



Petaluma rabbi taken off pulpit amid child molestation charges

BY ADMIN | DECEMBER 20, 1996

A Petaluma rabbi charged with molesting a 12-year-old girl in his synagogue has been relieved of his pulpit "until further notice."

The Petaluma Police Department arrested Rabbi Sidney Isaac Goldenberg, 58, of Congregation B'nai Israel, at his Tulare Street home Monday on one felony count of lewd acts with a child, and two misdemeanor counts of annoying a child.

According to Sgt. Mike Kerns, the girl told a public school counselor about incidents that allegedly occurred with the rabbi at the synagogue over a four-month period between September and December while she was receiving religious instruction. The counselor turned the information over to the police.

Goldenberg was released from Sonoma County Jail in Santa Rosa Tuesday after posting a portion of \$100,000 bail. Police did not divulge the amount, but generally defendants pay 10 percent of the bail.

Police investigating the case say they have not found any evidence so far of other molestation complaints involving the rabbi.

Detectives have "talked to a couple of other students at the synagogue who have taken classes. At this point in time, there are no other victims," Kerns says.

The rabbi, who Kerns said has no criminal record, is scheduled to be arraigned Dec. 30 in Santa Rosa Municipal Court.

The arrest warrant alleges the girl was preparing for her bat mitzvah when the rabbi took her to his office. There, he allegedly made lewd remarks, touched her breasts

and requested that she put her hands into his pants pockets.

Sonoma County District Attorney Michael Mullins said Wednesday the police have compiled other evidence, but he would not discuss it.

Deputy District Attorney Gary Medvigy, who is prosecuting the case, has said the girl's school performance suddenly plummeted as a result of incidents with the rabbi. He was not available for further comment.

Goldenberg, who has two children in their 20s, moved to California this summer to head B'nai Israel, a Conservative congregation of nearly 100 families.

Originally from New York, he became a rabbi just over four years ago after running a small computer business. Goldenberg, who is from an Orthodox background, was ordained at the Tifereth Yisrael Rabbinical Yeshiva of Long Island, in Sayville, N.Y.

According to Rabbi Jeffrey Wartenberg, head of the yeshiva, there were no untoward incidents involving Goldenberg, whom he called "an excellent student and a wonderful person."

Here in the Bay Area, Goldenberg never became a member of the Board of Rabbis of Northern California, according to Director Rabbi H. David Teitelbaum.

"This is the first time I've heard his name. I don't know who he is," said Teitelbaum.

"I was very sad and distressed to hear this [news]. I'm certainly concerned that a rabbi has been charged with this kind of crime."

B'nai Israel's board met Sunday and took the rabbi off his pulpit amid the allegations against him.

The board decided "it would be in the best interest of the congregation and the rabbi for him to cease performing any functions on behalf of the congregation until further notice," according to the board president, Regina Wilson Seppa.

"He's not acting in any official capacity at this point."

Members of the congregation are now leading the twice-weekly minyans and Shabbat services, which will continue, she said.

"People have normal response reactions to this kind of news. That's what people here are going through," said Seppa, who declined to comment further.

Goldenberg did not return calls from the Bulletin. His lawyer could not be reached for comment.

Convictions for lewd acts against a child carry sentences ranging from three to eight years in state prison. Annoying a child is a misdemeanor that carries a penalty of up to one year in county jail or a \$1,000 fine.

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