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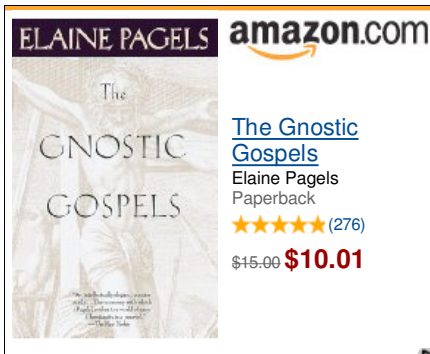
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## Police Charge Minister In Child-sex Case

June 27, 2001 | By Nancy L. OthM-sn Staff Writer

DELRAY BEACH — A Baptist minister was charged Monday with having a three-year sexual relationship with a Lauderdale girl that began when she was 12 years old, police said.

Lyndon Howell, 36, associate pastor of Delray Community Missionary Baptist Church, remained in the Palm Beach County Jail on Tuesday night on \$25,000 bond.



The girl, now 15, told police the relationship began when she called Howell while planning to run away from home. The two met at the church on Southwest Fifth Avenue, and Howell struck up a friendship with the girl's family.

Howell, who has children, would take the girl and her sisters on outings that included trips to the park and movies, police said. At one point, Howell began giving the girl money and occasionally buying items for her.

Howell and the girl had sex at her house, his mother's Delray Beach home and a Fort Lauderdale hotel starting when she was 12 years old and continuing until last November, according to an arrest affidavit.

Howell told the girl he loved her at one point, police said.

The girl told police that she informed Howell last fall that she was pregnant, but he denied being the father. The girl recently gave birth, according to reports.

For three years, Howell and the teenager made arrangements to see each other, including at least one time when the girl skipped school, according to his arrest affidavit.

The closeness that Howell and the girl exhibited apparently prompted concern from her parents and church members, police said.

The Rev. Albert Moore asked Howell about his relationship with the girl, but Howell would not confirm or deny a sexual relationship. Moore could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

After hearing a rumor that the girl was pregnant, Moore again confronted Howell but was reassured, according to police reports.

The girl's father told police that Howell called his home several times to speak to his daughter. The father reportedly warned Howell not to call or have any contact with his daughter, police said.

Shortly afterward, Howell reportedly spoke in vague terms to church members about doing something wrong and asked for their forgiveness.

During the investigation by Delray Beach police, Detective Veronica Covington tried to speak with Howell about the allegations several times.

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He reportedly agreed to go to the Police Department for an interview but never showed up.

Delray Beach Police Officer Jeff Messer declined to comment on the case because it is part of an ongoing investigation, and additional charges may be pending.

Howell faces charges of sexual battery upon a child, contributing to the delinquency of a child, and lewd and lascivious acts upon a child.

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