

Faith-Healing Couple Accused of Murder Headed to Trial

Arguments that a Philadelphia faith-healing couple did not know their baby was sick enough to die failed to convince a judge to dismiss murder charges arising from the death of their infant son in April.

Herbert Schaible, 45, and his wife, Catherine Schaible, 43, are accused of murder and involuntary manslaughter in the death of 7-month old Brandon Schaible.

Philadelphia Municipal Court Judge Charles Hayden on Wednesday said their case should proceed to trial after he rejected claims by defense attorneys that prosecutors could not show gross negligence, malice or that the parents knew the baby was about to die.

Brandon Schaible died on April 18 of bacterial pneumonia and dehydration, the city medical examiner's office ruled.

"They did nothing to help that child," prosecutor Joanne Pescatore said at the court hearing. "That's why it's murder."

Brandon was the second Schaible child to die. In 2009, Kent Schaible, age 2, also died of bacterial pneumonia.

The two were convicted of involuntary manslaughter in the case of their 2-year-old son and put on 10 years probation, on the condition their surviving children get annual physical checkups and be taken to a medical professional if they were ill.

The Schaibles belong to the First Century Gospel Church in North Philadelphia, whose members believe in the power of divine healing.

The Rev. Nelson Clark of the 525-member church said in a

recent interview that Herbert Schaible was trusting in God to heal his child.

He said while Schaible could have informed authorities or a medical professional that his son was sick, “he felt like any kind of a call was a lack of faith on his part.”

“He felt, I guess, he would be being disloyal to God,” he said.

Police Detective James Crone read a transcript in court of an interview he conducted with Catherine Schaible when the baby died. He quoted her saying that no one in her family goes to doctors “because of our religious beliefs.”

“That’s why we don’t go,” she said in the police statement.

The parents, who are being held in jail, each face a possible sentence of 40 years in prison if convicted of third-degree murder and 10 years for involuntary manslaughter.

The couple’s seven surviving children were placed in foster care after Brandon’s death.

Editing by Ellen Wulfhorst and Steve Orlofsky

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