

Ex-Methodist Pastor Sentenced for First Wife's Murder

A former Methodist minister serving life in prison in Pennsylvania for the murder of his second wife was sentenced on Wednesday to up to 40 additional years for killing his first wife as well.

An investigation into the death of Arthur Schirmer's second wife in 2008 raised questions about the death of his first wife nine years earlier, authorities said.

Schirmer, 66, was sentenced last year to life in prison for the murder of his second wife, Betty Jean Schirmer, when he was pastor at the United Methodist Church in Reeders, Pennsylvania.

He was convicted of bludgeoning her to death with a crowbar and then staging a car crash to cover up the crime, authorities said.

Investigators then looked into the death of his first wife, Jewel Schirmer, in 1999.

Schirmer told authorities he came home to the parsonage of Bethany United Methodist Church in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, to find his wife had fallen down the basement stairs and hit her head. She died a day later.

Using a bio-mechanical crash test dummy to recreate the incident as alleged, investigators determined that the fall could not have caused the head injuries she sustained.

Schirmer pleaded no contest to third-degree murder in June.

On Wednesday, Judge John Tylwalk of the Lebanon County Court of Common Pleas sentenced him to 20 to 40 additional years for her death. The new sentence will run consecutively to the life

sentence.

Schirmer's children with Jewel were in court to support their father.

Authorities have said Schirmer was a repeated philanderer. Several months after Betty Jean Schirmer's death, the cuckolded husband of his church secretary shot himself to death in Schirmer's office.

Schirmer has resigned his ministerial credentials, according to a spokesman for the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church.

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