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Sex Offender and Sex Crime News

Minister not registered as sex offender gets 2 years
 2001-06-01 The Ledger

BARTOW -- Accompanied by family and parishioners, a Baptist preacher was sentenced Thursday to a two-year prison term for failing to register as a sex offender.

Circuit Judge Randall McDonald upheld a plea agreement reached in March between the Rev. Kenneth Baxley, pastor of Central Baptist Community Ministries in Lakeland, and the State Attorney's Office.

Because Baxley, 36, faces new charges, he temporarily will serve time at the Polk County Jail Annex in Bartow rather than state prison, which was part of his plea agreement.

While Baxley was awaiting sentencing for the failure-to-register charge Thursday, prosecutors filed additional charges of sexual activity with a child in familial custody, a first-degree felony. Each of the five counts carries a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison.

Those charges stem from accusations made by a 17-year-old girl who lived for several months with Baxley and his wife, Amanda. The teen-ager told sheriff's investigators that she had showers and three-way sexual relations with the couple.

Baxley admitted to investigators that he massaged the girl and that he had washed her and his wife in a shower, according to court records.

A pretrial conference on those charges is scheduled for July 13.

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Current Poll

Which choice best reflects how you would react if your adult child was arrested for a sex offense involving a minor?

Do anything you can to support your son/daughter, even if you have doubts about his/her innocence.

Do anything you can to support your son/daughter, but only if you are confident he/she is innocent.

Do anything you can to support your son/daughter, even if you are confident he/she is guilty.

Offer no support, including no assistance with bail.

Break off contact with your son/daughter completely.

Not sure.

None of the above.

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The failure-to-register charge originated with a crime committed by Baxley in 1983 but confessed to seven years later. He served 15 months in prison for attempted sexual battery on a child younger than 12.

Baxley has served several churches in various capacities in the Lakeland area since his release.

He was arrested in May 2000 for failing to register his address as a sex offender.

Minutes before Thursday's sentencing hearing, Baxley and nearly a dozen of his supporters, including his wife, held hands and prayed outside a ninth-floor courtroom.

After he was sentenced, Baxley took off his necktie, wristwatch and jewelry, handed them to his attorney, John Kirkland, and from a distance whispered to his supporters: "I love you. Visit me."

Amanda Baxley said she held out hope that her husband would somehow receive a reduced sentence. "We prayed for a miracle, and we were definitely open to whatever God saw fit," she said.

Amanda Baxley said she has faith that the new charges facing her husband will be dismissed for lack of evidence. Meanwhile, she said, she'll visit her husband often and pray. "I have faith that the Lord will see fit to

have us freed from those charges."

Judge McDonald denied several motions Thursday by Baxley's attorney, including one to postpone sentencing so he could prepare a defense against the five counts of sexual activity.

For Kirkland's convenience, McDonald did agree to let Baxley stay in the jail annex rather than the county jail in Frostproof.

Assistant State Attorney Tracie Spoto objected to Kirkland's motions, saying that Baxley showed a blatant disregard of the law by not registering his address and that he is a danger to children.

Before sentencing, Baxley addressed McDonald, saying that he has repented his old ways, which may

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be connected to abuse he suffered as a child.

"I have lived a lifestyle in the last 18 years that does not reflect any of the (new) allegations," he said. "If you choose today to send me to prison for two years, I will respect that."

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