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Raymond man alleges he was molested as a teen

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RAYMOND — A 20-year-old man who alleges a Raymond youth pastor molested him when he was 14 has told authorities that the church member often came to his house to punish him with a wooden cutting board and paddle, a police affidavit said.

In an interview with Raymond police Tuesday, the alleged victim said that during his early teens, he and his mother were “having trouble getting along” and that Michael L. Cranford frequently visited his home to discipline him.

“The punishment often included Michael spanking (the teenager) with a wooded cutting board, then a rowing paddle,” the affidavit said.

The Raymond man told police that he was first introduced to Cranford when he was in his early teens. At that time, Cranford was a member of the New Life Assembly of God church, where the boy’s mother worshipped.

The 37-year-old Cranford, a convicted sex offender, was charged by Raymond police Thursday with one misdemeanor count of sexual assault for allegedly molesting the then-14-year-old boy between January 1995 and December 1996. The charge came two days after Candia police charged Cranford with sexually assaulting another boy, also 14, at the time, sometime between September 1996 and June 1997.

The two alleged victims, who police said are related, reported the assaults to Raymond and Candia authorities within the last two weeks. Cranford, formerly of Candia, has admitted that he assaulted the teenager in the Candia case, a police affidavit said.

Cranford was arraigned yesterday on the Raymond charge in Auburn District Court. He remains held at the Rockingham County jail in lieu of \$100,000 cash bail.

While he attended the church when the alleged assaults occurred, Cranford did not become a part-time youth pastor until 1998, the church’s senior pastor, Kenneth Bosse, said yesterday. Cranford was hired as a full-time youth pastor in February 2001.

During an interview with Raymond Sgt. Shawn J. Coope, the alleged victim in the Raymond case said he was assaulted when Cranford was called to his house after he

and his mother had a fight, an affidavit said. After Cranford arrived, the boy's mother left the home and he locked himself in his bedroom, he told police.

According to the affidavit, Cranford eventually forced his way into the bedroom and pushed the boy onto the bed. Cranford then allegedly got on top of the boy, pinned him down, and performed a sexual act, the affidavit said.

After the incident, the alleged victim told police that he ran from the house and hid in a barn until Cranford left.

According to police, the investigation into Cranford began when the alleged Raymond victim told Raymond School Resource Officer James Tomilson on Jan. 15 that he had been sexually assaulted as a child. The report was made five days after the alleged victim in the Candia case, who is now 19, called police to report that Cranford had molested him.

In a police interview Jan. 22, Cranford told investigators that he was "put in charge of disciplining" the Raymond teenager by his mother. Cranford acknowledged that the punishment included spanking the boy with a paddle, police said. While Cranford denied he had any sexual contact with the boy, he admitted to police that he used a paddle to spank the boy on several occasions while the boy's mother was not home.

During that same police interview, Cranford admitted to having sexual contact on several occasions with the alleged victim in the Candia case, a police affidavit said.

Cranford is a convicted sex offender and has been registered with the Candia Police Department since moving to Candia in 1993, police said. In 1991, he was convicted of sexually assaulting a child while serving as an associate pastor at a church in Groton, Mass., police said.

Cranford was also a Candia firefighter and the chaplain for the fire department, but resigned Jan. 20.

Despite being a registered sex offender, Cranford was hired as an associate youth pastor and the music minister at the New Life Assembly of God church. The church dismissed him after the recent charges.

Cranford told a judge at his arraignment on the Candia charges that he planned to move to Texas to enroll in a program to help him deal with his "problems."

Bosse, the church's pastor, called Cranford's alleged behavior "unacceptable in church and society."

"We here at New Life Assembly are devastated by the recent events. Everyone here at the church had been really fond of Michael Cranford. Now everyone is in a state of shock. . . . Our hearts go out to the victims and their families," Bosse said in a statement. "Our prayers are that they will be able to move on from here and receive the healing that they will need to have fine lives. The church continues to offer the victims any support that they need."

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