

## ***Tambourine player says priest threw her down, punched friend in face***

FORT COLLINS, Colo. (UPI) — A Roman Catholic priest, angered by the way a woman played a tambourine at mass, allegedly threw her down a flight of stairs and punched a woman youth counselor who tried to intervene.

The tambourine player said the two women prayed for guidance before deciding "the best thing to do was call the police" and file complaints. The youth counselor later withdrew her charge.

The Rev. Thomas Woerth, pastor of St. Joseph's Church, could be charged with third-degree misdemeanor assault in the Sept. 25 incident. He was ordered to appear at a Nov. 21 pretrial hearing.

Neither Woerth nor his attorney would comment.

The tambourine player, Mary Ellen Watterson, a part-time student at Colorado State University, said the incident occurred when she approached Woerth because people told her he "had a problem with the way I played the tambourine."

"I knew other members of the congregation enjoyed it, so I thought it was important I talk to him about it," Miss Watterson said Thursday.

Watterson said Woerth told her, "You play the same way over and over again. You're not going to play at the 5:15 mass any more."

When she asked the priest if he planned to kick her out of the musical group, he said, "You're damn right," then threw open a door and ordered her out, Miss Watterson said.

"Tom was in a rage," she recalled. "It was just crazy. He kept telling me to get the hell out. He grabbed me by the neck and the belt and threw me out of the door. I went down three steps and landed against a railing about six feet down."

Miss Watterson said the priest then grabbed her by the shirt and was shoving her down another flight of stairs when Mary Susan Landrum, the church's youth director, intervened.

She said the priest turned on Miss Landrum and "slugged Mary Susan in the face."

"I hope the archdiocese will get Tom out of the church and get him some help," Miss Watterson said. "Tom's a good man, but he has a high-pressure position. He shouldn't be there."