

Retired Pastor Hid Heinous Crime for Decades

It's been nearly 50 years, but a retired pastor came forward to confess that he had kidnapped and killed 8-year-old Gretchen Harrington while she was walking to a Bible camp in Pennsylvania.

Several charges were levied against 83-year-old David Zandstra of Marietta, Georgia this week. He was charged with criminal homicide; first, second and third-degree murder; kidnapping; and possession of an instrument of crime, the Delaware County District Attorney's office said in a statement.

The incident happened in 1975, and family members may finally get justice for this horrific crime.

"The murder of Gretchen Harrington has haunted members of law enforcement since that terrible day in August 1975. The families of victims often say that their lives are forever altered into the 'before' time and the 'after' time," District Attorney Jack Stollsteimer said in a statement on Monday.

"Gretchen's murder created a 'before' time and an 'after' time for an entire community—and for an entire county. This heinous act left a family and a community forever changed."

It's an act that has never been forgotten by many members of the community. Zandstra, a husband and father of three—admitted to the crime to the Delaware County District Attorney's office.

"Justice been a long time in coming, but we are proud and grateful to finally be able to give the community an answer," Stollsteimer said in the statement.

The summer Bible camp took place at two neighboring churches

in Marple, Pennsylvania—Trinity Church Chapel Christian Reformed Church and The Reformed Presbyterian Church. At the time, Zandstra pastored at Trinity and was responsible for helping transport children from Trinity to Reformed.

Gretchen Harrison's father was a pastor at Reformed and that day expressed his concern about her whereabouts that morning when she did not show up at Trinity. News began to spread about Harrison's apparent disappearance, and Zandstra called police to report the young girl missing.

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Two months later, Harrison's remains were discovered within a nearby state park. Police questioned Zandstra, but he denied seeing her that day.

✖ Zandstra's morals came into question earlier this year when the best friend of Zandstra's daughter, named in the criminal complaint filed against the defendant, told authorities that while sleeping over at Zandstra's house one evening when she was 10 years old, she awoke to Zandstra touching her, Fox News Digital reported. The DA's office said in a release that the defendant's daughter said, "he did that sometimes."

After investigators contacted Zandstra on July 17, he initially denied involvement in the case but ultimately confessed to the crime when he was confronted with the evidence.

"The Commonwealth can have confidence that law enforcement will not rest until justice is served," Pennsylvania State Police Lt. Jonathan Sunderlin said in a Monday statement. "This case has been investigated by generations of detectives, and they all are owed a debt of gratitude for never giving up."

The Marple Police Department also “never gave up hope that Gretchen’s killer would be identified,” the DA’s office said in its statement.

How can some ministers whose personal and spiritual lives are dried up and in shambles still operate in the anointing and continue to minister with power? Pastor Benny Hinn asked this question during a season of personal trial, and his quest led him to an in-depth understanding of the three “rivers,” or types, of anointing in Scripture: 1 John 2:27 (the anointing within you); Acts 1:8 (the anointing upon you); and Isaiah 10 (a global anointing related to building up and destroying nations).

In Mysteries of the Anointing, read about Pastor Benny Hinn’s season of personal trial, and the quest that led him to an in-depth understanding of three types of anointing (Charisma House, 2022). {eo}

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Shawn A. Akers is the online editor at Charisma Media.