

San Bernardino pastor arrested on suspicion of child molestation

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SAN BERNARDINO >> The pastor of the Muscoy United Methodist Church was arrested Thursday on suspicion of child molestation involving boys who at one time attended the church, San Bernardino County Sheriff's detectives said Friday.

Stephen James Howard, 54, of Fontana was arrested after being questioned by detectives, according to jail records.

Last week deputies investigated reports that Howard allegedly had been molesting boys at several locations, including San Bernardino, Rancho Cucamonga and Fontana, sheriff's officials said.

On Monday the sheriff's Crimes against Children unit took over the investigation and found two victims, a 14-year-old boy and a 23-year-old man, both from Rancho Cucamonga, who had been allegedly sexually abused by the pastor for years, sheriff's officials said.

The older victim said his abuse began when he was 9 years old and continued into adulthood, authorities added.

Both victims told detectives that Howard was sexually abusing them in exchange for money.

Bishop Minerva G. Carcano, Los Angeles Area resident bishop of the church, issued the following statement Saturday in response to Howard's arrest.

"It has come to my attention that Stephen J. Howard, pastor appointed to Muscoy United Methodist Church, has been arrested on suspicion of child molestation.

"I have reached out to his family and am working with our East District Superintendent, Rev. Bau Dang, to reach out to our Muscoy congregation.

"I am deeply grieved by this sad situation and earnestly ask for your prayers for all who are affected. As United Methodists we stand firmly against child abuse, sexual abuse, and sexual misconduct. We also believe in justice for all and will await the determinations of the legal system," Carcano said

Howard was booked into the Central Detention Center in San Bernardino for suspicion of lewd acts with a child under 14, oral copulation with a person under 18, and sodomy with a person under 18. He is being held in lieu of \$250,000 bail and transferred to West Valley Detention Center in Rancho Cucamonga.

Howard has been the lead pastor at the Muscoy United Methodist Church since 2001 and also was the youth director at a United Methodist Church in Ontario from 1989 to 2001, sheriff's officials said.

Anyone with information about this case is asked to call Detective Jennifer Wood at 909-387-3615.

Callers wishing to remain anonymous are asked to call the We-tip Hotline at 1-800-78-CRIME (27463) or you may leave information on the website at www.wetip.com.

URL:

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