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Norwalk pastor arrested for sexual assault

Thursday, September 19, 2013

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SANTA FE SPRINGS, Calif. -- An associate pastor in Norwalk has been arrested for allegedly preying on at least 20 female parishioners over an eight-year period. Investigators say he used their illegal status in the U.S. to cower them into silence.

Detectives received information in April that Jorge Juan Castro had sexually assaulted women from Las Buenas Nuevas Church from October 2004 to September 2012. Castro was an associate pastor and a counselor at the church.

Authorities say the women, ages 18 to 39, implicated the suspect to a third party, and that person contacted sheriff's deputies. Many of the alleged victims are Spanish-speaking undocumented immigrants, and Castro allegedly told the women that if they reported him, he would have them deported. Only four women have come forward to give interviews to detectives.

"From what we understand, some of the victims went to him for counseling for various reasons, and during that counseling session, he would perform certain acts with them in the name of God, telling them that the acts that he's performing would help them in their problems, whatever they are having, and would sexually molest them," said Sgt. Al Garcia of the L.A. County Sheriff's Department. "He took advantage of his position as a pastor."

Castro, a 53-year-old Norwalk resident, was arrested on Sept. 13 and booked on an arrest warrant for six felony charges of rape, oral copulation and penetration by a foreign object. He remains in custody, with bail set at \$2 million.

Carmen Pichardo, a former church member and Castro's friend, said she is stunned by the allegations.

"I took counseling with him for over two years and I can really state that he never ever did anything to me," said Pichardo. "When I was going through the worst time in my life...he and his family were there for me."

Castro's neighbors say he lives with his wife and four children. They say he kept to himself and was not very outgoing.

"I've never been able to get friendly with him. He's been here maybe three years, maybe four years, and I have just never been able to get friendly," said neighbor Mary Langiewicz.

Investigators say Castro was also an associate pastor at a church in Riverside County, but there are no known victims there. He moved to the Los Angeles area from Argentina in 2004.

Anyone with information is urged to call the L.A. County Sheriff's Special Victims Bureau at (877) 710-5273.

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