

Pastor Arrested on Murder Warrant Was 'Blindsided and Totally Shocked'

A California youth pastor who was arrested on an outstanding warrant for murder in Las Vegas claims he is innocent.

"I was blindsided and totally shocked," Robert Cox told News10 from San Joaquin County Jail, where he was held last week.

The murder charges come from an incident last June in which Cox, a youth minister with The Place of Refuge Church in Manteca, California, was with his wife and around 20 interns on a ministry trip in Las Vegas.

The group was dining at Four Kegs Sports Pub when another man at the restaurant, Link Ellingson, started threatening them out of the blue, Cox says.

He said his actions were out of self-defense.

"When somebody says they are going f—ing kill me and they attack me and choke me and punch me in the face and go after my students and give a student a concussion," he says.

He said he grabbed the man and they both fell down. Court documents and the police report show that Cox punched Ellingson in the head, leaving him with a severe brain injury. Ellingson died in December.

"No, I did not throw a punch," Cox says.

Ellingson's niece, Gina Hardy, shared photos showing his injuries. Cox's wife, Julie, provided News10 with an image of her husband, showing what she says are choke marks on his neck from the incident.

Julie Cox said she fought to change the police report but couldn't get anywhere. She thought they were in the clear when she received a letter in October from the Clark County District Attorney's office stating no charges would be filed. They are now fighting the charge.

Cox had a court hearing on Monday.