


Thursday, November 28, 2013

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	Tulsa	Bartlesville	Jenks
	51st & Sheridan	Frank Phillips & Hwy 75	Elm & Creek Turnpike
	81st & Sheridan		Muskogee
	101st & Mingo	Broken Arrow	746 N York
	21st & Yale	81st & Aspen	Owasso
			129th & 86th

Jehovah's Witness church elder Ronald Lawrence arrested over sex abuse claims dating back to 1980s

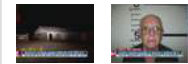
Tulsa, OK

49° Mostly cloudy Today's Forecast

• FORECAST: Highs back in the 50s!

Video

Photo



10pm church arrest



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Posted: 11/26/2013
Last Updated: 21 hours and 18 minutes ago

By: Tyler Dunn

MCALESTER, Okla. - A 76-year-old McAlester man was arrested Tuesday on 19 counts of sexual abuse after police received claims he molested several children while in a position of authority more than 30 years ago.

McAlester police detectives were alerted to the alleged sexual crimes conducted by Ronald Lawrence back in August when his first accuser reported abuse at the hands of a Jehovah's Witness church leader.

A woman now in her 40s told detectives Lawrence, an elder at McAlester's Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, abused her when she was just eight years old, inviting her to his home, where he fondled her and raped her in his bathtub, according to her testimony found in Lawrence's arrest warrant, which was issued Tuesday.

Two other accusers, also in their 40s, then came forward with similar stories of abuse. Both said they were very young, with one telling investigators the molestation took place from the time she was 10 until she was 13 years old. She reported being assaulted in Lawrence's swimming pool, at the lake and in the janitor's closet at the First National Bank where he worked, his arrest warrant indicates.

Detectives spoke with Lawrence shortly after, on Oct. 25. Lawrence initially denied any sexual contact with two of the three, but admitted to at least some form of inappropriate behavior with one of the alleged victims.

"They shouldn't have [happened]," Lawrence told detectives during a recorded interview. "I'm sure and [it] may have been on purpose, I touched her."

Lawrence also said he was "dis-fellowshipped" from the Kingdom Hall after two allegations from within that community came to light. Lawrence even named another allegation involving a boy in the First National Bank basement, according to the affidavits. He refused to speak with investigators.

But after the interview in which Lawrence denied the majority of allegations facing him, he called a McAlester detective, the document states, to say he had confessed to the Kingdom Hall in 2005 that the claims of abuse were true in order to be reinstated into it.

According to Lawrence's arrest warrant, the elder did not believe the Kingdom Hall ever elected to tell law enforcement of the potential crimes. If officials did, in fact, withhold that information from authorities, they too could be prosecuted.

We reached out to McAlester's Kingdom Hall Tuesday evening, but our efforts were unsuccessful.

The district attorney's office is now in the process of determining what laws Lawrence might have broken that were in place in the 1980s. McAlester detectives are also exploring the possibility of more victims.

McAlester law enforcement said Wednesday Lawrence had already bonded

out of jail.

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