

Pastor Accused of Sexually Abusing a Minor Kills Himself, Police Say

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A Florida pastor accused of sexual abuse of a minor killed himself Sunday, police say.

Rev. Bryan Fulwider was found dead in his home in Altamonte Springs. He was arrested earlier in October for the alleged sexual abuse of a teenage girl. The young woman told police that the abuse started in 2014 and continued for years while she attended his church. He was released on bail on Oct. 17.

Fulwider faced multiple charges that could have led to life in prison, though he denied the allegations.

The Medical Examiner's Office ruled Fulwider's death a suicide. The woman who accused Fulwider of sexual abuse said she wasn't surprised at his decision.

"Fulwider's day in court will never come because he knew all the truths I could tell," she wrote in an anonymous statement shared with the *Orlando Sentinel*. "My story doesn't stop with his cowardice through; I will work in the coming months to get justice for myself and any other victims impacted by Fulwider's abuse. ... I'm thinking of Fulwider's other victims and hope they are well tonight."

Prosecutors say their sexual-abuse case against Fulwider was strong. They claim to possess a recording of an hour-long conversation between Fulwider and his accuser in which he admits she was a victim and that he was a predator.

According to arrest documents, Fulwider began grooming the

teenager when she was only 13 and raped her more than 100 times during the years he abused her.

Fulwider was senior pastor of First Congregational Church of Winter Park, an “open and affirming church of the United Church of Christ,” according to its website. The church openly affirms homosexuality and same-sex marriage and is part of a “liberal, progressive, inclusive” denomination.

Fulwider also was the popular radio co-host of “Friends Talking Faith,” a show also hosted by Rabbi Steven Engel and Imam Muhammad Musri with the goal of communicating “across religious lines in a healthy and respectful way.”

The Facebook page for Fulwider’s “Friends Talking Faith” show wrote:

“We are shocked at the death by suicide of Bryan Fulwider. Our sympathies are with his family in their time of anguish. We stand in solidarity with the victim or victims in this case that will now not have their day in court and receive the justice due to them. We will do what we can to give a voice to all victims of abuse and will work diligently to bring healing to the wide range of people who have been adversely affected.”