

June 5, 2013: Senior "Pastor" of the "ROC" (Richmond Outreach Center) which is closely aligned with South Norfolk Baptist Church, (which is trying to imitate their methodology) is arrested:

"Geronimo Aguilar, the embattled senior pastor at the Richmond Outreach Center facing child sex abuse charges in Texas, stepped down along with three other pastors Wednesday evening from the church he founded in 2001.

"The resignation, announced by the South Richmond megachurch's board of directors after a meeting, comes a day after arrest warrants were released alleging Aguilar had sexually abused an 11-year-old girl and her older sister for more than a year while living in their parents' home in Texas in the 1990s.

"The Richmond Outreach Center remains focused on serving those in need and we will never stray from this mission," read a letter from the board posted on the church's website.

"It did not address the charges Aguilar is facing, but the board has previously said that it stands by the pastor.

"According to the letter, the board met Wednesday evening and accepted Aguilar's resignation "upon mutually agreeable terms." Three other pastors at the church stepped down as well: Aguilar's brother Matthew, Andrew Delgado and Jason Helmlinger.

"Helmlinger is a former Henrico County police officer facing charges in Richmond for threatening Allen Caldwell, a former ROC pastor and Aguilar critic. Caldwell said Monday that Helmlinger cursed at him during a phone conversation and used racial slurs.

"It's a sad day, but it creates an opportunity for the present board" to continue the church's mission, said Don Coleman, a local pastor, Richmond School Board member and a part of Bless Richmond, a pastors' group.

"Coleman said it's particularly important that the outreach ministry continue "and get restored to health." He added that by resigning, Aguilar showed he understood the severity of the charges and could dedicate his time to his family.

"The ROC, as it's known, was founded in 2001 "as a place where local churches, civic groups and individuals could come together to serve the inner city and the urban poor," according to its website. Over the years, Aguilar became the face of the church, appearing in videos and having his weekly sermons broadcast on television and across the Internet.

"But at least one local religious leader said the spotlight was shining too brightly on Aguilar.

"The ROC is not a church," said Donald N. Blake, chairman of the Virginia Christian Alliance, a religious advocacy group. "It is a private, personality-led cult."

"Blake has called for outside auditors to investigate the church. Under Aguilar's guidance, the church has grown to include half a dozen nonprofits including a real estate foundation, café, thrift store, fitness center, child care center, clothing line and a tutoring company in Florida, according to its 2011 tax filing.

"According to the tax records, the church had \$16.9 million in assets at the time of the filing. Aguilar received a \$94,120 salary from the church and an additional \$35,233 from other church-related sources. But Aguilar, who attended last week's church service at the ROC, began to lose his grip on the church last month when he was charged in the sexual assault of two underage girls in Texas.

"Two Chesterfield women alleged in 2011, that Aguilar repeatedly molested their 16-year-old niece. Aguilar filed civil suits against the women claiming their accusations defamed him and caused him emotional distress.

"He faces seven felonies in the case, four of which carry sentences of up to life in prison.

"Aguilar did not respond to an email request for comment. His attorney is under a gag order issued by a Texas judge."

(Source: The Richmond-Times Dispatch, June 5, 2013).