

# Ore. couple convicted in faith-healing trial

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OREGON CITY, Ore. (RNS) After just an hour of deliberation, jurors on Tuesday (June 7) unanimously found two members of a faith-healing church guilty of felony criminal mistreatment for not seeking medical care for their daughter.

Timothy and Rebecca Wyland face up to five years in prison but are likely to receive probation and possibly some time in jail. They will be sentenced June 24.

As the verdict was read, Timothy Wyland slipped his arm around his wife's waist, and the couple stoically faced the judge. The Wylands made no comment after the proceedings, walking out of the courtroom surrounded by supporters from their church, some of them sobbing.

The couple's daughter, Alayna, was born in December 2009 with a birthmark above her left eye that developed into an abnormal growth of blood vessels, known as a hemangioma. As the growth slowly engulfed her left eye, the Wylands never consulted a doctor.

The case is the latest involving members of Oregon City's Followers of Christ church, which considers medical treatment a rejection of religious faith. The Wylands are the third church couple to be prosecuted over the past two years for failing to provide medical treatment to their children.

In the two previous cases, the children died. In the Wyland case, 18-month-old Alayna has improved under court-ordered medical care.

The swift and unanimous verdict stunned the Wylands, their attorneys and about 20 church members who attended the session.

In her closing argument Tuesday, lead prosecutor Christine Landers dismissed the defense attorneys' efforts to portray the Wylands as victims of overly aggressive child-welfare workers who snatched their daughter and persecuted the couple for their religious beliefs.

Landers called the defense a smokescreen intended to obscure the facts and distract jurors. The couple had six and a half months to seek medical attention for Alayna and they did not, she noted.

"They never would have. The reason why ... is because of their faith," she said.

For the first six months of 2010, the Wylands watched as the growth on their daughter's face ballooned. The Wylands relied on faith-healing rituals -- prayer, anointing with oil and laying on of hands.

Under Oregon law, a parent or guardian has committed first-degree criminal mistreatment if that person "intentionally or knowingly withholds ... medical attention."

The Wylands testified during a juvenile court custody hearing last summer that they wouldn't have willingly taken Alayna to a doctor because it would violate their religious beliefs. The Wylands said they put their trust -- and Alayna's fate -- in God's hands.

Defense attorneys portrayed the Wylands as loving parents who fully cooperated with state officials and court orders once Alayna was in state custody, diligently attending doctor appointments and making sure Alayna received her medication.

Landers called the defense attorneys' attempt to focus on what happened after Alayna was in state custody misleading.

"They want to minimize the conduct of their clients," Landers told the jury. "They don't live in some mountain village in Nepal where they've never heard of doctors."

Clackamas County District Attorney John Foote, who has had several faith-healing trials under his watch, released a short statement: "We agree with the jury's verdict and appreciate their service. There is

another case pending trial so we will have no further comment."

Foote was referring to another couple from the church whose son was born prematurely and died nine hours later. They are scheduled to go on trial in September on charges of second-degree manslaughter.