon successful completion of probation. The judge ordered the 400 hours of community service in part because of Rodelo's past in youth ministry.

Rodelo must also complete anger management and is prohibited from having further contact with Heron.

Watanabe inquired as to why the state was not requesting restitution with more than \$12,000 in medical bills stemming from Heron's injuries.

Cahill said the victim did not request restitution.

Soong noted the victim may be pursuing financial matters through a separate civil action.

Heron, represented by attorney Richard Gronna, filed a negligence and injury civil suit in May against Beachview Realty for Rodelo's actions as property manager. The Newport Beach, Calif., property management and vacation rental company operates in Hawaii under the name Favorite Family Rentals.

In the civil complaint, Heron claims that Rodelo was acting as the property manager when he agreed to a month-to-month tenancy on Feb. 1, 2011. He claims he woke and found Rodelo in his apartment and accused him of striking him in the face and abdomen and causing disfigurement and disability.

Rodelo either denies the allegations or says they lack sufficient information to admit or deny the claims.

The case is set to be heard by Chief Judge Randal Valenciano. No hearings are scheduled.

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