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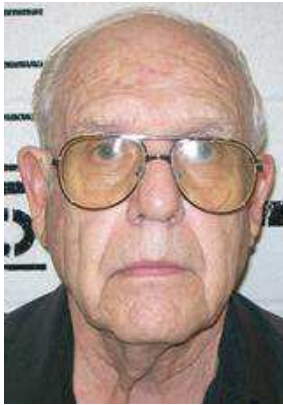
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February 4, 2014

[DA: Jehovah Witness Church concealed molestation crimes](#)

By Jeanne LeFlore [Staff Writer](#)

McALESTER — “The entire church body of the Jehovah Witness Church” allegedly concealed child molestation crimes alleged against a man identified as a former church elder, according to a motion filed in Pittsburg County District Court.

The motion was filed Jan. 28 by the District 18 District Attorneys office in connection with molestation charges against Ronald Lawrence, 76.

Ronald was an elder in the McAlester Jehovah Witness Church, according to McAlester Police Detective Sergeant Chris Morris.

“He is no longer an elder but he is still a member of the church,” Morris said.

According to the motion the State will present an offer of proof regarding concealment of the crime by Lawrence and the “entire church body, most especially the governing body of the Christian Congregation of Jehovah Witnesses.”

In November Lawrence was charged in Pittsburg County District Court with 19 felony counts, including 11 of lewd molestation, seven of forcible sodomy and one count of rape by instrumentation.

The alleged victims in the cases were two preteen girls and one 5-year-old boy at the time.

Lawrence was arrested by McAlester police after three people came forward late last year alleging they had

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been molested some 30 years ago, according to the McAlester Police.

An affidavit filed in the case alleges one female was molested from the time she was 8 until she was 13 years old.

A second female alleged she was molested by Lawrence between the ages of 10 and 13, and a male alleged he was molested at the age of 5.

Lawrence told police that “he admitted to his church that all of the allegations were true” so that he could be reinstated into the church after being “dis-fellowshipped,” the affidavit alleges.

The affidavit alleges Lawrence said he confessed to his church and he named four Jehovah Witness church elders who he said were aware of some of the incidents.

Lawrence told police he confessed to his church about the allegations including an incident with fourth child, a boy who told his parents that he was “sexually assaulted” by Lawrence in the janitors closet at First National Bank, the affidavit alleges.

In December Lawrence’s attorney Warren Gotcher filed a motion stating the charges should dismissed because the statute of limitations had expired.

In response the district attorney’s motion states that because the alleged crimes were not reported to law enforcement until 2013, the statute of limitations has not run out.

The motion alleged that the Jehovah Witness Church prevented the victims from coming forward.

“The actions of the church, their banishment of (Lawrence) on one or more occasion and the directives of the governing body toward the victims and their family members regarding these crimes were actions of “concealment” and further actions preventing the victims from reporting the crimes to law enforcement,” the motion alleges.

According to the motion, the State of Oklahoma is asking the court to overrule the defendants motion to dismiss and order the matter to proceed to preliminary hearing.

Lawrence was released from jail Nov. 24 after posting a \$50,000 bond. As a condition of his bond, he is not to have contact with the alleged victims in the case.

If convicted, he faces up to life in prison.

No one answered several calls to the Jehovah Witness Church and Lawrence could not be reached for comment.

A future court date had not been set by press-time today.

Contact Jeanne LeFlore at jlflore@mcalesternews.com.

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