

Pa. Man Shoots, Kills Ex at Church Service

An elementary school music teacher walked into a church in the middle of Sunday services and shot and killed his ex-wife as she sat in a pew, police said.

Gregory Eldred, 52, of Coudersport, Pa., has been charged with first-degree murder, accused of twice shooting Darlene Sitler, 53, at the First United Presbyterian Church, where she served as organist and choir director. It wasn't immediately clear if she was serving in those capacities when she was shot.

Witnesses told police they saw Eldred pacing outside the 180-year-old church before the service and that other members of the congregation grabbed Eldred after the shooting around 11:20 a.m., and held him until police arrived. Nobody else was injured.

The defense attorney listed in online court records did not immediately return a call for comment Monday.

Eldred has taught music at the borough's elementary school since 1986.

Trooper Michael Knight told the Bradford Era newspaper on Sunday that Eldred allegedly walked down the church's middle aisle and fired two shots at Sitler.

Trooper Knight told the newspaper there were no children in the church when the shooting happened, but that police bused all those who witnessed the shooting to a building which houses Potter County offices so they could be interviewed by police. Mental health counseling was also being made available to those witnesses, Knight said.

Potter County Commissioner Susan Keffer told the newspaper

the shooting was “devastatingly tragic for the community.”

“It’s hard to even comprehend it. You just feel this tremendous grief and you’re trying to process what happened,” Kefover said.

In addition to her church duties, Sitler taught music at the Northern Potter Children’s School, an elementary school that neighbors the district where her ex-husband taught, for 30 years.

“She’s just the consummate professional,” Northern Potter Superintendent Scott Graham told The Associated Press on Monday. “The kids loved her. She just did so many things here for the school and the community.”

The Northern Potter School District is based in the tiny borough of Ulysses, about 160 northeast of Pittsburgh, very near the New York border. It’s about 20 miles northeast of Coudersport, where her ex-husband taught school and she attended church, Graham said.

Sitler taught music to all students in the Pre-K through 6th-grade school, and also headed the chorus and band for 5th and 6th graders. She’s taught at the district since 1982, spending just one year after college teaching elsewhere before coming to Northern Potter, so the staff and students throughout the district knew her well, Graham said.

Crisis counselors from surrounding districts and a member of the local pastors’ ministerium were at the district Monday.

“There’s a lot of good things about growing up and living in a small community, and I believe we have a lot of help for the children and the staff members who may need it,” Graham said.

Graham said the couple had been divorced for several years and offered no rationale for the shooting.

Officials with the Coudersport Area School District, where

Eldred taught, did not immediately return a call and email for comment. Eldred also played clarinet for the Southern Tier Symphony Orchestra in Allegany, N.Y.

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