

Teacher-pastor arrested on child porn charges

JOSH DOOLEY 9:59 p.m. CDT June 23, 2014



(Photo: Izard County Sheriff's Office)

MELBOURNE – A former fourth-grade teacher at Izard County Consolidated School District, who also served as a pastor at Franklin Baptist Church for many years, has been charged on 24 child pornography counts, according to Izard County Sheriff Tate Lawrence.

Robert Jackson Norton, 52, was arrested after an investigation in which the Izard County Sheriff's Office assisted the Arkansas State Police, the lead agency in the case, according to Lawrence. Authorities say Norton downloaded child pornography on his home computer.

Norton, of Sage, is being held in the Izard County jail in lieu of a \$240,000 bond, according to Lawrence. Were he to be convicted on all charges, Norton could be sentenced to spend up to 240 years in prison and be fined up to \$240,000.

Jackson resigned his positions as a teacher and a pastor, according to Lawrence.

While the investigation is continuing, Lawrence said there is no evidence Norton had any physical contact with the children depicted in the photographs authorities seized. Additional charges are a possibility as the investigation moves forward, Lawrence said.

On Thursday, the day before he was arrested, Norton went to Izard County Elementary School and turned in his resignation. Norton's resignation letter did not mention a reason for his leaving the district, according to Superintendent Fred Walker.

Norton had taught at the district for two years. He had a provisional teaching license as he worked on a master's degree in teaching, which he eventually received, according to Walker.

"He was a preacher at Franklin Baptist church for years and years. He had an impeccable reputation. He is Tate Lawrence's brother-in-law — the sheriff's brother-in-law even. I couldn't have been more shocked," Walker told *The Bulletin*. "It's one of those deals where it's a person you'd least expect it of. He's not been found guilty, I'm not saying that, it's just hard to believe."

Walker said he did not find out about the charges against Norton until someone told him about seeing the story on a newspaper website.

"I didn't know why he resigned," Walker. "I didn't understand why he didn't come up and tell me instead of handing it in at the elementary school."

Norton resigned as a pastor at his church, according to Lawrence.

As for the safety of children in the ICCSD, Walker said, investigators have told him the charges are not related to any children who have or are attending the district's schools.

Walker noted the district has a full-time deputy who works in the district's schools and said the district does and will cooperate with law enforcement to ensure the safety of students and staff.

"It's just a tragic situation, a shocking situation," Walker said. "I hate it for the district, for the community, and the people he was a pastor for. That's a church that has done a lot of good things. It's just a tragic situation."

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