

Priest's killer set for parole hearing

Former parishioner serving sentence for 1985 slaying

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The man sent to prison for the brutal murder of a priest in a downtown Santa Cruz church is up for parole in August.

That has family, friends and colleagues of Greek Orthodox priest John Karastamatis lobbying to keep Edward Bowman locked up.

Authorities described the 1985 bludgeoning and stabbing of Karastamatis and subsequent three-year investigation and trial a "real, real murder mystery."

Karastamatis, 47 when he was killed, was well-liked by parishioners of the Prophet Elias church and honored by colleagues.

Bowman, 54, himself a former parishioner, was cast as the conspirator and pleaded no con-

test to the murder charge in 1988. In exchange for his plea, then-District Attorney Art Danner agreed not to seek the death penalty by dropping allegations that the murder was committed during the commission of a burglary.

Bowman, of Santa Cruz, was sentenced to 25 years to life in state prison and is eligible for parole in August. Authorities doubt Bowman will be released, saying the political climate in the state is not to release murderers. The time and place of the hearing has not been announced.

Also urging the state parole board to deny Bowman's request is the Greek Orthodox bishop of the diocese of San Francisco, which oversees churches in seven states.

Bishop Metropolitan Anthony, in a letter to clergy and other churches, urged support for the Karastamatis family's efforts to "ensure that this violent killer never again walks among us."

Paul Sandas, long-time member of Prophet Elias church, said parishioners have been filling out petitions for a month.

"As Christians we are taught to forgive, and

there are many who have made peace, but there are people who don't want a fellow like that (Bowman) to be walking the streets," he said.

Sandas said it's odd that a man who so brutally murdered a priest in a church is allowed to have a parole hearing after only 13 years in prison.

Ron Truhitte was the Santa Cruz police detective who was on the case in 1985. Now an inspector for the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office, Truhitte said the murder rises above most he's handled because of its brutality and many twists and turns.

"It was a real, real murder mystery and if you were to write a book, you could not include as many different dark alleys, leads that led nowhere and suspicions as this case had," Truhitte said. "But all the time the ones who did it were right there in front of us."

It took detectives seven months to arrest Bowman although his and his wife's names were brought up after the murder.

Bowman's wife, Anna, served as Karastamatis' voluntary secretary.

While interviewing Edward Bowman, oth-

er detectives went to Anna's home to talk to her. When they knocked, she shot at officers through the door and later that night fatally shot herself.

Seven months earlier, authorities said the couple was robbing the church offices when Karastamatis caught them in the act. A struggle ensued, and the priest was stabbed several times and beaten to death with a fish whacker, a club-like object used by fisherman.

Before pleading no contest, however, Bowman said he killed the priest because he made sexual advances toward his wife. His defense also included the fact that at a preliminary hearing other women testified that the priest exposed himself to one and forced another to perform a sexual act.

Truhitte said he doesn't believe Bowman should be released.

"It has to do with the severity of the crime," Truhitte said. "They didn't just murder this man, they butchered him."

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