

# Pastor Charged in Granddaughter's Faith-Healing Death

Pastor Rowland Foster has been charged in the faith-healing death of his granddaughter, 2-year-old Ella Foster, according to reports.

Ella was found dead on her couch in November after her parents refused to take her to the doctor for pneumonia. The family is part of Faith Tabernacle Church in Pennsylvania, which practices faith healing. That is, church members will not seek any form of medical treatment for themselves or their families, choosing to rely on faith instead.

"He was well aware of the fact that this child was in need of medical treatment and he never reported it, nor do I believe that he ever had the intention to report it," Berks County District Attorney John Adams said.

A forensic pathologist told investigators Ella would have had a 95 percent chance of surviving if she had been given a routine course of antibiotics. But Jonathan Foster told police "it would be frowned upon and against their religion" to have taken Ella to a doctor, ABC reports.

"Our laws recognize that you have a duty to care for your child's health and welfare, and we cannot justify a parent not seeking health care for their children when their children are ill," Adams said.

The Fosters, including Rowland's son Jonathan, believe Ella's death was part of God's will.

"Any illness or injuries that occur within their lives are considered acts of God, and they leave all of their faith in

God to keep them safe, healthy and debt-free,” Jonathan told courts after Ella’s death in November. He and his wife were also charged in her death.

The Fosters’ case is not the first of its kind.

Fellow faith-healers David and Shannon Hickman were convicted in their child’s 2009 death.

Oregon’s Timothy and Rebecca Wyland were found guilty of criminal mistreatment when their daughter died in 2011.

Herbert and Catherine Schaible of Pennsylvania pleaded no contest when they had not one, but two children die from faith-healing-related incidents.

Author Jerry A. Coyne documented the tragedies in *Faith Versus Fact: Why Science and Religion Are Incompatible*.

Most of these deaths are needless, Coyne says.

In an article for Slate, he writes that a 1998 medical study analyzed cases of child mortality due to faith-based medical neglect and found that of the 172 deceased, 140 had conditions that would have been curable with a probability of greater than 90 percent, while another 18 would have been cured with a probability between 50 and 90 percent. All but three of the children would have been helped by real medical care.

But faith healers are convinced they’re following God’s will.

“They believe that God heals, which all Christians believe, but they take it a step further, thinking that God always heals,” author and columnist Jonathan Merri told *The Washington Post*. “Most Christians have not interpreted Scripture as a sort of universal promise that faith will always lead to healing. But there are some popular movements in America that still hold those views. Even those movements, however, don’t believe you should withhold medicine; they believe medicine is used as a conduit to healing.” {eo}