

Human rights group banishes minister for making anti-gay remarks on show

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO — A Baptist minister was removed from the city's Human Rights Commission on Monday after saying homosexuals were an abomination and noting that the Bible says gay men should be stoned to death.

Mayor Frank Jordan ordered the Rev. Eugene Lumpkin of Ebenezer Baptist Church off the commission. He had asked him to resign last week but Lumpkin refused.

Weeks ago, Lumpkin told a San Francisco Chronicle reporter that he agrees with statements in the Bible that male homosexuality is

an abomination against God.

Jordan refused to remove him from the commission, citing religious freedom concerns and what he said was Lumpkin's previously unblemished record on the panel.

On Friday, Lumpkin told a television talk show he believes everything in the Bible. When asked whether he agreed with a Book of Leviticus passage that calls for stoning to death men who have sex with other men, he said, "That's what it says... That's what God says... That's what the Bible says."

"Prior to Friday, the mayor said he would defend (Rev. Lumpkin) up to the Supreme Court," said Noah Griffin, a spokesman for Jordan.

The mayor "could not justify someone being on the Human Rights Commission who justifies violence, whether based upon biblical passages or otherwise," Griffin said.

Lumpkin said his comments were taken out of context and that he did not call for killing homosexuals but only agreed with the talk show host that the Bible advocates such punishment.

Lumpkin's attorney, Brad Dacus said the minister's removal violated his Constitutional right to freedom of religion. He wouldn't say if Lumpkin planned to sue to get his job back.

The 11-member commission's duties include handling reports of discrimination and hate crimes.

Jury selection begins in racial torching case

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — Prospective jurors in the trial of two men accused of setting a tourist ablaze said they had heard little about the incident other than that a black man had been set afire in Tampa.

Jury selection began Monday for Mark Kohut, 27, and Charles Bourk, 33, on charges of attempted first-degree murder, robbery and kidnapping in the New Year's Day attack on Christopher Wilson.

The trial was originally scheduled to begin last month in Tampa, where the attack occurred.

Circuit Judge Donald C. Evans ordered it moved across the state to West Palm Beach because of pre-trial publicity in Tampa.

Wilson, a stock brokerage clerk from New York City, was burned over 40 percent of his body.

A note left at the scene read "One les (sic) nigger more to go" and was signed "KKK."

Wilson, 32, has said he is healing but remains in pain.

On Monday, 180 prospective jurors were called.

The majority were eliminated because they wrote on a questionnaire that they would face hardship if sequestered for up to two weeks of testimony.

Police search Michael Jackson's homes in abuse investigation

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — Michael Jackson's ranch and another of his homes were searched by police investigating a child abuse allegation that the pop star's security consultant blamed Tuesday on an extortion attempt gone awry.

Police confirmed that a complaint has been under investigation since Aug. 17, but officials wouldn't elaborate.

"We do not want to feed any wild speculation on this matter," Cmdr. David Gascon said.

Jackson's security consultant, Anthony Pellicano, said people Jackson knew made a false child abuse complaint against the entertainer after he refused to pay them \$20 million.

Search warrants were served over the weekend at Jackson's condominium in Los Angeles and his Neverland ranch north of the city. The warrants were sealed.

"I am confident the department will conduct a fair and thorough investigation and its results will demonstrate that there was no wrongdoing on my part," Jackson said in a statement from Thailand on Tuesday.

Jackson hired criminal lawyer Howard Weitzman, who defended John DeLorean in a cocaine case in which the former automaker was acquitted. During a brief news conference, Weitzman read the statement from Jackson but refused to answer questions.

Pellicano, who appeared with Weitzman at the news conference, said the case was "an extortion

gone awry." Jackson gets 25 to 30 such extortion attempts a year, said Pellicano, who has worked for the musician for four years.

"He is appalled by this thing," Pellicano said.

"We had no intentions to do anything with it, we wanted to see how far they went," Pellicano said. "They made threats that they wanted to go to the district attorney's office and I says, 'Go.' I says, 'Why you waiting?'"

"When we would not pay, a phone call was made to Child and Family Services, which started this investigation."

Investigators for the county Department of Children's Services had no comment on the case, said spokesman Schuyler Sprowles.

Jackson's personal life has long been fodder for tabloids, which have portrayed the entertainer as a strange loner, a man-child obsessed with plastic surgery, children and exotic animals.

During a February TV interview with Oprah Winfrey, Jackson said he surrounds himself with children to make up for a friendless, workaholic childhood as a performer with The Jackson Five singing group.

Jackson, who turns 35 on Sunday, counts Elizabeth Taylor as a close friend, and child actors Emmanuel Lewis and Macauley Culkin are frequent companions.

In addition to his Bangkok concert Tuesday and one Wednesday, Jackson is to perform 15 concerts in Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, Moscow, Israel, Turkey and the Canary Islands.

"He is appalled by this thing."

- Anthony Pellicano, Jackson's security consultant

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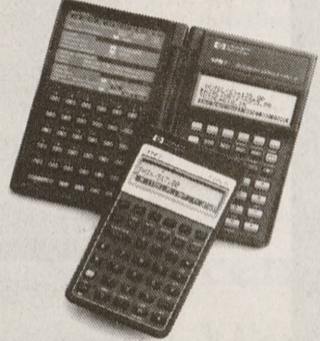
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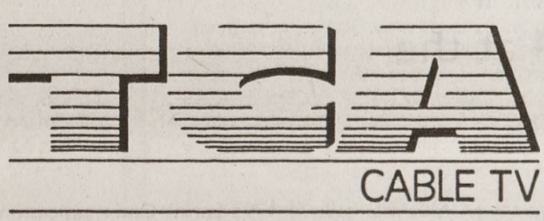
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