

# Woman: Priest exposed self

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SANTA CRUZ — A woman who volunteered for the Greek Orthodox Church testified Wednesday that Father John Karastamatis exposed himself to her while parked in his car on a quiet dirt road near Aptos less than two weeks before his murder.

The woman said she had been helping Father John that day when he asked her to accompany him to Aptos, where he intended to buy property.

She said the priest told her dirty jokes and asked her personal questions along the way. Finally, she said, the priest stopped his Lincoln towncar on a dirt road, got out and walked over to a grove of trees. The woman said she followed, but went back to the car when Father John made her uncomfortable with his remarks.

She said he asked her if she didn't see him as a man. "I said 'You're my priest,'" the woman replied. Then, she said, she went back and got in the car.

When father John returned, she said, his pants were unzipped and he was exposing himself to her. She said he got in the car and sat next to her. "He tried to embrace me and said, 'Oh, come on, relax,'" the woman testified.

When the woman objected, the priest zipped up his pants. "He tried to be apologetic, like he was trying to instill in my mind that nothing had happened."

She said he used a Greek expression, which she translated to mean "Without having gained anything I'll probably be accused of something."

The woman testified Wednesday at the preliminary hearing for Edward Bowman, the man accused of bludgeoning and stabbing Father John.

She was summoned to testify by Public Defender Jerry Christensen, who represents Bowman. Bowman's wife, Anna, also worked at the church. She committed suicide as police arrived at her house for questioning. Christensen has inferred that because Father John allegedly made advances toward other volunteers, he made advances toward Anna Bowman.

The woman said the priest previously had made remarks that she felt were inappropriate and she had stayed away from the church.

But she returned to doing volunteer work after her boyfriend asked the priest to help him with a visa.

"Even though Father John made you nervous you still placed yourself back in that situation?" asked District Attorney Art Danner on cross-examination. The woman said,

"yes," and explained, "I made up my mind what he did was not proper for a priest, but I felt I could keep him at a distance." She also said that after Father John exposed himself to her, she had dinner with him and his wife one evening.

She said she was not attracted to Father John in any way. "He was as old as my father," she said.

Danner asked her why she did not tell police for several months about the priest having exposed himself to her. She said she wanted to help, "but at that point I felt what happened to me had nothing to do with his murder."

The woman told Danner that the incident occurred when her boyfriend was visiting Greece. She said she planned to complain to the bishop about the priest's behavior once her boyfriend returned.

She said she did not tell the local church council. "If you knew the reaction of the church people — you can see it here (in the courtroom) — they wouldn't believe it," she said. She said she thought the bishop would investigate.

Numerous parishioners were in church again to hear the sexual testimony they say they don't believe.

Also in court Wednesday was Father John's daughter, Maria. She said she had "no comment" on the testimony.

Others said they are angry that Father John — the victim — is suddenly the defendant in this case. They said they could pack the courtroom with parishioners who would refute the testimony.

The testimony was the third by women church volunteers of behavior they thought inappropriate by the priest.

Christensen has called them to testify to support his contention that Father John was killed in a crime of passion rather than during a burglary as Danner has charged.

One more woman — known as the mystery witness — is scheduled to testify this afternoon. She has become known as the mystery witness because the discovery of her information led to an abrupt delay in the preliminary hearing last week and neither Danner or Christiansen would say who she was or what her testimony would be.

The hearing, which began Aug. 12 and is now the longest in memory, possibly could conclude today.

Municipal Court Judge Richard Kessell will decide whether the evidence is sufficient to order Bowman to stand trial in Superior Court.

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — The name of the witness is not included in the story. The Sentinel has a policy of withholding names in many sex-related cases.