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French Valley Jury Hears Different Portrayals of Minister Accused of Child Rape

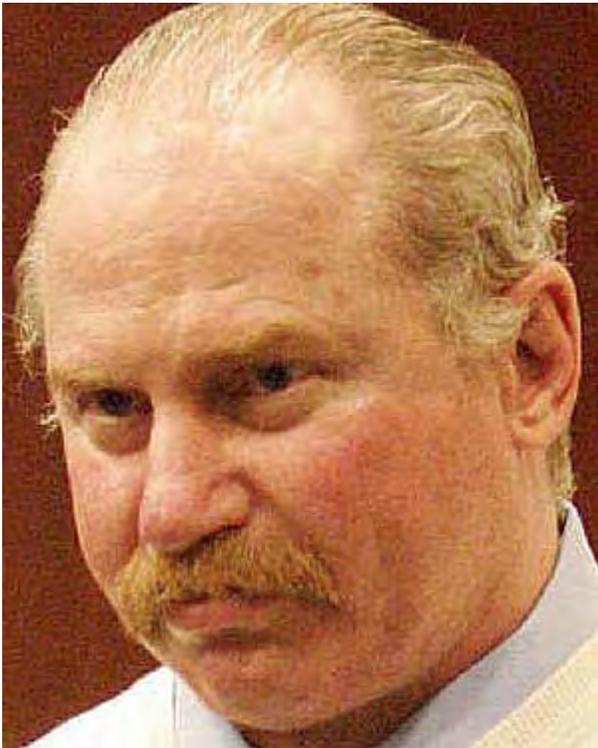
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A Menifee minister charged with raping his 9-year-old foster daughter is either the victim of false allegations or a man who preys on troubled, vulnerable children, attorneys told jurors Friday.

These different portrayals of Joseph Patrick Billock, an ordained minister with the Church of the Nazarene, emerged at the start of his trial on child rape charges.

"You are going to hear about a tragic betrayal of the awesome, humbling, trust and responsibility given to a foster parent," prosecutor Burke Strunsky told the jury.



Joseph Patrick Billock

In describing what happened to her, the girl provides details about sexual intercourse and Billock's body that a child her age could not fabricate, the prosecutor said.

However, in the same French Valley courtroom, defense attorney Michael Pancer said the child was exposed to sexually explicit movies and walked in on adults having sex.

He described his client as a man of faith who loves his wife and was devoted to helping children as a foster parent.

"There is no more horrific accusation, no more horrific nightmare that to find you have been charged with child molest, child rape, and to be innocent of the crimes," Pancer said. "Not only will we show he didn't rape . . . he could not have."

Billock, 51, faces 30 years to life in prison if convicted on two counts of aggravated child rape stemming from the girl's claims about what happened while living at the defendant's home in 2005.

The Press-Enterprise does not routinely publish the names of minors who could be victims of sexual abuse.

This is the second trial at the Southwest Justice Center this year for Billock. A separate jury in March was evenly split and unable to reach a verdict, resulting in a mistrial.

On Friday, Pancer told the jury that Billock and his wife, Wendy, who was in the courtroom, were devoted foster parents.

The couple became licensed foster parents in 2000, while living in San Diego County, by an agency that specialized in placing troubled children.

"False allegations happen in the foster care system. . . . It's a tough situation," Pancer said. However, Strunsky contends Billock relied on the fact that the girl in question and his other foster children were troubled.

"Mr. Billock thought he could get away with abusing them. . . . Because who would believe these children?" the prosecutor said. "Mr. Billock counted on that and the evidence will show that he counts on that now."

Five of the nine boys and girls placed with the Billock family between 2000 and 2005 will testify the defendant either molested them or tried to, Strunsky said.

Billock has not been charged with any crimes against the other foster children.

"What you are not going to see is any reasonable basis for them to accuse him," Strunsky said.

Pancer spelled out for the jury some of the many documented problems these foster children had before they came to live with the defendant.

Many have suffered past sexual abuse, including a young man expected to testify that Billock tried to touch him.

The boy has also been arrested for sexual battery and witness intimidation, Pancer said.

"Abuse goes on in homes without anyone ever knowing," the prosecutor said.

While the foster children have leveled accusations against Billock, Billock's defense attorney said no complaints were ever lodged against him when he worked as an associate pastor at a San Diego-area church.

"It's significant, where the complaints are coming from in this case," Pancer said.

The trial resumes Monday. Billock remains in custody at the Southwest Detention Center. Bail is set at \$1 million.

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