

Minister's wife testifies she knew about her husband's affairs

By Mitch Mitchell

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FORT WORTH

Remembering the names of the women her husband had affairs with was emotionally draining for Samantha Aguilar as she testified Monday in her husband's trial.

She said her husband, Geronimo Aguilar, confirmed to her that he had sex with these women at least once: her sister-in-law, his personal assistant, a family friend who baby-sat their three daughters, a board member's wife and another family friend who was a member of the Richmond Outreach Center (ROC), the church that the couple built together in Virginia.

She said she heard many of the names first from reporters after her husband was indicted on two counts of sexually assaulting children.

Samantha Aguilar testified that she never asked her husband for further details about his relationships.

"I didn't want the details. I still don't want the details," Samantha Aguilar said. "I don't want to have to keep going through it."

In 2014, Geronimo Aguilar, 45, was indicted by a Tarrant County grand jury on two counts of aggravated sexual assault of a child. He is accused of sexually assaulting a 13-year-old girl and her sister in the mid-1990s, when they all lived together in the same residences in Fort Worth and Grapevine.

Prosecutor Sheila Wynn asked Samantha Aguilar if she just swept a lot of things under the rug.

"Looking back, I probably had some hunch," Samantha Aguilar said. "We were at this huge ministry. That's the obvious thing that people are going to think when you have women around you. I just thought it went with the territory."

Geronimo Aguilar and Samantha married in 1995 in California when she was 17. They soon moved to Texas to the New Beginnings International Church in Fort Worth, according to previous testimony.

The couple moved to Richmond, Va., and founded the ROC in 2003 with fewer than 18 members, Samantha Aguilar said.

At its height, the ROC's Sunday services drew 10,000 people, and its campus contained a recording studio, day-care center, food pantry, gymnasium and cafe, Samantha Aguilar said.

Aguilar was pastor of the ROC until he was fired in 2014 when reports of sexual improprieties reached a crescendo.

Samantha Aguilar testified that she did not want to believe her husband had been carrying on multiple affairs for most of their marriage.

His personal assistant, Jammie Chasteen, was "like a sister" to her, Samantha Aguilar said. And for nearly a decade, she was oblivious that Chasteen and her husband were having an affair.

Samantha Aguilar testified that Amber Baker, a sister-in-law who also had an affair with Geronimo Aguilar, started saying negative things about Geronimo Aguilar to her children.

"What they see in him is real, and I don't want them to not trust their dad because of what they had heard," Samantha Aguilar said. "She was going to my kids saying that your mom has lied to you, your dad is lying to you."

The maximum sentence on the sexual assault of a child charge is life in prison. The indictment also includes three counts of sexual assault of a child under 17 and three counts of indecency with a child, all second-degree felonies and each with a maximum sentence of 20 years.

The trial is scheduled to continue Tuesday in state District Judge Louis Sturns' court. Prosecutors Eric Nickols and Wynn are presenting the state's case. Aguilar's attorneys are Thomas Pavlinic and Heather Barbieri.