

The preliminary hearing for Gary Lee Bullock began this morning after a two hour delay and multiple courtroom moves. A preliminary hearing is to determine whether or not there is sufficient evidence against the defendant for a trial to move forward. The case was called at 10:20am in courtroom 2 by Judge Marilyn Miles with the first of two witnesses that testified today. Eureka Police Officer Alan Aubuchon testified that he responded to the St. Bernard's Rectory and immediately noticed the strong odor of natural gas. Dr. George Zibilich was already on scene as he had been in attendance at the morning services; Dr. Zibilich stated that Father Eric Freed was deceased. Officer Aubuchon found Father Freed in an upstairs bedroom, on his back with blood strewn across his face and the room had been ransacked. The Officer conducted a thorough search of the area to ensure that no one else was present. Other officers that had responded found that burners on the gas stove were left open and there was a smoldering cigar placed nearby which they extinguished. The gas was turned off and the windows opened to air the residence.

Twenty-one year Eureka Police veteran Detective Todd Wilcox then testified about the initial scene he encountered when called at home to respond to the situation. Upon arriving Detective Wilcox noticed the strong smell of alcohol. The door to the upstairs bedroom was damaged "consistent with a break-in" according to the testimony. Father Freed's body was on the floor in the bedroom. He had been wrapped in bedding which had been pulled off the bed nearby and appeared to be soaked with alcohol; there were 3 empty whiskey bottles nearby. Wrapped up in the bedding, under the upper body, were broken pieces of wood that appeared to be redwood fence slats and an approx. 18" piece of metal pipe. Father Freed's head was bloody with a laceration on his nose and abrasions on his chin. The chest area was mostly covered in debris including newspapers soaked with alcohol. There were two red marks on his body that appeared to be the same diameter as the piece of pipe found at the scene. There was a small piece of wood stuck in Father Freed's leg. In the same room was a bag which had contained cash and checks from the collection plates. Defense attorney Kaleb Cockrum objected to testimony regarding whether the collection money had been taken or not as hearsay.

The preliminary hearing continues tomorrow morning...