

Inside the Stacks

- ▶ [About Stacks](#)
- ▶ [Search tips](#)
- ▶ [Customer service](#)
- ▶ [Frequently asked questions](#)
- ▶ [Fees](#)
- ▶ [Terms & conditions](#)
- ▶ [New Search](#)

- ▶ [Stacks tracker](#)
- ▶ [Track your topics](#)

Stories/Photos

- ▶ [What's not in the Stacks](#)
- ▶ [Before there was Stacks](#)
- ▶ [Photo reprints](#)

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- ▶ [Gifts and guides](#)
- ▶ [Posters, books, collectibles](#)
- ▶ [Pictures, page reprints](#)

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- ▶ [Research services](#)
- ▶ [Reprint permission](#)
- ▶ [Publicity reprints](#)
- ▶ [Obituary help](#)
- ▶ [Extranet: Your Web Guide](#)

Options:

[go to best part](#) | [printer format](#) | [results list](#) | [start a new search](#)

Griffin minister held on molestation charge

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GRIFFIN, Ga. - The leader of a fundamentalist church remained behind bars on child molestation charges Wednesday, the eve of a court hearing on allegations by church officials that law enforcement officers searched the "world headquarters" of the denomination without a warrant.

The Rev. Norman LeGallienne, 47, general overseer of the Union Gospel Holiness Church of God, which claims 1,000 affiliate churches nationwide, was arrested at a revival meeting April 12 and charged with child molestation and aggravated sodomy. He has been unable thus far to post a \$17,600 bond.

The fact that the minister is accused of **molesting**▶ the 8-year-old son of an ex-girlfriend and that the crime is alleged to have taken place more than three years ago has prompted charges by LeGallienne that the woman is "on a vengeance trip."

The Rev. David Carnrike, who is charge of the church while LeGallienne is in jail, complained that officers broke up a revival meeting to arrest LeGallienne and that they unlawfully searched the church and adjoining living quarters without a warrant.

A hearing on the church's allegations that the search was unlawful and improper has been scheduled Thursday in Spalding County Superior Court.

Jimmy Jordan, an investigator with the Spalding Sheriff's Department, said deputies had a warrant to enter the church when they arrested LeGallienne. A week earlier, deputies entered the church with the permission of a man who lived in the adjoining living quarters, he said.

Molestation charges often take several years to surface, said Jordan.

The alleged victim's mother and her son moved in with LeGallienne after meeting him at a Union Gospel Holiness revival in Arizona, the minister said in a telephone interview last week.

"It had been suspected since the mother and child left (LeGallienne's residence) that some molestation had taken place," said Jordan. "But the child had suffered some real mental and behavioral problems. They thought he had learning

disabilities and were working with the child. It finally came forward and this was apparently the child's trouble."

But LeGallienne contends that the molestation charge stems from nothing other than the fact that he refused to marry the mother. "She's on a vengeance trip," said LeGallienne. "I never touched that boy."

LeGallienne has also been engaged in a long-running battle with the Spalding County Department of Family and Children Services.

A week before LeGallienne's arrest on the child molestation charges, deputy sheriffs and DFCS representatives came to the church and took twin 14-year-old boys into custody who had been living with the minister for almost a year.

Last week, the DFCS successfully petitioned the Juvenile Court of Spalding County for temporary state custody of the twin boys, contending that the youths were "without proper parental care, control, subsistence or education."

According to the DFCS custody petition, LeGallienne, who has been separated from his wife for nine years, was "deliberately" keeping the twins and other boys in his care out of school, claiming to be teaching them himself through a correspondence course. The twins had not been in school since the fourth grade, the petition states. LeGallienne himself never completed the 11th grade.

Conditions were unclean at the church living quarters where the twins were staying, according to the petition.

Once before, in May 1983, DFCS removed the twins from LeGallienne's home and warned the minister not to renew contact with the children. The mother was also warned to keep the children away from LeGallienne.

Nevertheless, in May 1984, the mother, who still contends that LeGallienne provided excellent care, returned the boys to his custody.

"I'm a free person in the U.S.A., and I just thought they didn't have a right to tell me that," she said. "He's a decent man. He's respectable. You can trust him."

When authorities went to the church on April 5 to take the boys, LeGallienne was arrested and charged with giving false information to law enforcement officers after he allegedly gave the wrong names when asked to identify the youths. He was released on bond in that instance.

Local DFCS officials refused to comment on the case.

But friends and supporters of LeGallienne say he is not guilty of molestation or abuse.

Robert Presley, 23, who moved in with LeGallienne some five years ago after experiencing family problems in Marietta, disputes the DFCS accusations and believes the **preacher** provided excellent care for those who lived with him.

"He helped me out in ways my real daddy wouldn't," said Presley. "He bought me clothes. He taught me the Bible."

LeGallienne, who sports a bumper sticker on his car reading, "Get Government Off the Back of Religion," is primarily concerned now with getting out of jail. But he fears his church work will suffer regardless of the outcome of the charges.

"It's ruining me and it's ruining my reputation," he said. "I'm sick and I'm tired and I just want to get out."



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