

Woman feared priest's company

By MARK BERGSTROM

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — "Be careful, Father."

That's what a parishioner testified she told Greek Orthodox priest John Karastamatis after he sat down beside her, told her she was pretty

and he was lonely.

She said he told her he was a priest, but a man, too.

The woman said she walked out of the priest's living quarters above the Prophet Elias Church.

She testified she had gone to the church to do some work for Father John and he invited her upstairs for coffee and a glass of Ouzo. The priest's wife was visiting Greece at the time.

Public Defender Jerry Christensen led the woman through most of the questioning Thursday afternoon at a preliminary hearing for Edward Bowman, who is suspected of murdering the priest last year.

She said she did not drink the Ouzo because she thought it might have something in it like she'd seen on soap operas.

After that incident, the woman said she stayed away from the church for a while. And when she returned she kept her distance from the priest.

The parishioner said she was nervous being in court and frequently said she couldn't remember facts. She also told Judge Richard Kessell, who is conducting the hearing, that she has trouble with the English language.

It was difficult to distinguish between her reluctance to answer questions and her misunderstanding of many questions.

Under questioning by District Attorney Art Danner, the woman said she did not believe the incident to be a sexual advance by Father John. And, she said, it would be a lie for someone to say it was.

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Father John

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Danner objected to the calling of the woman as a witness, saying her testimony was irrelevant.

Danner argued that Kessell had refused to allow testimony earlier in the hearing about a previous burglary of a minister's house to support the prosecution's contention that the priest was killed when he interrupted Bowman and Bowman's wife, Anna, in the middle of a burglary at the church.

Christensen has insinuated the

murder was a crime of passion. He said the testimony would be relevant because both that woman and Anna Bowman were volunteers at the church. "It's a key point in this case," Christensen argued.

Danner said the testimony would be relevant only if Bowman takes the stand and says he killed the priest in a crime of passion.

Before the parishoner took the stand, Christensen argued that another witness is expected to testify that the woman told her a

substantially stronger story.

Christensen said a future witness is expected to say the woman told her Father John was clad in boxer-type shorts and chased her around the coffee table "in an excited sexual state."

The hearing enters its eighth week Monday afternoon.

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.